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# Scottish Birds

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*Scottish Birds* is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications, including the *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme Report* and the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

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**On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds;** The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

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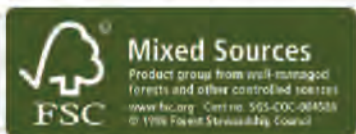
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# President's Foreword

It has been a strange old winter. With less Atlas work and no Bean Goose or Iceland Gull invasion, there has been a certain lack of focus. However, I always feel better when January is over; February is short and by the end of March there is the odd migrant. For me, the end of March also means the start of the White-billed Diver season. This superb bird was once thought to be an extreme rarity in Scotland, but intensive survey work over the last ten years has revealed it is more of a passage migrant. I was interested to hear that Will Miles and Mark Newell recently saw the first White-billed Diver for the Isle of May - an excellent record, which fits with our recent ideas of wintering areas and passage. There are images on the Isle of May website, which is regularly updated. The Isle of May has an excellent record in documenting rare birds, so important at a bird observatory.



Plate 1. Ken Shaw, Spain, February 2013. © Chris McInerney

It has been a busy time at Waterston House. The new website is almost up and running, much activity on the Birdfair front, and, of course, we have started working on the annual conference. One resource, which is probably underused, is the George Waterston Library. This superb collection of natural history books is a wonderful resource and is open to members and non-members alike.

I have always been a fan of local avifaunas and bird reports. In fact, I have always enjoyed the role of a 'county birder' as we say these days. As such I noticed two things over the last couple of weeks. I was delighted to see the publication of *The Birds of Bute* and I must mention the three authors Ron Forrester, Ian Hopkins and Doug Menzies - well done guys! Around the same time the 2011 *Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report* came out. As we all know, Dumfries & Galloway is a superbly varied county and it demands even more attention; good to see it is so up-to-date with its reports. A well-produced, prompt bird report does a lot to encourage the submission of even more bird records - from high densities of Whinchats on the hill in May, to good counts of Sabine's Gulls and Balearic Shearwaters off Corsewall Point in September - we all have a part to play in county bird recording.

It is winter now, but it will soon be spring. Have a great spring and perhaps you will get the chance to visit the SOC stall at the Scottish Birdfair in May.

Ken Shaw, President



**Plate 2.** North Rona from the east with the lighthouse on the summit of Toa Rona (centre) and the peninsula's of Scepull (left) and Fianuis (right), 26 May 2004. © S Murray

# The status of breeding seabirds on North Rona, Outer Hebrides in 2012

S. Murray & L.J. Wilson

*North Rona holds 14 species of breeding seabird and one breeding sea duck, the Eider. Descriptive accounts of the birds exist from the 1880s and some population estimates from the 1930s up to the 1960s, but the first attempt at whole-island counts of all the breeding species (except for Leach's and Storm Petrels) was not made until Operation Seafarer in 1969.*

*In 2012, whole-island counts were made of Fulmar, Guillemot, Razorbill, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake and Shag; all of which appear to be in decline, with the lowest ever totals recorded for the most frequently counted species. A partial survey of Leach's Petrel suggests they could have declined further since the last survey in 2009. The status of Storm Petrel was not investigated, but earlier surveys in 2001 and 2009 suggest stable numbers. Puffins have maintained their numbers and Great Skuas have increased. Eider and Black Guillemot bred in small numbers and show little apparent change from subjective estimates made in earlier years. Arctic Tern continues to be an erratic breeder with no clear trend in breeding numbers.*

## Introduction

North Rona (hereafter referred to as Rona) lies 73 km north-east of the Butt of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides and a similar distance north-west of Cape Wrath on the Scottish mainland (Figure 1). The island is approximately triangular in shape, with an area of some 122 ha. It has a central ridge running west to east, which reaches a maximum height of 108 m on Toa Rona (Plate 2). Two low promontories extend from this ridge, one to the north, Fianuis (Plate 3), the other to the south-west, Scepull (Plate 4). Midway down the south slope lies the site of an ancient, now ruined village, surrounded by the evidence of past cultivation in the form of 'lazy beds'. The island has not been permanently inhabited since 1844 and the only modern building is an automatic lighthouse. There are no native land mammals, but the island is grazed by domestic sheep, which are managed on an annual basis by shepherds from Lewis. The Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* comes ashore in large numbers to pup in the autumn, mainly on Fianuis.

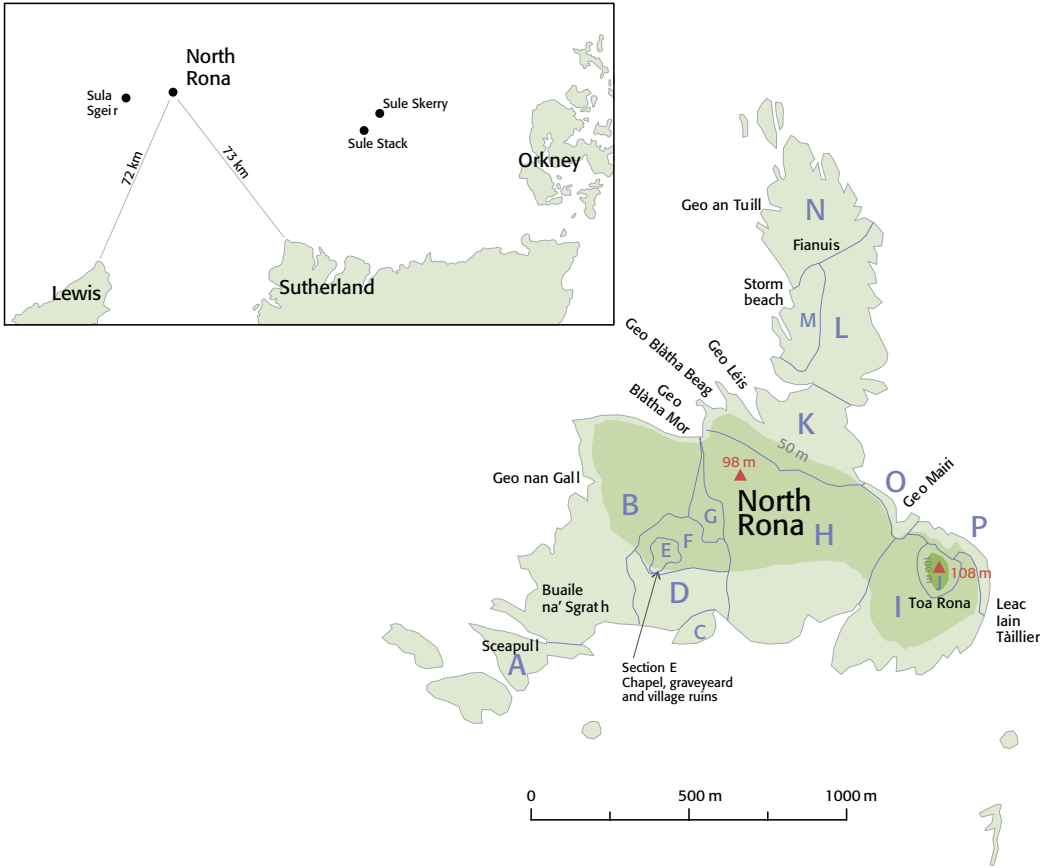


Figure 1. North Rona showing place names given in the text and Sections A to P used to simplify gull and storm-petrel counts.



Plate 3. North Rona from the north-west. The Fianuis peninsula in the foreground, with the cliffs of Toa Rona beyond, 11 May 2005. © J A Love



Plate 4. North Rona from the south-west. Scepull in the foreground, with the village ruins in the centre of the south slope, 11 May 2005. © J A Love

The island was first declared a National Nature Reserve in 1956 and classified as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under Article 4 of the European Birds Directive in 2001 and in 2005 as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Habitats and Species Directive.

Rona was visited between 2 and 19 June 2012 with the aim of making counts of all the breeding seabirds, except for the Storm Petrel, for which the recommended survey period is mid-July.

## Methods

Seabird species counts were made in accordance with the suggested timings and count methods described in the *Seabird Monitoring Handbook* (Walsh *et al.* 1995) and Gilbert *et al.* (1999). For Leach's Petrel the tape-playback survey technique was used (see Ratcliffe *et al.* 1998). This involves playing recordings of the chatter call of a male Leach's Petrel, which only responds to chatter calls of the same sex (Taoka *et al.* 1989), in order to elicit a reply from an incubating adult within a burrow. Not all individuals respond to the taped calls at a given time, even during peak to late incubation, so a count of responses greatly underestimates the total number of apparently occupied sites (AOS) at a colony. Therefore it is necessary to measure what proportion of birds are present in burrows and responding to the taped calls, by setting up a calibration plot to calculate a colony-specific correction factor (Ellis *et al.* 1998). Repeat visits to a delimited section of the colony are then made on successive days, each time marking new responding AOS, until such time as no new responses are heard. Apart from using a recording of the species-specific purr call the same methods were used for Storm Petrel surveys in 2001 and 2009.

Further details of count methods, where relevant, are given in the individual species accounts. The count units are abbreviated e.g. Apparently Occupied Sites/Nests/Territories/Burrows are given as AOS, AON, AOT or AOB, but some earlier counts used for comparison were recorded as 'pairs'. In 1986 the island was divided into 16 sections to aid and simplify counts of gulls; designated A to P (Figure 1) and following clearly defined natural or man-made boundaries. These continue to be used for gulls and since 2001 storm-petrels also. The village ruins in Section E are further divided into sub-sections a, b and c, to refine storm-petrel surveys in this complex (Plate 6). Excellent weather conditions throughout the 17-day stay helped greatly in achieving accurate counts and calm seas allowed inspection by boat of the only site hidden from the land, the interior of Geo Blátha Mor. For place names given in the text see Figure 1.



**Plate 5.** The storm beach, section M on Fianuis, breeding site for more than half the European Petrels on North Rona, 3 July 2009. © S Murray



**Plate 6.** The ruined village, section E, with the sub-sections a, b & c, which hold c30% of the breeding sites of Leach's Petrel on North Rona. For survey purposes the outer wall is included with sub-section A (see Table 2). 26 May 2004. © S Murray

The 2012 results are not compared with historic accounts made before 1969, (see Benn *et al.* 1989) unless by doing so it helps to illustrate or clarify a point. Counts that were made covering the whole island or using methods comparable to 2012 began with Operation Seafarer on 14 June 1969 (Cramp *et al.* 1974), followed by The Seabird Colony Register (SCR) on 18 April and 11–24 June 1986 (Lloyd *et al.* 1991), then Seabird 2000 on 11 April and 24 June–16 July 2001 (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). The senior author was part of the Rona team on both SCR and Seabird 2000 surveys. Other studies consulted have been made by Evans in 1971, 1972 & 1976 (1971, 1972, 1975 & 1976a & b), J. de Karte 1989 (cited in SNH annual report), Murray & Love 1993 (1994), Murray 1993 (1995), SNH in 1998 & 2005 (unpublished), Murray 2001 & 2009 (unpublished) and Murray *et al.* in 2001 & 2009 (2008 & 2010). To avoid repetition in the species accounts only the year of the observation is given.

### Species accounts

#### Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Thirteen nests were found in 2012, ten with eggs and three with hatching ducklings (Figure 2). The number of nests found is larger than in recent years e.g. nine in both 1986 and 2005, and seven in 1998. Nests are usually found by chance rather than specifically searched for and the higher count in 2012 can be attributed to the concurrent ground search for gull and Great Skua nests. Actual nest counts are rarely given in past accounts, usually only estimates of pairs, which have ranged from 20 to 60 pairs in the 1930s (Ainslie & Atkinson 1937a) and 35–45 in 1976, so it is hard to judge if there has been any decline in breeding numbers over this period. Offshore counts of adults have varied little since the mid-1980s, with maximum counts of 55 males, 31 females and 29 ducklings in 1986, 48 males and 18 females in 2005 and 50 males and 29 females in 2009. No comprehensive offshore counts were carried out in 2012.



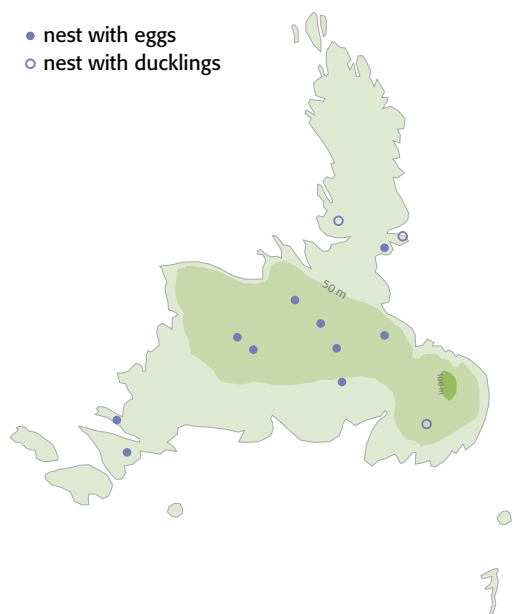


Figure 2. The distribution of Eider nests on North Rona in June 2012.

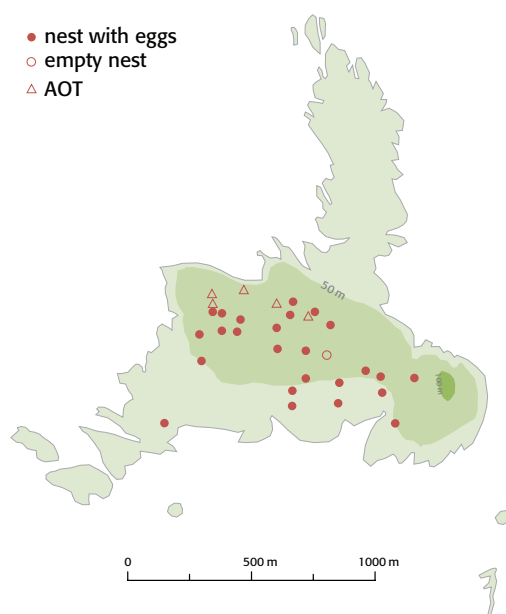


Figure 3. The distribution of Great Skua nests and territories on North Rona in June 2012.

### Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

The largest whole-island count was 4,141 AOS made in 1972. Each succeeding count since then has seen a further reduction in numbers, 3,738 AOS (1986), 3,520 AOS (1998), 2,616 AOS (2005) and 1,438 AOS in 2012. The counts are of both coastal and inland areas, the latter being principally the storm beach and Fianuis (Sections M, L and N), the southern half of Section B, Buaille na' Sgrath, and the village ruins, Section E (Figure 1). The numbers breeding among the ruins have decreased steadily over the years. The largest counts of young have been 45 in 1971 and 32 in 1972 (J.A. Love pers. com.), down to 19 adults on eggs in 1986, 11 in 2001, seven in 2009 and five in 2012. The reduction in breeding numbers in the village, taken together with the series of whole-island counts, leaves little doubt that overall the species is in decline.

### Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

First recorded in 1885 by Harvie-Brown & Buckley (1888), but no counts or estimates were made. Barrington in 1886 describes 'hundreds churring under stones' (cited in Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1888), but the first estimate of the population, '80 or more pairs' was not made until 1931 by Harrisson (1932). Estimates since then have been mostly descriptive and imprecise e.g. in 1958 they were 'abundant in the storm beach' and found in man-made structures and under piles of stones across the island (Bagenal & Baird 1959). Boyd, in a very short visit in early June 1958, estimated 1,000 pairs in the storm beach alone (cited in Robson 1968). In 1966, Robson (1968) says only that their distribution appeared similar to that of 1958. In 1972, Evans, cited in Lloyd *et al.* (1991), estimated an island population of 1,000 pairs, with the storm beach (Plate 5) holding the largest numbers.

No survey was made in 2012, but comparable island wide surveys were made in 2001 and 2009 (see Methods) and no change was found between them. The 2009 survey was incomplete, but in the surveyed sections 132 birds responded to the taped calls. The (partial) population estimate in 2009, was therefore  $132 / 0.422$  (correction factor) = 313 AOS (95% CI = 276–359). The unsurveyed sections held a combined total of 19 responses in 2001. If a similar figure were assumed for 2009,

then total island responses would be 151, giving 358 AOS (95% CI = 315–410) compared with 362 AOS estimated for 2001. Thus, the partial island estimates for 2001 and 2009 are very similar and there is no evidence for change; even had the unsurveyed sections in 2009 held no AOS, there would still be no evidence for an island-wide decline in overall numbers between these years.

**Leach’s Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa***

First recorded in 1883 by Swinburne (1885). The first island estimate, 120 pairs, was not made until 1931 (Harrison 1932), followed in 1936 by Ainslie & Atkinson (1937b) who suggested a total population of 380 pairs, with the majority, 327 pairs, located in the village. In 1958, a study using ringing and retrapping estimated the island population to be about 5,000 pairs (Bagenal & Baird 1959). This method will capture non-breeding birds as well as breeders; so will give larger estimates than those derived from counts of occupied nest sites. Evans in 1972, cited in Lloyd *et al.* (1991) estimated the entire population, including that of the village, at 500 pairs.

The first comparable, island-wide surveys were made in 2001 and 2009 using tape-playback, also for the first time (see Methods). The population was found to have declined by 34% between those years, falling from 1,084 AOS in 2001 to 713 AOS in 2009 (Table 1).

No similar survey was made in 2012, but tape-playback was carried out in the village ruins (Section E) (Plate 6) on the 18 June, and 52 birds responded. This contrasts with an incomplete tape-playback made in the village on 17 June 2005, when 122 birds responded (SNH 2005). However suggestive of decline these results may be it is not valid to compare them with either 2001 or 2009 (Table 2), as they were made more than two weeks earlier than the optimum survey period and no correction factor values were calculated to give robust AOS estimates.

**Table 1.** Number of Leach’s Petrel AOS on North Rona in 2001 and 2009 and the percentage change between years (Murray *et al.* 2010).

Section	2001	2009	% change
A	0	0	0
B	62	45	- 27
C	0	0	0
D	12	8	- 33
E	314	235	- 25
F	5	8	+ 60
G	22	11	- 50
H	29	22	- 24
I	81	48	- 41
J	93	45	- 52
K	152	65	- 57
L	177	161	- 9
M	27	14	- 48
N	48	51	+ 6
O	20	0	- 100
P	42	0	- 100
Total	1,084	713	- 34

**Table 2.** Number of Leach’s Petrel responses to tape-playback in the three sub-sections, a, b and c of the North Rona village (Section E) in 2001 and 2009 (Murray *et al.* 2010).

Section E	30 June 2001	1 July 2009
sub-section a	68	27
sub-section b	37	25
sub-section c	37	31
Total responses	142	83
Correction factor	0.452	0.355
Estimated AOS	314	235
95% CI	282–353	212–259

**Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis***

There are few whole-island counts of apparently occupied nests (AON), the recommended count unit for the species. The first appears to have been made in 1972 when 117 AON were found, followed by 143 in 1986, 156 in 1998, 21 in 2005 and 83 in 2012, including 18 within Geo Blàtha Mor. The highest count has been the 156 found in 1998, which was then regarded as a minimum, because nests known to be in sea caves were not counted; conversely, the lowest count so far made, in 2005, also excluded sea caves. In both years counts were made between 14 and 18 June, but no details are given of nest contents, or the ages of any young present in either year. That being so, it is unclear what the timing of breeding was, or in 2005 what the exact breeding status of the colony was. On the same dates in 2012, of 50 nests with contents that could be checked, three were empty, 17 held eggs and 30 had broods ranging from new hatched to near fledged. It is possible that breeding could have begun later in 2005, after the surveyors had left the island; it is equally possible that breeding had begun earlier and failed. In either case, it seems a large-scale non-breeding event took place that year, or perhaps earlier, and numbers may only now be slowly recovering.

**Great Skua *Stercorarius skua***

The first two nests with eggs were found in 1965 (Eggeling 1965). Since then the number of breeding pairs has risen slowly, reaching 14 AOT in 1986, seven of which had eggs. Most counts made since then have been only of AOT, and apart from 1986 systematic searches for nests are only known from 1989 (20 AOT, 15 with eggs), 1993 (18 AOT, 10 with eggs or young), 2001 (16 AOT, 7 with young), 2009 (18 AOT, 5 with eggs or young) and 2012 (31 AOT, 25 with eggs) (Figure 3). Between these years AOT counts have been made, but none have been higher than 20. In 2012, considerable effort went into finding nests and confirming the exact status of each AOT. Using GPS each nest/AOT was recorded with a ten-figure grid reference, which should enable a future survey to establish population change more precisely. At present, it is uncertain if there has been a population surge since 2009, or whether earlier counts underestimated breeding numbers.

**Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla***

Numbers peaked at 4,197 AON in 1993, declined to 2,913 AON in 1998, and then increased to 3,398 AON in 2001. In 2005 there were 1,837 AON and since then the decline has been more pronounced, reaching 987 AON in 2009 and 923 AON in 2012. The last two counts may hold out some hope for a stabilization of the population.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus***

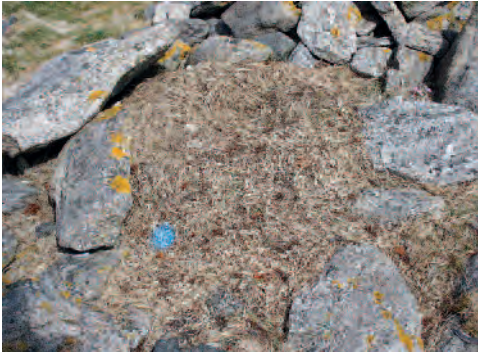
The maximum count has been 12 pairs in 1976. Although pairs or nests have been in single figures for many years, breeding has been regularly noted, most recently in 2009 when two broods were found. No evidence of breeding was found in 2012 and only three birds were seen, one of which was later found dead.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Maximum counts have been 137 pairs in 1976 and 69 AOT in 1986. There were 40 pairs in 1998 and 15 in 2005. Only ten nests with eggs were found in 2012, all on the coastal fringe, but it is possible that isolated pairs on the higher cliffs were overlooked; even so the species is in slow decline, barely maintaining a presence on Rona.

**Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus***

From a maximum of 2,018 pairs in 1972, subsequent counts have charted the slow decline of the species on Rona. Most counts have been of AOT made from a distance, but in 2005 ground searches were made of the four sections: A, B, M and N (Figure 1), which hold the majority of the nests on the island. By marking nests and making recounts of marked to unmarked nests in these sections, combined with AOT counts elsewhere, a total of 551 AOT were found. When only well-built nests were included and trace nests excluded, the total was reduced further, to 431 AOT.



**Plate 7.** Well-built but empty Great Black-backed Gull nest marked with blue paint, section M, Fianuis. Within a few days the nest had disintegrated and been abandoned, 4 June 2012. © S Murray



**Plate 8.** Abandoned Great Black-backed Gull nest with cold egg and dead chick, section M, Fianuis, 4 June 2012. © S Murray

In 2012, between 3 and 5 June, a direct count was made of all well-built nests on the island, 167 were found. These included 72 empty nests (43%), 79 with eggs (47%) and 16 with young (10%) (Table 3). All nests were marked with blue or green paint (Plates 7 & 8) and four days after the first count a recount was made of the section holding the most nests (sections L & M combined with 50 nests). Forty-one marked nests were re-found, with an additional six unmarked, which gave a correction factor of 1.146, and a calculated total for the entire island of 191 AON, the lowest estimate on record.

It was unexpected to find such a high proportion of well-built nests without eggs or young and we assumed that the follow up check on 9 June would see at least some of these nests with first eggs. Rather we found an increased number of empty nests in both sections L and M. Marked nests that had held eggs or new hatched young showed clear signs of predation and by the last check on the 16 June only three nests with eggs were found and one brood of medium sized young. Other sections checked on the 18 June also produced few broods e.g. Section H, two broods from 10 nests, Section D, no broods, with five clutches remaining from 17 nests and in Section B a minimum of 10 broods and two clutches from 41 nests. Although we left Rona before the outcome for these nests and broods was known, it seems likely that the 2012 season would end in a similar fashion to 2009, when the colony experienced near total breeding failure, with the few chicks present in late June succumbing to starvation and cannibalism.

**Table 3.** Great Black-backed Gull nest counts in Sections A to P, North Rona, showing empty nests, and both clutch and brood sizes on 3–5 June 2012.

Section	Empty	C/1	C/2	C/3	B/1	B/2	B/3	Total
A	1	0	3	1	0	1	0	6
B	12	1	18	5	0	2	3	41
C	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
D	8	2	7	0	0	0	0	17
E	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
G	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
H	4	1	2	1	0	1	1	10
I	0	0	2	2	0	1	0	5
J	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
K	2	0	0	4	1	0	0	7
L & M	31	1	10	5	0	3	0	50
N	9	1	3	6	1	1	0	21
O	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>167</b>

Correction factor = 1.146. Total island estimate = 191 AON.

**Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea***

Noted in most summers, but not always thought to breed, but did so in 2001, 2005 and 2009, when up to 60 pairs bred at three sites: two on Fianuis and one on Scepull. In 2012, about 20 pairs were present at the extreme north tip of Fianuis. The colony was not entered as a precaution against disturbance and nest abandonment, so no conclusive proof of breeding was made.

**Guillemot *Uria aalge***

The peak count was 17,104 individuals in 1986, declining to 10,497 in 1998, then 6,113 in 2005 and 4,961 in 2012. All breeding sites are either accessible or visible from the land, except for the interior of Geo Blàtha Mor. Both in 1986 and 2012, counts were made almost entirely from the land, with counts from the sea required only for the Geo Blàtha Mor cave. In 1998 and 2005, SNH did not count Toa Rona, Geo Blàtha Mor or Geo Blàtha Beag from the land, either doing boat counts or estimates of these areas; nevertheless it is quite clear that the population has been in steady decline, at a rate of 5% per annum since 1986.

**Razorbill *Alca torda***

Given the nature of its preferred habitat, partially or completely out of sight when breeding, the species can be difficult to count; fortunately there are only small areas of boulder scree on Rona where birds are completely hidden from all vantage points. Accurate counts do however require repeated visits to both known and likely breeding sites, which has led to thorough counts of individuals being made in only four years. Results are: 1,053 in 1986, 824 in 1998, 543 in 2005 and 513 in 2012. The counts made in 1986 and 2012 are the most comparable in coverage, and suggest a major decline between these years. However, the 1998 count is described as a 'slight underestimate' (SNH 1998), so it is likely that the loss of breeding birds has only occurred in the last decade or so. Further evidence for this comes from sample counts of the largest, most easily viewed colony, on the west side of Geo Léis. Counts here have been, 186 (1986), 122 (1993), 123 (1998) and 71 in 2012. The last is the highest of five counts made on different days, and points to a clear loss of breeding birds.

**Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle***

The ideal conditions for counts of this species have yet to be achieved at Rona. Counts should be made of individuals in the pre-laying period, up to 300 m offshore, from first light to two hours later, and within the first three weeks of April. A partial offshore count on 18 April 1986 found 56 birds, and an incomplete attempt on 11 April 2001 found 13 birds inshore and another 12 beyond 300 m. Estimates rather than counts have been made in June in several years and suggest a breeding population of c.20 pairs. Nests have been found regularly along the west coast from Geo an Tuill to Scepull; a maximum of seven in 1986 and four in 2009. Birds have been seen off the south and east coasts and breeding here is likely, but so far remains unproven. Counts are too few to be certain of the population trend, but similar June counts suggest a stable breeding population.

**Puffin *Fratercula arctica***

The population has almost certainly declined since the 1880s, but to what extent is unknown, since numbers and distribution are uncertain before 1958. In that year, Dennis & Waters (1962) estimated 8,000 pairs on the island and Bagenal & Baird (1959) drew the first distribution map of the colonies. They were mapped again in 1972, 1986, 1993 and 2001, and while the main concentrations on the east cliffs appeared unchanged, there were losses along the west coast by 2001, noticeably between Geo nan Gall and Scepull (Figure 1). By 2012, no birds were seen here, or occupied burrows found.

The main colony on the east cliffs between Geo Mairi and Leac Iain Tàillier (Plate 9) is maintaining its numbers, and shows no sign of decline. Average burrow densities here increased between 1976 and 1993 (Murray 1995), and the latest checks, in 2009 ( $180 \text{ m}^2/206 \text{ AOB} = 1.144 \text{ AOB/m}^2$ ) show no significant changes in density over the previous check in 2001 ( $330 \text{ m}^2/381 \text{ AOB} = 1.154 \text{ AOB/m}^2$ ).



Plate 9. The majority of Puffins breed on the east cliffs of Toa Rona between Leac Iain Tallier and Geo Mairi, 16 July 1994. © S Murray

These high burrow densities are confined to relatively small areas of stable soil, which are also the only areas safely accessible for survey. These sites are flanked and overlooked by steep cliffs where puffins also nest; observation suggests at low densities (Plate 10), but it has not proved possible to sample burrow densities here. On the less steep cliffs, south towards the colony edge at Leac Iain Tallier, densities are much lower, ranging from 0.316 AOB/m<sup>2</sup> to 0.716 AOB/m<sup>2</sup>.

The whole-island occupied burrow count of 5,625 AOB made in 2001, is probably still valid, although it should be regarded as a minimum and could be as high as 7,000 AOB. Despite some peripheral losses since 2001, there is nothing to suggest a wider decline maybe taking place; overall the population appears stable.



Plate 10. Toa Rona east cliffs showing Puffin monitoring sites 1 to 4, established in 1976. Unnamed geos A, B & C, are accessed from above to count Guillemot, Razorbill and Kittiwake nests, 19 June 2012. © S Murray



Plate 11. *St Ronan's cell and chapel, a breeding site of Leach's Petrel, 14 June 2012. © S Murray*

### Discussion

The difficulties and expense of working on Rona have precluded annual monitoring or long-term studies of any of the seabirds breeding there; so what has been achieved over the decades since the 1970s amounts only to snapshots of populations at different times. These have inevitably been made by different observers, but where comparison was possible, either across the whole island or between sections, this has shown that the large gulls, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Fulmar and Razorbill, have declined to historic low numbers compared with counts from the 1970s and 1980s. For Puffin, the picture is less clear, but the population appears to be stable at present. Shag may be making a comeback from a low point in the mid-2000s, but whether numbers will continue to increase remains to be seen. Great Skua is the only species to have increased, although undercounting in earlier years may have masked a more gradual rise in numbers up to 2012, but in common with all other species on Rona, nothing is known of either its diet or breeding success.



Plate 12. *Leach's Petrel. © J.A. Love*

Where the storm-petrels are concerned, there is an intriguing difference between the two species, with Storm Petrel unchanged between the survey years of 2001 and 2009, while Leach's Petrel declined by 34% in the same period. It may be that increased predation, either by Great Skuas or Great Black-backed Gulls is the reason for the losses of Leach's Petrel, if so it is surprising that Storm Petrel is not equally at risk. On St Kilda, both species are taken indiscriminately and in large numbers by Great Skuas (Phillips *et al.* 1999a & b), but on Rona, if skuas and gulls are preying on storm-petrels, they both appear to be largely ignoring the smaller species.

There has been no study of Great Skua diet on Rona, or their impact on storm-petrels and other seabirds, which studies on St Kilda (Phillips *et al.* 1999b) and

Shetland (Votier *et al.* 2004) have shown can be severe. A study was carried out on Great Black-backed Gulls in 1972 (when only three pairs of Great Skuas were present) and this recorded a wide range of avian prey taken, including both storm-petrels, but the bulk of the gulls diet then was fish (Evans 1975). The present situation regarding bird predation by skuas and gulls is unclear, but avian prey does not appear to be a major part of their diet, although this remains to be proven. In 2012, all recent and long dead corpses, including those found in skua pellets, were collected across the island; a total of 65 were found of 14 species, with Puffin comprising the largest component (31%) followed by Leach's Petrel (27%), with only a single Storm Petrel found. Neither Guillemot nor Kittiwake was recorded, whereas in Shetland both have suffered significant losses at some colonies due to Great Skua predation (Votier *et al.* 2004, Heubeck 2009), but this does not appear to be happening on Rona; equally, the still large Puffin population appears unaffected by the low numbers taken by both skuas and gulls.

Of the 14 species of seabird breeding annually on Rona, this study has shown clear population reductions in nine of them since 1986. The specific reasons behind these losses are not well understood, but are no doubt similar to those that have affected other seabird colonies in the north-east Atlantic in recent decades. A complex interplay of environmental and behavioural change, including predation, has now, in 2012, reduced the numbers of Rona's varied seabird population to a historically low level.

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Plate 13. North-western Redpoll, Fair Isle, October 2012. Although *C.f. islandica* has been removed from the UK/Scottish List, birds from Greenland and surely Iceland too, known informally as North-western Redpolls do occur as scarce migrants. © Roger Riddington

# Amendments to The Scottish List: species and subspecies

## The Scottish Birds Records Committee

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

The *Scottish List* was most recently published in full in 2011 (Forrester 2011b), incorporating all changes from the last report of the *Scottish List* subcommittee (Forrester 2011a). A full explanation of the procedure for maintaining the list is included.

SBRC established several principles for the original version of the *Scottish List*, which are still followed. The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) has maintained the official *British List* since 1883 and SBRC decided at the outset to follow its taxonomy, sequence and scientific names for the *Scottish List*. It was subsequently also agreed to use English names as they appear on the *British List*. Identical categories to BOU are used and in no instance is a species or subspecies placed in a higher category on the *Scottish List* than it appears on the *British List*.

The BOU Records Committee (BOURC) normally only adjudicate on the first British record for any taxon. The responsibility then lies with the British Birds Records Committee (BBRC) for acceptance of all subsequent records of rare species and subspecies in Britain. Similarly SBRC is responsible for acceptance of all records of species and subspecies which fall outwith the remit of BBRC, but which are rare in a Scottish context. Decisions by BOURC, BBRC and SBRC automatically apply to the *Scottish List*.

Since the latest version of the *Scottish List* was published, BOURC has published its 40th Report (BOU 2012), 41st Report (BOU 2013) and two Taxonomic Sub-Committee reports (Sangster *et al.* 2011, 2012); BBRC its reports on rare birds for 2010 and 2011 (Hudson *et al.* 2011, 2012); and SBRC its reports covering 2009 and 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011, 2012).

## Category B

The *Scottish List* has most recently described the definition for Category B to be ‘Species which were recorded in an apparently natural state at least once up to 31 December 1949, but have not been recorded subsequently’. However, in *The British List: A Checklist of Birds of Britain* (7th edition) BOURC redefined the category as ‘Species that were recorded in an apparently natural state at least once between 1 January 1800 and 31 December 1949, but have not been recorded subsequently’. This definition now applies to the *Scottish List*.

### BOURC decisions which affect the Scottish List:

#### Family and generic limits of Western Palearctic Galliformes

There have been several recent papers, including coverage of molecular phylogenetic studies of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA sequences, which have advanced our knowledge of the relationships among the Western Palearctic Galliformes (Sangster *et al.* 2012). The classification suggested is based on several unrelated studies, and more investigations are likely in future which may further change the relationship of genera. However, the following taxonomic sequence now applies to species on the *Scottish List*:

- Quail *Coturnix coturnix*
- Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*
- Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*
- Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*
- Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix*
- Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*
- Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*
- Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*
- Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*

#### Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*

This species is currently dual-categorised BC. The indigenous population of Capercaillie became extinct prior to 1 January 1800 and in view of the revised definition for Category B (see above), should no longer be included in Category B. The current population is derived from birds that were re-established within areas of former occurrence and therefore meets the criteria for C3 (naturalised re-establishment) (BOU 2013). The species should be listed as Category C.

Change from Category BC to Category C.

#### Cory’s Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

Cory’s Shearwater has appeared on the *Scottish List* as a polytypic species with two subspecies *diomedea* and *borealis*, of which only *borealis* has been recorded in Scotland. Recent studies, including phylogenetic analyses of mitochondrial DNA sequences, indicate that these two taxa merit specific status, which is supported by plumage size and vocalization differences (Sangster *et al.* 2012). The species is therefore split:

Scopoli’s Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

Cory’s Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*

Only Cory’s Shearwater, which is now monotypic, appears on the *Scottish List*.

#### Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

Storm Petrel has previously been treated as monotypic. However, Mediterranean and Atlantic populations show mean morphometric differences and differences in vocalisation. Phylogenetic analysis of mtDNA sequences supports treatment as two separate subspecies. The Atlantic population now becomes nominate *pelagicus* and the Mediterranean subspecies is *melitensis* (Sangster *et al.* 2012). Only nominate *pelagicus* is known to occur in Scotland.

### Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*

Following a review, a record of an adult male Gyr Falcon collected on Shetland in 1835 is now accepted as the first British occurrence (BOU 2012). An 1810 record from Hedderwick (Angus & Dundee) and an 1832 record from Orkney (Forrester *et al.* 2007) pre-date the Shetland record, but are now considered unacceptable, with the 1835 record consequently becoming the first record for Scotland.

### Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

Saker Falcon has been in Category D of the *Scottish List* on the strength of three records (Forrester *et al.* 2007), which were the only British records. BOURC has reviewed these with the Out Skerries 1976 and the Fetlar 1978 records being retained in Category D, but with the 1986 Fair Isle record being rejected (BOU 2011). There are therefore now two Scottish Category D records.

### Revised taxonomic sequence of Charadriiformes

Whilst revision of generic limits of shanks and gull taxonomy was noted in our 2009 report (Forrester 2009), further studies, including a recent molecular phylogeny based on mitochondrial and nuclear DNA sequences have provided strong evidence for a revision to the taxonomic sequence within the entire Charadriiformes (Sangster *et al.* 2011). As a result of these recommendations the taxa on the *Scottish List* should be listed in the following sequence:

#### Charadrii

- Burhinidae (*Burhinus*)
- Recurvirostridae (*Himantopus*, *Recurvirostra*)
- Haematopodidae (*Haematopus*)
- Charadriidae (*Pluvialis*, *Vanellus*, *Charadrius*)

#### Scolopaci

- Scolopacidae (*Bartramia*, *Numenius*, *Limosa*, *Arenaria*, *Calidris*, *Phalaropus*, *Xenus*, *Actitis*, *Tringa*, *Lymnocyptes*, *Limnodromus*, *Scolopax*, *Gallinago*)

#### Lari

- Glareolidae (*Glareola*, *Cursorius*)
- Stercorariidae (*Stercorarius*)
- Alcidae (*Fratercula*, *Cepphus*, *Alca*, *Pinguinus*, *Alle*, *Uria*)
- Sternidae (*Onychoprion*, *Sternula*, *Gelochelidon*, *Hydroprogne*, *Chlidonias*, *Sterna*)
- Laridae (*Pagophila*, *Xema*, *Rissa*, *Chroicocephalus*, *Hydrocoloeus*, *Rhodostethia*, *Larus*)

### Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus*

Hudsonian Whimbrel is separable from Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* on the basis of diagnostic differences in plumage, mean morphometric differences and marked divergence in mitochondrial DNA sequences. It is therefore now treated as a separate species (Sangster *et al.* 2011). There are four Scottish records of this taxon: Fair Isle 27–31 May 1955; Shetland 24 July to 8 August 1974; Fair Isle 29–31 August 2007; and Outer Hebrides 12 September 2009 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Monotypic; status code SV. To appear on the *Scottish List* between Eskimo Curlew and Whimbrel. Add to Category A.

### Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

As a result of *hudsonicus* now being treated as a full species, Whimbrel now becomes monotypic.

### General arrangement of calidrine sandpipers

Results from a recent molecular phylogeny based on mitochondrial and nuclear DNA sequences has led to a revision of the taxonomic sequence of the calidrine sandpipers. The same study also showed that the monotypic genera *Philomachus*, *Limicola* and *Tryngites* form part of the *Calidris* clade, resulting in Ruff, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Buff-breasted Sandpiper being moved to the *Calidris* genus (Sangster *et al.* 2012). The species on the *Scottish*

List should now appear in the following sequence:

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*  
 Knot *Calidris canutus*  
 Ruff *Calidris pugnax*  
 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*  
 Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus*  
 Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*  
 Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*  
 Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*  
 Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*  
 Sanderling *Calidris alba*  
 Dunlin *Calidris alpina*  
 Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*  
 Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*  
 Little Stint *Calidris minuta*  
 White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*  
 Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*  
 Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*  
 Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*  
 Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*  
 Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

#### Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

Of the six accepted subspecies of *S. skua*, nominate *skua* of the northern hemisphere could be separated from southern hemisphere taxa *antarcticus*, *hamiltoni*, *lonnbergi*, *chilensis* and *maccormicki* by genetic and plumage differences together with the results of mitochondrial DNA analyses. Therefore *S. skua* becomes a monotypic species, with the four southern taxa apportioned to a further three species (Sangster *et al.* 2011). Only Great Skua has been recorded in Scotland and it should now be treated as monotypic.

#### Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Until now three subspecies of Sandwich Tern have been recognised, nominate *sandvicensis*, *acuflavida* and *eurygnatha*. However, molecular phylogenetic analysis indicated that *acuflavida* and *eurygnatha* are more closely related to Elegant Tern *Sterna elegans*. Therefore Sandwich Tern is now treated as monotypic with the other two taxa forming a separate species Cabot's Tern *Sterna acuflavida* (Sangster *et al.* 2011).

Although Cabot's Tern has occurred in England, only Sandwich Tern has been recorded in Scotland and it should be treated as monotypic.

#### Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

Three subspecies have previously been recognised, however molecular studies have indicated three strongly divergent groups within the Arctic Warbler complex. These three groups also differ in morphometrics, territorial song and calls and are therefore best treated as three separate species (Sangster *et al.* 2012). Of the three the only taxon recorded in Scotland is *borealis*, which retains the English name Arctic Warbler.

Arctic Warbler therefore now becomes monotypic.

#### Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*

Two subspecies have previously been recognised, *sarda* and *balearica*. Two studies based on mitochondrial gene sequences suggest that these two taxa are not closely related. Whilst the precise relationships between these two taxa and closely related species have still to be resolved, it is now considered appropriate to treat them as separate monotypic species, Marmora's Warbler

*Sylvia sarda* and Balearic Warbler *Sylvia balearica*. There is one Scottish record, from St Abb's Head, Borders 23–27 May 1993 for which race is described on the *Scottish List* as '*sarda* (presumed)'. It has been recommended that this record, along with the other five British records, should now be reviewed.

Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon*

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*

Booted Warbler *Hippolais caligata*

Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*

A detailed series of mitochondrial and nuclear gene sequences showed that Booted/Olivaceous Warblers are not closely related to *Hippolais* but placed these species outside the *Hippolais* and *Acrocephalus* clades. This study suggested that *H. pallida*, *H. caligata* and *H. rama* along with *A. aedon* are best placed in a separate genus, for which the name *Iduna* is available (Sangster *et al.* 2011).

As a consequence the names and taxonomic sequence of the four species of *Iduna* on the *Scottish List* becomes as follows:

Thick-billed Warbler *Iduna aedon*

Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata*

Sykes's Warbler *Iduna rama*

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*

These species are now placed between Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* and Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* on the *Scottish List*.

Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*

Recent phylogenetic studies have shown that the genus *Zoothera* comprises two clades that are not closely related. One (the *Zoothera* clade) includes White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma*, the other (the *Geokichla* clade) includes several colourful African and Indo-Malayan species. These studies show that Siberian Thrush is not part of the *Zoothera* clade, but most likely part of the *Geokichla* clade (Sangster *et al.* 2011).

Siberian Thrush is therefore placed in *Geokichla* and becomes:

Siberian Thrush *Geokichla sibirica*

Siberian Thrush is now placed between Veery *Catharus fuscescens* and Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* on the *Scottish List*.

### Taxonomic sequence of Muscicapinae

Recent phylogenetic analyses of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA has clarified the relationship among the genera of chats and flycatchers (Muscicapinae). This results in a revised sequence (Sangster *et al.* 2011). The following taxonomic sequence applies to genera on the *Scottish List* and is brought into immediate use:

Muscicapa

Erithacus

Larvivora

Luscinia

Calliope

Tarsiger

Ficedula

Phoenicurus

Monticola

Saxicola

Oenanthe

Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane*  
 Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans*  
 Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*

Recent phylogenetic analyses of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA sequences have demonstrated that Siberian Blue Robin, Rufous-tailed Robin and Siberian Rubythroat are not closely related to the 'true' nightingales. As a consequence the genera *Larvivora* and *Calliope* are reinstated (Sangster *et al.* 2011). The two *Larvivora* species on the *Scottish List* are now to be shown with Siberian Blue Robin first, followed by Rufous-tailed Robin. These three species now have the scientific names:

Siberian Blue Robin *Larvivora cyane*  
 Rufous-tailed Robin *Larvivora sibilans*  
 Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope*

#### Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*

Phylogeographical analyses of mitochondrial DNA sequences have placed European, Siberian and African taxa in separate clades, and have further indicated that European Stonechats are more closely related to Canary Stonechat *Saxicola dacotiae* than to Siberian and African Stonechats. European Stonechats, Siberian Stonechats and African Stonechats further differ in morphology. The name *Saxicola torquatus* is now given to African Stonechat, with the polytypic European Stonechat now called *Saxicola rubicola*.

Further, mitochondrial DNA sequences of the eastern Siberian *stejnegeri* are highly divergent from those of western Siberian *maurus*, but at this stage specific ranking for *stejnegeri* has not been supported because the position of the Chinese subspecies *przewalskii* has yet to be determined. The name *przewalskii* would have nomenclatural priority over *stejnegeri* if the two were conspecific. Therefore *stejnegeri* is tentatively included in *Saxicola maurus* along with four other taxa (Sangster *et al.* 2011).

The two Siberian taxa *maurus* and *stejnegeri* are notoriously difficult to separate in the field and although there have been in excess of 100 records of migrants relating to either *maurus* or *stejnegeri*, there are only possibly four records accepted as *maurus* and none as *stejnegeri*. Clearly it would be advantageous to have a record relating to *stejnegeri* confirmed for Scotland prior to the likely future promotion of *stejnegeri* to full species level. The only Scottish record of the taxon *variegatus* (known as Caspian Stonechat), also now included with *maurus* was of a male at Virkie, Mainland, Shetland on 7 May 2006 (Forrester 2009).

The specimen of the first British record of *maurus*, from the Isle of May on 10 October 1913, held at National Museums Scotland (NMS.Z 1913.239.2) was examined and reviewed. On the basis of plumage characters and a genetic analysis the subspecific identification as nominate *S. m. maura* was upheld. This therefore is the first Scottish record for the species now known as Siberian Stonechat (BOU 2013).

The breeding taxon in Scotland *hibernans* is a subspecies of European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*, with the English vernacular name Stonechat.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* is now added to the *Scottish List* with the subspecies *maurus*, *maurus* or *stejnegeri* and *variegatus*. Status code SV. It is placed between Whinchat and Stonechat.  
 Add to Category A.

#### Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

The only two British specimen records (held at National Museums Scotland) of *M. f. simillima* (Eastern Blue-headed Wagtail) have been reviewed and submitted to mitochondrial DNA analysis. The first, from Fair Isle, collected on 9 October 1909 (NMS.Z 1910.132.15) was found

to be of eastern origin but could not be assigned to subspecies level. The second, also from Fair Isle, collected on 25 September 1912 (NMS.Z 1913.50.20) was found to be of western origin and has been rejected. The subspecies *M. f. simillima* is therefore deleted from the *British List* (BOURC 2013). The Taxonomic Sub-Committee is reviewing the systematics of the *Motacilla flava* complex and the occurrence of a bird of one of the eastern subspecies will be recorded in the 8th edition of the *Checklist of Birds of Britain* (BOURC, in prep). However, Collinson *et al.* (2013) meanwhile assign it to subspecies *tschutschensis/plexa*.

The subspecies *simillima* is removed from the *Scottish List*.

#### Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Recent phylogenetic studies suggest that Greenfinch should not be within the genus *Carduelis* and is best placed in a genus *Chloris* (Sangster *et al.* 2011), but remains in the same place on the *Scottish List*. Greenfinch thus becomes:

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*.

#### Mealy Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Whilst the Icelandic subspecies (Iceland Redpoll) *islandica* has appeared on the *British List*, on the basis that there were records from 'northern Britain', the subspecies has never been accepted for the *Scottish List*. It has now been acknowledged that although the taxon is likely to occur regularly in Britain, there are no acceptably documented records and it has been removed from the *British List* (BOURC 2013).

#### Generic arrangement of North American wood warblers

Molecular phylogenetic studies of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA sequences have clarified the relationships among the North American wood warblers. These affect both the generic position and the taxonomic sequence of the wood warblers recorded in the Western Palearctic. Due to non-monophyly of *Vermivora* and following the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Tennessee Warbler is placed in *Oreothlypis*. Due to non-monophyly of *Dendroica* and *Wilsonia*, and priority of the name *Setophaga*, all species currently included in *Dendroica*, as well as Hooded Warbler (currently *Wilsonia citrina*) are placed in *Setophaga* (Sangster *et al.* 2011). The names and sequence of the species recorded in Scotland, all of which are on Category A of the *Scottish List*, become as follows:

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*  
Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*  
Tennessee Warbler *Oreothlypis peregrina*  
Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*  
Hooded Warbler *Setophaga citrina*  
American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*  
Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrina*  
Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*  
Blackburnian Warbler *Setophaga fusca*  
Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*  
Chestnut-sided Warbler *Setophaga pensylvanica*  
Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*  
Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*

#### BBRC decisions that affect the Scottish List are:

Redhead *Aythya americana*

2003 Outer Hebrides Loch Tangasdail, Barra, first winter female, 20 September to 15 April 2004 (*British Birds* 97: 563; *Birding Scotland* 7: 130–135, *Birding World* 17: 59); same, Loch an Dùin, Barra, female, 7–8 November 2004 (*British Birds* 100: 20).

Following a review, the above record, the only Scottish record, is now considered not proven (*British Birds* 104: 563).

Remove from Category A.



**Northern Parula** *Setophaga americana*

2010 Argyll Carnan Mòr and Balephuill, Tisee 25–29 September (*British Birds* 103: plate 387, plate 339: 104: 625; *Scottish Birds* 30: plate 336; 31: 86–90, plates 80–86).

Monotypic; status SV (see above for position on *Scottish List*.)

1st Scottish record. Add to Category A.

**SBRC decisions that affect the *Scottish List* are:****Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

2010 Shetland Ocracquoy, Lerwick, Virkie & Exnaboe, Mainland, adult, 24 February–25 March (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

Accepted by SBRC as most likely coming from a feral population (in England or continental Europe).

Monotypic; status code SV. To be placed after Red-breasted Goose.

1st Scottish record. Add to Category C.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos minor*

Following a review by SBRC the only Scottish record, at Duchray Castle, Aberfoyle, Upper Forth in 1968 and 1970 (*Scottish Birds* 6: 210–212, 384) was found to be unacceptable (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

Remove from Category A.

[Amazingly, within four months of SBRC publishing the removal of the only hitherto Scottish record, of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, a well watched and photographed bird, probably belonging to the Continental nominate race *minor*, was present for five days in Shetland during October 2012 (*Birding World* 25: 403). This record has still to be formally accepted.]

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

Category A	505
Category B	6
Category C	8
	519
Category D	10

The current version of the *Scottish List* can be viewed on the SOC's website at [www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-list](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-list). In addition to the above-mentioned Lesser Spotted Woodpecker record from Shetland, a number of other records remain pending. These include two possible new species for the *Scottish List*, White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca deglandi* and Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia* and a new subspecies, the Nearctic subspecies of Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus pallescens*.

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

A list of all records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions was published on behalf of SBRC (Andrews & Naylor 2002) and covered the period up until the end of 2001. Since that time there have been four updates (Forrester 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011a). An opportunity was also taken in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) to evaluate the validity of several old records and to revise the numbering of records up to the end of 2004 for several species. This is the fifth update and covers all records that have appeared in print since the last report, including records from the 2010 and 2011 reports on rare birds from BBRC (Hudson *et al.* 2011, 2012) and records accepted by SBRC for species and subspecies not adjudicated upon by BBRC and contained within their report covering the years 2009 and 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011, 2012).

For a species reaching its twentieth record, all additional records occurring during the year of the twentieth record are included. The two journals most frequently cited in this report *Scottish Birds* and *British Birds* have usually been abbreviated to *SB* and *BB*. A decision has also been taken to not include names of observers, which can be found in the referenced publication.

**Black Duck** *Anas rubripes*

2011 Highland Camuschoirk and Garbh Eilean, Loch Sunart, Lochaber, male, 6–26 June; presumed same Strontian, Loch Sunart, 6 October (BB 105: 559).  
13th Scottish record.

**Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*

2009 Fife Loch Gelly, adult male, 26 July–2 September (SB 31: 110).  
19th Scottish record of 20 birds.

**Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana*

2011 North-east Scotland Murchar and Blackdog, adult male, 27 June–4 October (BB 11: 561; SB 31: 276–278, plates 237–238).  
6th Scottish record.

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

2010 Orkney North Ronaldsay, 16 October (BB 104: 567).  
4th Scottish record.

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

*P. c. sinensis*, 'Continental Cormorant'

2009 Lothian Musselburgh, adult, 7 June (SB 31: 113).  
2009 Lothian Musselburgh, two adults, 1 August (SB 31: 113).  
2009 North-east Scotland Stonehaven, adult, 27 March (SB 31: 113).  
2009 Shetland Lochs of Hillwell & Spiggie, Mainland, at least four adults, 20 April–11 June (SB 31: 113).  
2010 North-east Scotland Girdleness, adult and third-calendar-year, 2 May (SB 32: 112).  
2010 Shetland Ocrquooy, Lerwick, Virkie & Exnaboe, Mainland, adult, 24 February–25 March (SB 32: 111).  
11th–16th Scottish records of 21 birds. SBRC will no longer consider this subspecies from 1 January 2013 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

**Frigatebird sp.** *Fregata sp.*

2010 North-east Scotland Battery Park, Peterhead, 8 September (BB 104: 568).  
2nd Scottish record in addition to a single record of Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*.

**Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides*

2011 Shetland Urafirth, Mainland, 6–7 June (BB 104: plate 225); presumed same Burn of Crooksetter, Mainland, 12 June (BB 105: 564).  
5th Scottish record.

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*

2009 Argyll Ballimartin, Islay, 23 October–6 November (SB 30: plate 149; 31: 114).  
7th Scottish record.

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*

2010 Highland Findhorn Valley, Inverness District, adult, 8 May; presumed same Waternish Point, Skye, 31 May; Outer Hebrides Clachan Farm area, Berneray, adult, 18–25 May, ringed; Shetland Burrarfirth and Uyeasound, Unst, adult, 2–6 June, ringed (BB 104: 570).  
2010 Highland River Spey, near Cromdale, Badenoch & Strathspey, juvenile, 9–10 September (BB 104: 570).  
2010 Highland Kyle of Lochalsh, Skye & Lochalsh, 9 September (BB 104: 570).  
19th–21st Scottish records of 22 birds. Now removed from the list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

**Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps*

2011 Argyll Salen Bay, Mull, 22 March–6 April (*BB* 104: plate 145; 105: 567).  
10th Scottish record.

**Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus*

2011 Argyll Pennyghael, Mull, juvenile, 20–24 September (*BB* 105: 567; *SB* 32: plate 297).  
2011 Argyll Machrihanish, juvenile, 22 September (*BB* 105: 567; *SB* 32: plates 300–301).  
2011 Ayrshire Garnock Floods, juvenile female, 27 October–7 November (*BB* 105: plate 323, 568; *SB* 32: 82–85, plates 61–66).  
2011 Fair Isle Malcolm's Head then other areas, juvenile, 12–15 August (*BB* 105: 568; *SB* 32: plates 298–299).  
2011 Fair Isle Gilsetter then other areas, juvenile, 11–14 September (*BB* 105: 568).  
2011 North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary and Blackdog, juvenile, 1 October (*BB* 105: 568; *SB* 32: 85–86, plate 67).  
2011 Orkney The Loons RSPB and Marwick, Mainland, juvenile, 23–28 September (*BB* 105: 568; *SB* 32: plates 294–296).  
2011 Orkney Hooking, North Ronaldsay, juvenile, 25–28 September (*BB* 105: 568).  
2011 Shetland Isle of Noss then Ander Hill Bressay, juvenile 24–26 August (*BB* 105: 568).  
2011 Shetland Norwick and other sites, Unst, juvenile female, 25 August–14 September (*BB* 105: 568, plate 324; *SB* 32: plate 289).  
2011 Shetland Sandgarth and Sand Water, Mainland, juvenile 31 August (*BB* 105: 568; *SB* 32: plates 291–292).  
2011 Shetland Quendale and other sites, Mainland, juvenile, 3 September–17 October (*BB* 105: 568).  
2011 Shetland Virkie and other sites, Mainland, juvenile, 10–19 September (*BB* 105: 568).  
2011 Shetland Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, juvenile, 11 September (*BB* 105: 568).  
2011 Shetland Arisdale, Yell, juvenile, 12–16 September (*BB* 105: 568–569; *SB* 32: plates 290 and 293).  
2011 Shetland East Burrafirth, Mainland, juvenile, 17 September (*BB* 105: 569).  
2011 Shetland Brake, Mainland, juvenile, 28 September–1 October (*BB* 105: 569).  
2011 Shetland Fetlar, juvenile, 30 September–5 October (*BB* 105: 569).  
2011 Shetland Channerwick area and Boddam, Mainland, 4–10 October, presumed same Trondra, 7 October (*BB* 105: 569).  
2011 Shetland Bardister, North Roe, Mainland, juvenile, 9 October (*BB* 105: 569).  
12th–31st Scottish records. Chapman (2012) provides a detailed overview of the unprecedented influx into Scotland during autumn 2011. Now removed from the list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni*

2011 Orkney North Ronaldsay, first-summer male, 20–21 September (*BB* 105: 571).  
3rd Scottish record.

**Sandhill Crane** *Grus canadensis*

2011 North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg RSPB, adult, 22–26 September (*BB* 105: 572, plate 327; *SB* 31: 375–377, plates 328–330).  
4th Scottish record.

**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus*

2010 Argyll Lossit Bay, Islay, 31 January (*BB* 104: 575, plate 75).  
16th Scottish record.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

2008 Lothian Aberlady Bay, male, 1–2 June (*SB* 31: 118).  
17th Scottish record.

**Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii*

2011 Highland Dornoch Point, Ross & Cromarty, adult male, 16–24 June (BB 105: 576, plate 329).  
5th Scottish record.

**Upland Sandpiper** *Bartramia longicauda*

2009 Caithness Quoys of Reiss, juvenile, 28 September (BB 105: 583).  
11th Scottish record.

**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla*

2011 Shetland South Ness, Foula, juvenile, 14–24 September (BB 104: plate 381; 105: 579, plate 332).  
5th Scottish record.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla*

2009 Shetland Brough, Whalsay, adult, 29 July (BB 104: 579).

2010 Lothian Tynninghame Bay, juvenile, 27 August–15 September (BB 104: 579; SB 30: plate 333; 31: plate 88).

2011 North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary, juvenile, 26 September–4 October (BB 105: 576; SB 32: 74–77, plates 55–57).

2011 Outer Hebrides Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine), South Uist, juvenile, 15–17 September (BB 105: 577).

2011 Outer Hebrides Cille Pheadair (Kilpheder), South Uist, juvenile, 21 September (BB 105: 577).

2011 Outer Hebrides Northton, Harris, juvenile, 25–26 September, presumed same 7th and 10th November (BB 105: 577).

2011 Outer Hebrides Rhubha Àird na Machrach (Ardivachar Point), South Uist, two, juveniles, 4–5 October (BB 105: 577; SB 32: plate 71).

2011 Shetland Pool of Virkie, Mainland, adult, 2–5 August (BB 105: 577).

18th–25th Scottish records of 33 birds. Now removed from the list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca*

2011 Highland Knockglass, Loch Fleet, Ross & Cromarty, first-winter, 14–17 December (BB 105: plate 337, 585).  
9th Scottish record.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica*

2010 Argyll Near Moss, Tiree, adult, 25 April (BB 104: 587).  
11th Scottish record.

**Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida*

2011 Outer Hebrides Loch Fada, Benbecula, 5–8 April (BB 105: 589).  
7th Scottish record.

**Franklin's Gull** *Larus pipixcan*

2005 Shetland Hamars Ness, Fetlar, first-winter, 9 November (BB 104: 586).

2011 Highland Clashnessie Bay, Drumbeg, Sutherland, first-summer, 17–18 May (BB 105: 587).  
Total of 14 Scottish records.

**Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*

A comprehensive review has recently been carried out by SBRC, with the result that many previously accepted records are now considered unacceptable. There are now only 19 accepted Scottish records. As full details of these Scottish records have recently been published (SB 32: 118–120), they are not repeated here.

**Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinnans*

2009 North-east Scotland Ugie Estuary, Peterhead, first-winter, 10 January (SB 31: 121).  
4th Scottish record.

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus*

2010 Outer Hebrides Cille Amhlaidh (Kilaulay), South Uist, immature male, 4 November, found dead, skin in NMS (NMS.Z 2010.98) (BB 104: 590; SB 32: 168).  
13th Scottish record.

**Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus*

2010 Outer Hebrides North Loch Aineort (Loch Eynort), Bornais, South Uist, one, 10 October, two 11th, one to 12th (BB 104: 592).  
11th Scottish record.

**Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus*

2009 Shetland Geosetter, Mainland, first-winter, 11 October (BB 104: 592).  
2011 Argyll Balephuill, Tiree, first-winter, 22 October–20 November (BB 105: plate 345, 592; SB 32: 78–81, plates 58–60).  
5th and 6th Scottish records.

**Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus*

2010 Shetland Scousburgh, Mainland, adult female, 12–17 October (BB 104: 593).  
20th Scottish record. This species will not feature in future reports.

**Southern Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis*

2010 North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg RSPB, first-winter *L. m. pallidirostris*, 14–18 October (BB 104: 594).  
7th Scottish record.



Plate 14. Southern Grey Shrike, Loch of Strathbeg RSPB, North-east Scotland, October 2010. © Harry Scott

**Hume's Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei*

- 2011 North-east Scotland Foveran, 12–19 November (BB 105: 596).  
2011 Shetland Kergord, Mainland, 8–9 November (BB 105: 596).  
2011 Shetland Trondra, 13–19 November (BB 105: 596).  
2011 Shetland Symbister, Whalsay, 15–30 November (BB 105: 596).  
2011 Shetland Gulberwick, Mainland, 15–19 November (BB 105: 596).  
2011 Shetland Grutness, Mainland, 15–20 November (BB 105: 596).  
19th–24th Scottish records. Now removed from the list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

**Western Bonelli's Warbler** *Phylloscopus bonelli*

- 2010 Shetland Creadyknowe, Whalsay, first-winter, 9–15 September, trapped (BB 104: 597).  
2010 Shetland Seafield, Lerwick, Mainland, 11–15 October; presumed same, Helendale, Lerwick, 29 October–1 November (BB 104: 597).  
2011 Shetland Gulberwick, Mainland, first-winter, 9–11 August (BB 105: 598).  
2011 Shetland Houbie, Fetlar, first-winter, 12 September (BB 105: 598).  
16th–19th Scottish records.

**Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus*

- 2010 Shetland Baltasound, Unst, male in song, 4 June (BB 104: 598, plate 319).  
3rd Scottish record.

**Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides*

- 2011 Shetland Out Skerries, 27 May (BB 105: 600).  
11th Scottish record of 12 birds.

**Sykes's Warbler** *Iduna rama*

- 2010 Shetland Burrafirth, Unst, first-winter, 16–17 August (BB 103: plate 385, 104: 603, plate 323).  
2010 Shetland Channerwick, Mainland, 2–9 October (BB 104: 603).  
2010 Shetland Tresta, Fetlar, first-winter, 6 October (BB 104: 603).  
8th–10th Scottish records.

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida*

- 2010 Shetland Ireland, Mainland, first-winter, 11–12 September (BB 104: 602, plate 322).  
2011 Fair Isle Taft and Schoolton, first-winter, 2–3 September (BB 195: 601).  
6th and 7th Scottish records.

**Hermit Thrush** *Catharus guttatus*

- 2010 Outer Hebrides Brèibhig (Brevig), Barra, first-winter, 9–11 October; presumed same Castlebay, Barra, 14–16 October (BB 104: 607, plate 325; SB 31: 279–283, plates 241–243, 246–247).  
2010 Outer Hebrides Loch Druidibeg NR, South Uist, first-winter, 10 October, trapped (BB 104: 607; SB 31: 279–283, plates 244–245).  
4th and 5th Scottish records.

**Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus*

- 2010 Fair Isle Lower Stoneybrek, 15 September (BB 104: 607).  
2010 Shetland Levenwick, Mainland, first-winter, 2–3 October (BB 104: 607).  
2011 Orkney Kirbuster, Mainland, first-winter, 21 October (BB 105: 603; SB 32: plate 73).  
2011 Shetland Dalsetter, Mainland, 21–23 September (BB 105: 603).  
9th–12th Scottish records.

**Grey-cheeked Thrush** *Catharus minimus*

- 2011 Shetland Tresta, Fetlar, first-winter, 23–24 September (BB 105: 604).  
10th Scottish record.

*Veery Catharus fuscescens*

2011 Highland Galanach Farm, Muck, Lochaber, first-winter, 16–24 November (BB 105: 604; SB: 32: 71–73, plates 50–54).  
6th Scottish record.

*Siberian Blue Robin Larvivora cyane*

2011 Shetland Ham, Foula, first-winter female, 1 October, found dead, skin at NMS (NMS.Z 2011.151) (BB 105: 604, SB 32: 168).  
2nd Scottish record.

*Rufous-tailed Robin Larvivora sibilans*

2010 Orkney Observatory, North Ronaldsay, first-winter male, 2 October, found dead, skin NMS (NMS.Z 2010.95) (BB 104: 612, SB 32: 168).  
2nd Scottish record.

*Siberian Rubythroat Calliope calliope*

2011 Shetland Gulberwick, Mainland, first-winter male, 18–30 October (BB 104: plate 448; 105: plate 356, 607; SB 32: plate 74).  
6th Scottish record.

*Collared Flycatcher Ficedula albicollis*

2010 Outer Hebrides Gearraidh na h'Aibhne (Garrynahine), Lewis, adult male, 1 June (BB 104: 616).  
2011 Fair Isle Hoini, first-summer male, 30 April–5 May (BB 105: 608).  
2011 Shetland Manse, Foula, male, 14 May (BB 105: 608).  
19th–21st Scottish records. Now removed from the list of species recorded on 20 or fewer occasions.

*Pied Wheatear Oenanthe pleschanka*

2010 Orkney Twingness, North Ronaldsay, female, 10–14 October (BB 104: 615).  
18th Scottish record.

*Buff-bellied Pipit Anthus rubescens*

2010 Fair Isle North Light, first-winter, 20–30 September (BB 104: 619).  
2010 Orkney Yesnaby, Mainland, 27 September (BB 104: 619).  
2010 Shetland Tangwick, Eshaness, Mainland, 28 September–6 October (BB 103: plate 386; 104: 619, plate 333).  
2011 Orkney Bewan Loch, North Ronaldsay, two, 22–26 September (BB 105: 613).  
2011 Outer Hebrides Hirta, St Kilda, 18 September (BB 105: 613).  
2011 Shetland Foula, 22 and 26 September, two on 29th–30th (one of which presumed same as 22nd/26th), one remaining to 1 October (BB 105: 613).  
2011 Shetland Quendale, Mainland, 8–13 October (BB 104: plate 451; 105: 613; SB 32: plate 76).  
10th–16th Scottish records of 18 birds.

*Rose-breasted Grosbeak Pheucticus ludovicianus*

2011 Orkney Near Stenaquoy, Eday, first-winter male, 10 October (BB 105: 615).  
3rd Scottish record.

*White-throated Sparrow Zonotrichia albicollis*

2010 Fair Isle Observatory, 19–20 May (BB 104: 621).  
2010 Shetland Scousburgh, Mainland, 21 May (BB 104: 621).  
18th and 19th Scottish records.

*Ovenbird Seiurus aurocapilla*

2011 Outer Hebrides Båg a' Chaisteil (Castlebay), Barra, 23–24 October (BB 105: 619).  
2nd Scottish record.

## Addendum

Supplement 1 to *Scottish Birds* volume 31. The Scottish List (pages 16–17).

**Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*:** The subspecies for Glaucous Gull was incorrectly omitted and by doing so indicated that the species was monotypic. This is not the case, as there are three subspecies and it is the nominate subspecies (*hyperboreus*) which occurs in Scotland.

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## Golden Eagle colonisation of grouse moors in north-east Scotland during the Second World War

A minimum of 22 nesting pairs of Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* colonised grouse moors in north-east Scotland during the 1939–45 war, when many gamekeepers were away in the armed services and persecution of eagles had lessened. Twenty of these pairs vanished soon after the war, associated with a return of gamekeepers and persecution. Then for many years most of the home ranges colonised during the war held no nesting pairs.

### Introduction

Watson *et al.* (1989) reported on a study area in upper Deeside and adjacent parts of north-east Scotland where six adult pairs of Golden Eagles nested on grouse moors in 1945–46, but vanished thereafter. Little grouse shooting occurred in the war years, when many grouse gamekeepers were away in the armed services. As the gamekeepers returned, colonist eagles soon vanished. Watson *et al.* (1989) gave a density figure of 6 pairs on 1000 km<sup>2</sup> of land type G (grouse moor). They gave also a maximum of 15 pairs from the same area, 'calculated by accumulating data on the number of ranges in which a nest was built at least once, and hence is a minimum value for the potential density on land type G'.

Below, a larger area, west to the Monadh Liath, north to the lower Findhorn and Spey, and south to the Forest of Clunie and the Angus Glens is used.

### Study area

Owners used the land mainly for shooting Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus scoticus* and Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* less so. These moors, now dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, were originally natural forest during the warm period after the last glaciers vanished, but following their clearing by prehistoric man have since been kept open by burning and by farm stock or Red Deer eating tree seedlings. The area and the eagles' food and nest sites have been described elsewhere (Watson 1957, Brown & Watson 1964, Watson *et al.* 1989, Watson *et al.* 1992, Watson *et al.* 2012).

### Methods

The number of pairs and their nesting attempts were checked by well-known methods (references above). The author observed in upper Deeside in 1943–80 and since. Summarised data for upper Deeside in 1981, 1982 and 1983 have been published (Watson 1982, Payne & Watson 1983, 1984). S. Rae's data in 1982–85 are in Watson *et al.* (1992, 2012). R. Rae of the North East of Scotland Raptor Study Group holds the existing data for north-east Scotland since 1985.

Historic data on Golden Eagle home ranges from Speyside, the Findhorn valley and wider north-east Scotland came from the author, other birdwatchers including P. Sandeman (see Sandeman 1957), gamekeepers and shepherds as listed in Table 1.

### Results

Table 1 summarises the data. In all, 22 ranges that were unoccupied by nesting pairs just before the 1939–45 war were colonised during it (ranges 1–12, 14–16, 21, 24–26, 28–30). Of these, 21 became vacant soon after and stayed vacant for many years (the above ranges except 25).

Eagles nested in range 1 for many years before the war, but not in 1938–39, so this is included as one of the above 22. They then nested during 1940–46, but only sporadically thereafter, and not for the last several decades. Range 27 was occupied in at least one year before the war and during the war, but not after.

Another four ranges (13, 19, 20, 22) were occupied before and during the war and for some years after, but later became vacant.

Nesting birds did not occur in range 17 before and during the war, but have occupied it sporadically since 1951. Range 23 was occupied before and during the war and until 1946, but not since. Eagles last bred at range 18 in 1838.

## Discussion

Whitfield *et al.* (2006) estimated a 'national target' for the number of 'territories' of Golden Eagles in Scotland, based partly on population modelling, including an assessment of 'likely suitable though unoccupied habitat'. They concluded that 'The key constraint preventing favourable condition being met was persecution, predominantly in some areas managed for grouse shooting.' Their Table 1, combined with the map in Figure 1 indicates that the greatest modelled shortfall was in what they called 'North East Glens', followed by their 'Cairngorms Massif' (in fact a much larger area than the Cairngorms massif, and including most of the Mounth), in turn by their 'Breadalbane and East

Argyll', and then their 'Central Highlands' (in fact from Lochaber east of the Great Glen via the Monadh Liath to the Morayshire moors). Their 'North East Glens' comprise predominantly grouse-moor, whereas the other areas named above include much deer forest with little or no grouse interest, as well as some grouse moor.

The main advantage of the modelling was that it brought eagle conservation to the attention of the public. One drawback was that the modelling rested partly on an assumption involving the authors' assessment of 'likely suitable though unoccupied habitat', an assessment which was subjective. This allowed a few gamekeepers to assert that the said habitat

**Table 1.** Number of nests and years of occupation of Golden Eagle ranges on grouse moors in north-east Scotland. Numbers of nests are minima, so should be regarded as 'at least'. Initials are for Archie Anderson, Leslie Brown, John Edelsten, Seton Gordon, Anne Keiller Greig, Ray Hewson, Alexander McConnochie's book, Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, Charles Palmar, Stuart Rae, Derek Ratcliffe, Pat Sandeman, Adam Watson, his father Adam Watson senior and Douglas Weir. ^For the eagles' sake, I give vague locations referring to nearby settlements. Precise locations are with RSPB Aberdeen.

Area ^	Nests	Observers	Nested in years
1 Strathdon	4	SG, AG, shepherd, AW	To 1937, 1940–46, 1962, not to 2012
2 Corgarff	1	Keepers, farmers	1944, 1945, not to 1981, then sporadic
3 Lumsden	2	Keepers, farmers	1944, 1945, not to 1980, then sporadic
4 Banchory	2	AW, LB	1944, 1945, 1971, 1972*, 1995–2004
5 Braemar	2	Keepers, AW	1943, 1944, 1+ young 1945
6 Crathie	2	Keepers, AW	1943, 1944, 2 young 1945
7 Ballater	1	Keepers, AW	1944, 1945, not to 1977, then sporadic
8 Dinnet	2	Keepers, AW	1944, 1945, 1964, 1979–80, not to 2012
9 Tarfside	2	Keepers, AW	1943–45, not to 2012
10 Edzell	2	Keepers, AW	1944, 1945, not to 1981, then sporadic
11 Cortachy	1	Keepers	1944, 1945, not to 2012
12 Kirriemuir	2	Keepers	1944, 1945, not to 2012
13 Glen Shee	4	LB, AW	up to 1963, not to 2012
14 Pitlochry	3	LB, PS, keepers	1942–45, not to 2012
15 Dunkeld	2	LB, PS	1944, 2 young 1945, not to 2012
16 Lecht	2	Keepers, AW	1944, 1945, not to 2012
17 Tomintoul south-west	10	DT, LB, AW, JE, SR	Not 1936–45, sporadic from 1951 on
18 Dufftown	1	DW, RH, AW	Not since 1838
19 Tomintoul low	9	SG, LB, AW, JE	Not since 1977
20 Kingussie east	3	Keepers, DW, AW	Till 1975
21 Aviemore	3	DR, CP, keeper, AW	1944, 1945, not to 1974
22 Dalwhinnie north	4	LB, AW	Till 1959+, not 1965–74
23 Carr Bridge south	5	DNT, AW	Till 1946
24 Carr Bridge north	1	LB, DW, farmers	1942–45, not to 2012
25 Culloden south-east	1	DW	1943–45, no young 1965–74
26 Ballindalloch west	1	DW	1944, 1945
27 Tomatin	2	McC, keepers, AW	1931, 1943–45
28 Daviot	2	CP, AW, AW senior	1943–45
29 Dalwhinnie south	1	AW, DW, keepers	1944–48
30 Kincaig	1	Keeper, DW	1944–45

\* Hen killed by poison 1973, no nesting 2005 and since.

was unsuitable because of factors such as disturbance by walkers, climatic change and others, although the critics had studied none of these factors and adduced no evidence on them.

The value of the present paper is its evidence that many ranges on grouse moors were observed to be occupied by nesting Golden Eagles during the Second World War and immediately after it, when many gamekeepers were away in the armed forces and persecution lessened. Then, after the gamekeepers returned and persecution was renewed, most of the colonist nesting pairs vanished. This situation has continued since, apart from some brief occupations in a small proportion of the total number of ranges occupied at the end of the war.

### Acknowledgements

For information, thanks are given to those named below Table 1, and gamekeepers whose names are withheld because they provided information that they had persecuted eagles, and shepherds who did not persecute.

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## Pre-First World War persistence of a Golden Eagle population in the Outer Hebrides

The Outer Hebrides now support a thriving population of Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* (Eaton *et al.* 2007), despite isolation by sea crossings of 20 km to the Inner Hebrides and 35 km to the Scottish mainland - significant obstacles for large soaring birds (Bildstein *et al.* 2009). However, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, when Golden Eagles were widely persecuted in Scotland, and were eradicated from Ireland (Evans *et al.* 2012), it is unclear whether this population persisted (Love 1983, Evans *et al.* 2012). Whether or not extinction occurred is therefore important to our understanding of the subsequent dynamics of recolonisation and population recovery during the 20th century by this species.

During the 19th century, more than 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> of hill land in Scotland was set aside for private “deer forests” (Orr 1982). Although the Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* is a woodland animal over much of its range, Scottish deer forests are not generally wooded and instead consist of extensive areas of open and relatively unfertile hill ground (Clutton-Brock & Albon 1989), habitat also potentially suitable for Golden Eagles (Watson 2011). In a wider landscape of persecution during the 19th and early 20th centuries, deer forests are thought to have provided significant refuges for Golden Eagles (Love 1983, Watson 2011, Evans *et al.* 2012), particularly as some deer forest proprietors were said to actively protect eagles on their land (Booth 1881–7, Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895).

In the Outer Hebrides, more than 300km<sup>2</sup> of deer forest had been created in north Harris

and south Lewis by the mid-1850s. This is relatively early compared with other parts of Scotland, where most deer forests were converted from the 1860s onwards (Orr 1982). By 1890, deer forest extended across 500 km<sup>2</sup> of the most mountainous parts of Lewis and Harris (Table 1, Figure 1).

In 1870, Harvie-Brown knew of eight Golden Eagle breeding localities in Harris (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1888), and in the 1890s, eagles were specifically said to have been actively protected on the Amhainnsuidhe and Park forests (Grimble 1896, Harvie-Brown 1903), covering a combined area of more than 330 km<sup>2</sup>.

Given (1) the stated size of the population in 1870, and (2) the presence of a benign management regime covering a significant contiguous area of the most suitable Golden Eagle habitat in the Outer Hebrides from the mid-19th century onwards, we propose that there was no local extinction prior to the First World War, and that a breeding population of Golden Eagles survived in the Lewis and Harris hills throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Golden Eagles in the Outer Hebrides were not confined to Lewis and Harris in the late 19th century, and also occurred in the Uists, though Harvie-Brown knew of only one breeding location (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1886). The extent of hill ground in the Uists is about half that on Rum and a quarter of that on Jura, islands from both of which Golden Eagles are

**Table 1.** Extent and date of conversion of land to deer forest in Lewis and Harris.

Deer forest name	Area (km <sup>2</sup> - converted from acres in Orr 1982)	Year converted
Morsgail (Lewis)	81.42	1850
Scaliscro (Lewis)	12.72	1850
Aline (Lewis)	45.16	1850
Amhainnsuidhe (North Harris)	162.28	1853
Luskentyre (South Harris)	24.28	1860s
Park (Lewis)	169.62	1886
<b>Total</b>	<b>495.48</b>	



Plate 15. Golden Eagle, Harris, 2012. © Laurie Campbell

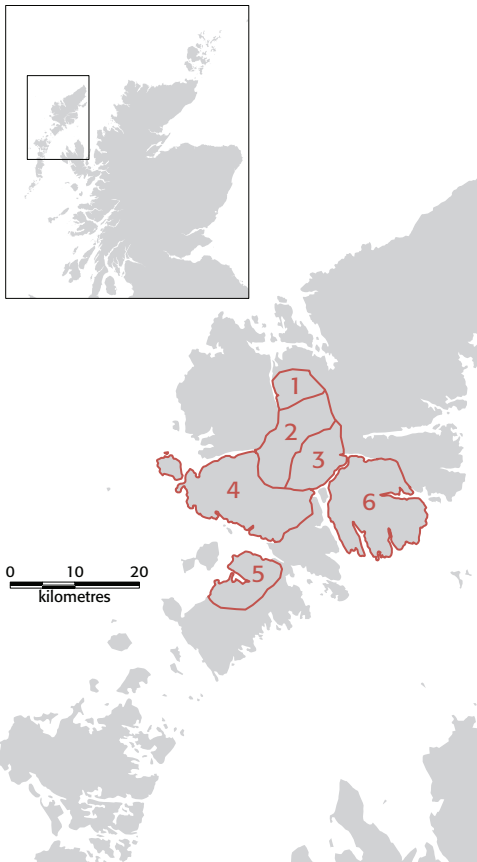


Figure 1. Location and extent of 19th-century deer forests in Lewis and Harris: (1) Scaliscro; (2) Morsgail; (3) Aline; (4) Abhainnsuidhe; (5) Luskentyre; (6) Park.

said to have been eradicated by the mid-1880s (Evans *et al.* 2012). Thus, in our view it is unlikely that Golden Eagles would have survived on their own in the Uists without a supply of potential recruits from neighbouring Harris and Lewis.

If our interpretation is correct, and an isolated population of Golden Eagles survived in the Outer Hebrides and subsequently recovered without the need for recolonisation by immigrant birds, then analysis of genetic material would be a useful formal test of this hypothesis, though we note that Bourke *et al.* (2010) did not report such differences in their analysis of DNA from the British Isles.

The conversion of land to deer forest took place over several decades and there is considerable variation in the size of contiguous areas eventually converted (Orr 1982). More detailed investigation of the timing and extent of deer forest conversion prior to 1914 across Scotland may allow a better understanding of the nature and scale of the effect of this land use change on Golden Eagles, and might also potentially indicate areas outside the Outer Hebrides that could also have an historical basis for more detailed DNA analysis.



Plate 16. Eagle perch, Loch Reasort, North Harris, August 2011. © Robin Reid

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# Breeding raptors in Scotland: a review

B. ETHERIDGE



Plate 17. Golden Eagle bringing in prey, Inverness-shire, July 2009. © David Whitaker

Since the early writings of Seton Gordon (1927), Scots and Scottish-based ornithologists have led the world in definitive studies of diurnal birds of prey or raptors and current interest in them by enthusiasts has never been higher. Over the past 30 years, nearly 300 amateur ornithologists have joined forces to form a network of 11 regional raptor study groups covering the whole country with the exception of Shetland. Much of what is currently known about the abundance, nesting success and distribution of birds of prey in Scotland is due to this army of dedicated field workers. Many of them are also SOC members and they carry out breeding studies of both raptors and owls, often in great depth and magnitude, and all in their own time. Furthermore, Scottish Raptor Study Group members provided data for the now defunct *Raptor Roundup* published by SOC up to 2002 and since 2003, most of the breeding records in the annual reports of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme upon which this review is based.

Currently 23 species of raptors have been recorded in Scotland (Table 1), but nine are solely winter visitors or vagrants and are not included any further in this review. The fourteen species that remain occur as annual breeders

but only three can be considered common with populations in excess of 5,000 pairs; Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel. A further four; Merlin, Peregrine, Hen Harrier and Golden Eagle have breeding populations of 400–750 pairs. Three are scarce but on a local scale can be fairly common in favoured localities and have populations in the low hundreds - Red Kite, Osprey and Goshawk. The remaining four; White-tailed Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Honey-buzzard and Hobby are nationally very rare with considerably less than 100 pairs each. The population trend over the past ten years for these 14 species has shown five increasing, five stable and four declining (Table 1).

## The 'common' breeders

Buzzards have made remarkable gains over the past 20 years, spreading eastwards to cover all parts of Scotland from which they had previously been exterminated during the 19th century. Buzzards have now re-colonised and are breeding in almost all habitats available to them and have now reached the outskirts of our towns and cities. With the exception of Shetland, they have successfully colonised all the island groups including Orkney where they are currently still expanding their range. Problems still exist;



despite full protection under existing legislation, Buzzards are still being killed in game-rearing areas, and their absence as a breeding bird on many sporting estates bears testament to the scale of this criminal behaviour.

Sparrowhawks were severely affected by the use of organo-chlorine pesticides in the 1950s and numbers recovered only after these chemicals had been phased out in later decades. Numbers reached a peak in the late 1980s as the species recolonized farming areas from which they had been lost, but have subsequently declined in line with population reductions in many of their farmland prey species. It is therefore surprising

that these hawks are so often accused of contributing to the decline of farmland and garden birds when the reverse is closer to the truth. Nevertheless, Sparrowhawks are still a fairly common species over much of Scotland, occurring where there are populations of small birds to hunt and woodland cover for nesting, including the urban parks and wooded cemeteries of our major cities.

Throughout much of the 20th century, the Kestrel was the only bird of prey that was sufficiently widespread and abundant to be classed as common. A decline first noticed in the 1988–91 Atlas years has since accelerated

**Table 1.** Status, breeding population and occurrence of diurnal birds of prey in Scotland, 2012.

Status and species in order of abundance	Breeding population in pairs or occurrence in Scotland	Information source	Population trend in last decade
<b>Common breeder</b>			
Buzzard	15,000–20,000	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	up
Sparrowhawk	8,000–12,000	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	down
Kestrel	7,500–7,800	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	down
<b>Uncommon breeder</b>			
Merlin	733	2008 National survey (Ewing <i>et al.</i> 2011)	stable
Peregrine	600	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	down
Hen Harrier	505	2010 National survey (Hayhow <i>et al. in press</i> )	down
Golden Eagle	443	2003 National survey (Eaton <i>et al.</i> 2007)	stable
<b>Scarce, localised breeder</b>			
Osprey	202	SRMS Report (Etheridge <i>et al.</i> 2013).	up
Red Kite	232	RSPB Scotland. 2012 survey. <i>Unpublished</i>	up
Goshawk	130	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	up
<b>Very rare breeder</b>			
White-tailed Eagle	66	RSPB Scotland. 2012 survey. <i>Unpublished</i>	up
Honey-buzzard	15–20	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	stable
Marsh Harrier	5–10	SRMS Report (Etheridge <i>et al.</i> 2013).	stable
Hobby	1–5	SRMS Report (Etheridge <i>et al.</i> 2013).	stable
<b>Very rare winter visitor</b>			
Rough-legged Buzzard	308 records since 1968	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	
Gyr Falcon	245 records	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	
<b>Vagrant</b>			
Red-footed Falcon	79 records	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	
Montagu's Harrier	35+ records	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007). - 5 proven breeding attempts.	
Black Kite	19 records	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007). - Bred once with Red Kite in 2008.	
Pallid Harrier	31 records (20 in 2011)	<i>Scottish Birds</i> (Chapman 2012).	
Lesser Kestrel	2 records	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	
American Kestrel	1 record	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	
Eleonora's Falcon	1 record	<i>The Birds of Scotland</i> (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007)	



Plate 18. Kestrel hovering. © David Abraham

to such an extent that nationally it has now fallen behind both Buzzard and Sparrowhawk in abundance. Much of this decline has been attributed to the reduction of small mammalian prey caused by agricultural intensification as well as competition with and predation by, respectively, increasing Buzzard and Goshawk populations.

### Uncommon breeders

The diminutive Merlin is a bird of broad open landscapes. It needs rolling heather moorland in the spring and summer for breeding and lowland farmland and coastal estuaries during the autumn and winter. The breeding population in the last two surveys indicate some stability in their numbers. In 1993–94, there was an estimated 800 pairs in Scotland whilst in the 2008 there was a non-significant decline to 733 pairs. Merlins are a popular study species amongst raptor study group members and a recent decline in some areas has been attributed to the loss of rank heather for nesting brought about by an increase in burning rotation on driven grouse-moors.

The Peregrine population of Scotland has experienced a roller coaster of changes during the past 200 years. Initially protected and nurtured because of its value to falconry, its popularity declined with the rise in sporting estates and game rearing during the 19th century. There were further set backs during the early 1940s when the government organised a cull to protect carrier pigeons as part of the war effort and over 600 birds were killed. However, at the cease of hostilities numbers began to recover, only to be severely blighted again from the mid-1950s with the increasing use of toxic organo-chlorine pesticides in agriculture. With the phasing out of these chemicals, the number of breeding pairs rose quickly again. A peak was reached in 1991, but numbers are now again in decline in the north and west Highlands, though this is in part compensated by increases in the south and at some coastal locations. The reasons behind these changes are poorly understood, though local declines are linked to resurgence in driven grouse-moors and an associated increase in persecution.

Thirty-seven years ago in his ground-breaking book, Leslie Brown (1976) wrote that the Hen Harrier was unique amongst British birds of prey at the time. It was increasing in numbers and expanding rapidly across upland Britain at a time when toxic pesticides were still prevalent in the countryside. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Hen Harriers continued to flourish in the uplands despite an unacceptable level of illegal killing on grouse-moors. However, a study in the 1990s near Langholm that looked at the impact of raptors on Red Grouse (Redpath & Thirgood 1997) showed that predation by a greatly increased population of breeding Hen Harriers that followed the cessation of illegal killing in the study area, had prevented grouse numbers from increasing to provide a surplus for shooting. The response to these findings amongst game-managers was swift and predictable. It was soon apparent across Scotland that the harrier population was dwindling rapidly in all regions where driven grouse shooting dominated upland land use and a 21% decline in the breeding population was recorded between 2004 and 2010 (Hayhow *et al. in press*). In the north of

England where the uplands are capable of supporting an estimated 300 pairs, the Hen Harrier is now teetering on the brink of extinction, with only one breeding pair in 2012. There are signs that this extermination is being repeated over much of eastern and southern Scotland, and firm action by authorities against those responsible is lacking.

The Golden Eagle is on the 'must see' list of most Scottish birdwatchers and visiting wildlife tourists and is Scotland's unofficial national bird. Apart from a couple of pairs in south Scotland, the entire British population lies north of the central belt. Estimated to be 442 pairs during the last survey in 2003, Golden Eagle numbers have remained surprisingly stable over the previous two decades, with 420 pairs in 1982 and 439 pairs in 1992. However, this stability masks some major changes in distribution, much of it attributed to changes in human persecution with a reduction in the west but an increased level associated with driven grouse-moors further east.



Plate 19. Hen Harrier with prey, Isle of Skye, July 2005. © David Whitaker

### Scarce, localised breeders

The Red Kite was a common and widespread species in Scotland up to the early 1800s, but had been exterminated by man from most of the country by the 1870s, the last pair breeding in 1879. It was another 100 years before the Red Kite was to breed again. In 1992, a pair reared a single chick on the Black Isle following a re-introduction programme that saw 93 Swedish-born kites released there between 1989 and 1993. Further re-introduction sites followed at Doune in west Perthshire, Castle Douglas and lastly, Aberdeen. There are now feeding stations in all four locations, providing a wildlife spectacle of which Scotland can be proud. Nevertheless, the growths of these populations are at rates far lower than similar reintroductions in England. In 2012, the Red Kite population in the Chilterns, established with the same number of birds as the Black Isle and over the same period of time, was estimated to exceed 850 pairs. The comparable figure for the Black Isle was just 61 pairs. This huge difference is attributed to acute levels of illegal poisoning that kites are exposed to on some estates in Scotland (Smart *et al.* 2010). Red Kites are birds of great beauty and a wonderful wildlife asset, yet they still face entrenched attitudes and intolerance from a small but damaging sector of the community.

The Osprey is one of Scotland's great wildlife success stories of the 20th century. Against the odds and facing the persistent attention of illegal egg collectors, Ospreys have naturally re-colonised much of mainland Scotland from which they were exterminated 100 years ago. From the initial Loch Garten pair, breeding pairs are now established from Caithness to Galloway and from the Rivers Clyde to the Don. In recent years, satellite tracking has revealed in minute detail the hazardous migrations some young birds face en-route to wintering grounds in West Africa. Long-lived and faithful to both breeding partner and nest site, Ospreys have captured the public imagination and the annual return each spring of individuals is followed avidly by a growing army of on-line enthusiasts across the country.

Following extinction in the 19th century, the Goshawk re-established a breeding foothold in Scotland in 1974 with the deliberate release by falconers of birds imported from northern Europe. Aided by a post-war expansion and maturation of commercial forests in which they could breed unmolested, Goshawks soon established viable and increasing populations in north-east Scotland and the Borders - centres from which the species has spread. Yet despite its size, this powerful hawk is easily overlooked and is likely to be more widespread than current knowledge suggests.



Plate 20. Red Kite on carrion, Black-isle, November 2001. © David Whitaker



Plate 21. *White-tailed Eagle*. © David Whitaker

### Very rare breeders

White-tailed Eagles are the largest birds of prey in Scotland but they became extinct with the shooting of the last native bird in 1918. Following a successful re-introduction programme on Rum starting in 1975 and a second one in Wester Ross beginning in 1993, a breeding population has become established in the north-west Highlands and in the Hebrides. With the west coast population now self-sustaining, a third re-introduction scheme was started in 2007, this time on the east coast in Fife, which has totalled 86 birds. Sea-eagles are far more tolerant of human presence than their Golden Eagle cousins and have different habitat preferences, favouring coastal fringes, estuaries and lowland water bodies. The presence of breeding White-tailed Eagles has proved an important visitor attraction to Mull, Skye and Wester Ross contributing substantial financial benefits to these more remote communities. Sadly, there have been a number of persecution incidents involving illegal poisoning and egg collecting as well as accusations by farmers and crofters of lamb-killing by the eagles in two areas. Despite these problems, the White-tailed Eagle breeding population continues to rise at an encouraging 10% per year and now appears secure.

Honey-buzzards are long distance summer migrants to this country requiring mature forest landscape for breeding and high numbers of social wasp grubs to feed their young. They are an abundant species further east in northern Europe, but in Scotland are on the extreme western fringe of their distribution. Honey-buzzards are known to occur in Highland, Tayside and Dumfries & Galloway, but other locations should not be discounted particularly where their forest and food requirements are met, and currently that includes much of mainland Scotland.

As a summer visitor to Britain, the Marsh Harrier needs a specific habitat for breeding - lowland reed beds. It is therefore not surprising that following an increase in the population in the latter part of the 20th century, Marsh Harriers quickly colonised the Tay estuary, the largest *Phragmites australis* reed bed in UK. Breeding has occurred elsewhere in Scotland, sometimes as far north as Orkney, but numbers arriving each spring in Scotland fluctuate. Their habitat preference shows there is room for the breeding population to grow but over the past ten years there have been no indications that this is happening.

The Hobby is a widespread summer visitor across much of southern and central England and Wales where it has significantly increased in recent decades. Sightings in Scotland have increased in line with this change with sporadic breeding occurring since the 1990s becoming an almost annual feature since 2001 at one location in Highland. The Hobby is a difficult species to prove breeding, and can be easily missed in the open farmland they favour. It follows that any adult seen inland during the summer months could possibly be breeding.

### Persecution

It is impossible in any birds of prey review to avoid discussing the impact that persecution has had and continues to have on their abundance and distribution. In these apparently enlightened times, some gamekeepers are still imposing their prejudiced views of what is good and bad in nature and negatively affecting the status of all but a few of Scotland's raptors.

In recent decades the scale and impact of this destruction on species such as Peregrine, Hen Harrier, Red Kite and Golden Eagle has been well researched and documented with a number of reports (Amar *et al.* 2011, Fielding *et al.* 2011, Smart *et al.* 2010, Whitfield *et al.* 2007). The finger of guilt points firmly at driven grouse-moors, a land management style that has experienced a renaissance in the last 20 years. However, these findings have little impact on those employed to manage these moors, as the chances of being caught are remote and

punishment for those convicted often paltry. With the rewards of providing a successful day's shooting high, the killing of raptors has increased on a scale not seen since Edwardian times.

To counter these damning reports of wildlife crime and in an attempt to justify the widespread killing of raptors that occurs, there are organised campaigns by the pro-shooting lobby to demonise raptors in the public eye. Buzzard numbers have increased spectacularly in recent years and are a convenient scapegoat. They have been widely blamed for declines in many species, particularly farmland birds, by land-owning and game shooting interests and there are ludicrous requests to allow Buzzards to be legally killed to protect the estimated 35 million young Pheasants that are released each autumn by the shooting industry. Additionally, there are campaigns against Sparrowhawks and White-tailed Eagles by vested sporting and farming interests, though much of the evidence to support these claims is purely anecdotal. In the absence of robust scientific evidence, these attempts to legalise any raptor killing have so far been successfully opposed, though these threats remain.

In Scotland, we are blessed with the richest, most diverse and abundant suite of raptors in Great Britain and Ireland. Nationally, we have a responsibility to protect all wild birds from over exploitation and have the strongest wildlife laws in Britain to help achieve this, though the continuing lack of effective enforcement can be both frustrating and despairing. Sadly, recent



Plate 22. Merlin feeding chicks, Sutherland, June 1984. © David Whitaker

incidents of illegal poisoning and killing of Golden Eagles on sporting estates have received considerable publicity and greatly tarnished Scotland's reputation for wildlife excellence as well as being a damning indictment against those involved in grouse shooting. Driven grouse-moors are unique to northern Britain and occur nowhere else in the world. These managed moors have now become a high input, high extraction industry that for its vast size provides relatively few benefits for biodiversity. The overwhelming evidence is that the killing of raptors and the destruction of their nests is an established and widely accepted management tool used on most, if not all, grouse-moors. Furthermore, there have been lamentably few attempts by moorland owners to operate in a legally sustainable way, such as introducing procedures like supplementary feeding that help to eliminate grouse chick predation by Hen Harriers. These driven moors may be at the top end of a game shooting market but if the high grouse numbers essential for the 'sport' cannot be achieved without killing vulnerable European protected species, then the 'sports' existence, viability and legality should be challenged at the highest level. Surely it is morally wrong that large tracks of upland Scotland have become no-go areas for raptors in support of a field-sport that delivers little public benefit and is sustainable only through widespread criminal behaviour.

More than any other family of birds, raptors attract considerable admiration and appeal, possibly because they convey beauty, power and wildness. Raptors are sentinel species, top predators at the head of major food webs reacting quickly to human induced changes to their habitat or to threats from pollutants in the wider countryside. Furthermore, raptors are our "canary in a coal mine" and their presence and abundance is a visual indication of the health of the environment and our respect for it.

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# Raptor persecution in Scotland: an update

I.M. THOMSON



Plate 23. Poisoned Golden Eagle, Skibo, Sutherland, May 2010. © RSPB Scotland

The 7 May 2010 was a beautiful, warm spring day. As I stood on the hills high above the Dornoch Firth, the sky was blue, Ben Wyvis was bathed in sunshine to the south west and the waters of the Moray Firth looked very tempting.

However, this idyll was not to last. With me that afternoon were my RSPB colleague Bob Elliot and two police officers from Northern Constabulary. At our feet lay the contorted body of a poisoned Golden Eagle, the third to be found on the Skibo Estate in the space of just five days. A few minutes earlier we had found the staked out carcass of a Red Grouse, laced with an illegal pesticide, with the body of another victim, a Sparrowhawk, lying close by.

The following day, a search warrant lead by Northern Constabulary found a stockpile of the banned pesticide, Carbofuran, in a shed on the estate. The quantity found, 10.5 kg, was enough to poison the entire bird of prey population of Scotland six times over. The estate's shooting manager, Dean Barr, was later convicted of possession of an illegal pesticide and fined £3,300. No-one was charged with the killing of the eagles.

That dreadful week nearly three years ago is perhaps an appropriate place to begin the latest chapter of the decades-old story of the persecution of some of our most magnificent wildlife. Less than a month after the awful events on Skibo, another search warrant led by the police, on the Moy Estate, south-east of Inverness, recovered the shattered body of a Red Kite from the back of an estate Land Rover. It had broken legs and its skull had been smashed.

In the preceding month, the severed legs and wing tags of a 'disappeared' satellite-tagged Red Kite were found hidden on the same estate and another dead kite was found to have been poisoned. A live male Hen Harrier was found caught by the leg in an illegally set spring trap, while further illegally set spring traps, camouflaged under a thin layer of moss, were found beside the bodies of a partridge and a rabbit. During the execution of the search warrant, four BTO rings that had been fitted to young Golden Eagles at various Scottish nest sites over the previous five years were found in the home of one of the Moy Estate gamekeepers.



Subsequently, one of the estate gamekeepers, James Rolfe was found guilty of illegal possession of a dead Red Kite and was fined £1,500. No-one was charged with any of the other offences uncovered on the estate.

These cases on the Skibo and Moy estates are perhaps the most notorious examples of recent bird of prey persecution incidents. And, yes, it is frustrating that the offences for which people were finally convicted do not reflect either the seriousness of the cases or the conservation impact of the crimes.

Since the beginning of 2010, 11 Red Kites, six Golden Eagles and one White-tailed Eagle have been confirmed as being the victims of illegal poisoning. Two Red Kites, a Goshawk, a Peregrine and a Golden Eagle have died as a result of being illegally trapped; an Osprey, a Hen Harrier, a Short-eared Owl and a Golden Eagle have been shot; Buzzards, Sparrowhawks and owls have starved to death in crow traps and Hen Harrier and Peregrine nests mysteriously failed; Golden Eagles, Hen Harriers and Red Kites fitted with satellite tags have simply 'disappeared'. As usual, the vast majority of these incidents occurred in areas associated with intensively-managed driven grouse moors.

But these are just the incidents we are aware of. We cannot say whether the figures represent 5% or 95% of the crimes that are actually taking place. What we can say, however, is that population surveys, scientific studies and analyses consistently show that illegal persecution is having a marked negative effect on the populations of some of our rarest and most iconic birds of prey, notably Golden Eagle, Red Kite and Hen Harrier. Indeed, the breeding population of the latter species dropped by over 20% in Scotland between 2004 and 2010.

Much has been made of an apparent recent drop in the number of birds of prey poisoned. While it is important to reiterate the caveat that these figures only represent confirmed, detected incidents, any decline has to be welcomed.

This decline, which we must all hope is real and is sustained over the long term, has come primarily as a result of the enactment of



**Plate 24.** *Baited Spring traps, (with moss removed), Moy Estate, Inverness-shire, June 2010. © RSPB Scotland*

legislation at the beginning of 2012 making landowners vicariously liable for the actions of their employees. This was very much as a result of the volume of correspondence received by MSP's from conservation bodies and concerned individual members of the public on the back of the dreadful cases outlined above.

It has come about because the fitting of satellite-tags to eagles and kites has made it easier to detect those areas where this indiscriminate activity is carried out, because the enforcement agencies have caught some of the perpetrators and removed some of the illegal chemicals from circulation, and because of peer-pressure in an industry whose reputation was being dragged through the gutter.

The placing of baits laced with poison in the open countryside has been illegal for a century. It is a shame that it has taken so long for there to be any hint that this horrific practice is perhaps starting to disappear.

But in 2012, we still had three Golden Eagles as well-publicised victims of crime. A satellite-tagged bird was found poisoned in Lochaber in March; a satellite-tagged bird died as a result of being illegally trapped in May; and an adult bird was found shot in Dumfries-shire in October. While poisoning may be on the decline, there is no room for complacency when our protected birds of prey continue to be shot, trapped or have their nests destroyed.



Plate 25. Poisoned Red Kite, Glen Kyllachy & Farr, Inverness-shire, May 2011. © RSPB Scotland

While the number of people engaged in poisoning may be dropping, there is no evidence that bird of prey persecution is in decline. Indeed there is plenty to suggest that there has merely been a change in tactics by those who wish to kill these species. Hen Harriers continue to be absent from most of southern and eastern Scotland; Peregrine nests continue to be destroyed; Buzzards and Goshawks are shot and trapped; Red Kites are still confined to a few core areas; Golden Eagles do not live long enough to reach breeding age.

It has been a long, hard struggle to get where we are today. I appreciate the support given by SOC members in reporting potential wildlife crime incidents to us, the police or SSPCA, and in writing to our elected representatives to ensure that these crimes are not ignored.

The death of those three eagles on that moor in east Sutherland back in May 2010 was appalling, but, I hope, not in vain. We have further improved our laws, and we are perhaps seeing the beginning of the end of illegal poisoning as a result.

But, 2013 sees the reform of the Scottish Police service with the formation of a new single force. How far up the list of priorities will wildlife crime be? There is considerable pressure on our decision-makers to allow licensed killing of Buzzards and Sparrowhawks due to perceived predation levels on pheasants or grouse. There has been a recent relaxation of the rules governing the use of crow traps, many of which trap birds of prey.

It is surely up to all of us who care about birds of prey to ensure that those who continue to shoot, trap or otherwise persecute these birds face the full force of the law and that our decision-makers do not just hear the voices of those who wish to 'legalise persecution'.

Here's hoping this Year of Natural Scotland, and those yet to come, are good for our birds of prey.

**Ian Thomson, RSPB Scotland**  
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# NEWS AND NOTICES

## New SOC Members

**Borders:** Miss S. Burthe, Mr & Mrs P. Carr, Mr & Mrs R. Goodwill, Mr S. Nicolson & Ms T. Hopkins, Mr & Mrs J.M. Rea, Mr N. Stratton, Mrs C. Tees, **Caithness:** Mr G. Anderson, **Central Scotland:** Dr B. Darvill, Miss B. Helm, Mr J. Short, **Clyde:** Mr N. Kempe, Mr C.E. Stuart, **Dumfries:** Mr D. Deeson, Mr A. Lynn, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr M. Crutch, Mr R.C. Dalrymple, Mr M. Dawson, Mr S. McCormick, Mr J. Mercer, Mr A. Miller, Mr S. Sweeney, **Fife:** Mr P. Bambridge, Mr A. Bowie, Ms L.J.N. Fahey, Mr B. Forbes, Mr & Mrs H. Freel, Prof & Mrs A. Riches, Ms X. Zhu, **Grampian:** Mr S. Addison, Mr J. Gallagher, Mr A. Irvine, Mr M. Souter, Mr D. Stewart, **Highland:** Mr R. Anderson, Mr J. Clarke, Dr M. Collins, Mr & Mrs I. McLaren, Mr D. Miller, Ms C.S. Miller, Mr D. Pullan, Rev Dr J.S. Ross, Ms L. Rowe, Mr D.M. Shields, Ms L. Shove, Mr P. Smith, Mrs A.J. Storie, Ms F. Strachan, Mr J. Teesdale, Mr & Mrs M. Thomas, Ms R. Thornton & Mr R. Charlesworth, **Lothian:** J. Aldous & B. Sommerville, Mrs E.E. Berry, Dr & Mrs J. Best, Mr & Mrs M. Bonar, Mr & Mrs P. Collins, Ms A. Coppins, Rev R. Edge, Mr I. Finlayson, Mrs A.D. Hawke, Mr R. Hutchinson, Mr & Mrs B. Irving, Mr D. Jarrett, Mr & Mrs T. Lambert, Mr & Mrs A.T. Lawrie, Ms A.J. Mackenzie & Mr R. Johannesson, Mr D.C. MacKinnon, Mr & Mrs J. Martin, Mr D. McLanaghan, Dr & Mrs H. Miller, Mr S.B. Morrice, Mr & Mrs W. Muir, Mr H. Paton, Mrs C. Purves, Mr S. Rafferty, Mr C. Rodger, Ms P. Runciman, Mr & Mrs J.M. Sharp, Mr T. Simpson, Ms E. Sutherland, Mr J. Taylor, Mr & Mrs A. Truesdale, Mr M. Wilson, **Orkney:** Mr B. Ribbands, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr A. Daves, **Stewartry:** Mr K.W. Gillies, **Tayside:** Mr J. Carter, Mrs C. Webster.

## 200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **December: 1st** £30 R.S. Smith, **2nd** £20 Mrs F. Hewlett, **3rd** £10 G. Shepherd. **January: 1st** £30 M. Nicoll, **2nd** £20 Mrs V. Wells, **3rd** £10 Mrs F. Hewlett.

The 200 Club, entering its 25th year in May, is an invaluable source of funding for furniture and equipment for Waterston House. An annual payment of £12 allows members to be entered in a number of prize draws during the year for

44 cash prizes. To join the 200 Club, please complete the enclosed form and send to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe along with your payment or Standing Order mandate.

## The SOC starts tweeting

Having successfully launched the SOC Facebook page (currently with 400 fans and rising), Management thought it would be timely to expand the Club's growing reach on social media by setting up a Twitter account.

Staff and volunteers have been engaging with our members and wider audiences, 'tweeting' details of upcoming branch talks, Headquarters events and sharing articles, news and reviews that relate to the Club, our work and ornithology in general. Thank you to our partner organisations BTO Scotland, BirdTrack and others, for the very warm welcome we have received on the forum.

## Don't have a Facebook or Twitter account?

No problem - you can still view the SOC Facebook and Twitter pages without being signed up to either. Follow the links from the Club's homepage at [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk) to both these sites or else visit:

- [www.facebook.com/scotlandsbirdclub](http://www.facebook.com/scotlandsbirdclub)
- [twitter.com/ScottishBirding](https://twitter.com/ScottishBirding)

If you need any help in viewing these pages, or you would like to contribute to our Facebook and Twitter postings, then please contact Jane at Waterston House on 01875 871 330 or email [jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk)

## Change of recorder

Hywel Maggs was bird recorder for North-east Scotland for seven years. During that time, this voluntary role has become ever more complex and time-consuming (as is the case for all local recorders) and the volume of records has increased dramatically, especially since the growth of BirdTrack and the sharing of thousands of records submitted via the BTO. At the same time, requests for data from consultants and conservation bodies, including

RBBP, have become more frequent and detailed, often with pressing deadlines. Addressing these things in one's 'spare' time is no mean feat! The local recorder's role is still pivotal in British ornithology, and Hywel was able to develop this in the north-east with great success. Thankfully, he will now have time to find even more rarities in this bird-rich part of the country. We wish Nick Littlewood (details below), as incoming recorder, all the best as he takes over the mantle (and the burden!); no doubt he will continue to develop the role still further and make a strong contribution to the Scottish bird recording network.

Nick Littlewood, The James Hutton Institute, Craigiebuckler, Aberdeen AB15 8QH.  
Email: nesrecorder@yahoo.co.uk

Ian Francis

### Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report 2011 (No. 22)

Edited by Duncan Irving. 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. E-mail: pandmswan@btinternet.com. Please make cheques payable to "SOC Dumfries & Galloway Branches". Also available from Waterston House, WWT Caerlaverock and RSPB Mersehead.



### Events at Waterston House Art Exhibitions

- John Busby, Fran Knowles & Sonas Maclean, showing until 10 April
- Tim Wootton, 13 April–5 June
- Lucy Newton, 8 June–24 July

### Spring Optics Demo

Sunday 28 April - a chance to try out a wide range of binoculars and scopes or just come along for some friendly, expert advice!

### Scottish Birds online

Over the years *Scottish Birds* has published a great many important papers as well as notes and obituaries documenting the history and development of Scottish ornithology. The Club currently provides access to 50 years of back issues of *Scottish Birds* free of charge through our web site at [www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-birds-online.htm](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-birds-online.htm). This has been greatly appreciated by Club members and others around the world who do not have their own printed copies or sets of the journal in a nearby library. In parallel with the Club website, Council is planning to make access to back issues even more widely available through the Biodiversity Heritage Library. The BHL [www.biodiversitylibrary.org](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org), whose main partners in the UK are the Natural History Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, has become the world's main free archive of digitised natural history literature, and has established itself as a leading online research library. If you don't already know it, you should have a look - it offers free access to a vast amount of historical books and journals, including the *Scottish Naturalist* and the *Annals of Scottish Natural History* through to 1922, the *Proceedings of the Glasgow Natural History Society*, rare books by Pennant, Harvie-Brown, MacGillivray and much more. By adding *Scottish Birds* to the BHL we hope this will allow more people around the world to find and read our journal and appreciate its contribution to ornithology. It will also highlight the role of the SOC to a new audience.

Authors, photographers and artists originally submitted their articles and other material to *Scottish Birds* for print publication, mostly before the idea of digital access came along. It is now impracticable or impossible to trace all the individual contributors or their legal representatives, but we believe that most or all would be happy to see their work now reaching new and wider audiences to the overall benefit of Scottish ornithology. If any copyright holder does not wish to have their material included in free digital access, they should contact [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk) to discuss this with us as soon as possible, preferably before 1 June 2013. Arrangements are in place to have material removed from web access where necessary.

### SOC Annual Conference 2013

This year's conference is provisionally scheduled to take place 25–27 October. Please check the SOC website for updates, including venue details. Speakers confirmed at the time of writing include Tony Marr, Mark Avery (political birder), Martin Collinson (ornithological fraud), Steve Roberts (Honey-buzzards), Bob Furness (seabirds & windfarms) and Dario Fernández-Bellon (world raptors).

### Planning a spring clean?

If you find yourself with more bird books than you know what to do with and you're looking to downsize your collection - then please get in touch with us! We're now collecting donations for our second-hand book stall at the Birdfair this May and would be delighted to take good quality bird and natural history books off your hands! Last year we raised nearly £600 for the Club at the fair, thanks to donations and legacies of some very good natural history books we were extremely fortunate to receive, so we're hoping for similar this year!

### Annual book sale

There is no book sale planned for spring/summer at Waterston House. However, the Club will have a bookstall at this year's Bird Fair. Any plans for an autumn sale will be announced in *Scottish Birds* and on the SOC website.

### Amendments to SOC Constitution

The following changes to the Constitution were unanimously accepted by members at an Annual General Meeting held on 27 October 2012 at MacDonal Aviemore Resort, Aviemore: **Amend parts b, d and g of section 3 (Membership) as follows:**

- b) Amend the word '*sign*' to read '*complete*' with reference to the membership form, to reflect the fact that online forms will not require a signature.
- d) Amend reference to 'married couples' to reflect modern families and civil partnerships: '*Family membership and Life Family membership shall be available for up to two adults and any nominated children under 18 years of age sharing the same address*'.

- g) Amend text to read '*Subscriptions are due on joining and on each subsequent anniversary of the joining date. Council shall have the power to offer the option of quarterly payment of subscriptions by instalment. A member whose subscription is not paid within three months of the due date shall cease to belong to the Club*'.

A copy of the updated Constitution can be viewed on the SOC website. Alternatively, if you would like a hard copy sent by post, please contact the office.

### The 2013 Scottish Birdfair, 11 & 12 May at Hopetoun House, Lothian

*We're pleased to let you know that the RSPB have offered SOC members £2 off the adult ticket price\*, available at the time of booking.*

A definite date in the birdwatchers' and nature lovers' diary!

After a very successful event last year, Jane our Development Officer is busy preparing for this year's Birdfair, putting together a varied programme of talks, walks and workshops for event-goers over the weekend. Keep an eye on the Club website for full details of our activities at the Birdfair and visit [www.scottishbirdfair.org.uk](http://www.scottishbirdfair.org.uk) for more information on the range of events you can enjoy over the weekend. Programmes will be available nearer the time. Hope to see you there! \* *Membership identification not required.*

## FOR SALE

Large collection of Birdwatching, Natural History & Ecology titles including: *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, Collins New Naturalists, Poyser, Helm, Pica etc. & various field guides, VHS tapes & journals; *British Birds*, *British Wildlife*, African BC, Neotropical BC, Oriental BC, OSME, BSBI etc.

**Send S.A.E. to S.L. Rivers for full list:**  
Flat 8, 10 Waverley Park, Edinburgh, EH8 8EU.  
**or Email:** [slr.bee-eater@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:slr.bee-eater@blueyonder.co.uk)



Plate 26. The co-authors (l–r): Ron Forrester, Doug Menzies and Ian Hopkins at the launch of *The Birds of Bute* held at the Bute Museum on 26 January 2013. © SOC

## The Birds of Bute

### R. FORRESTER

*The following publication, *Birds of Bute*, which the SOC helped publish through The Birds of Scotland Fund, is described here by one of its authors, Ron Forrester. Who better than a resident of the island itself to introduce us to this excellent book.*

The island of Bute is situated in the upper Clyde estuary on the west coast of Scotland, among the most magnificent scenery. The Kyles of Bute, at the north end of the island, has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and there are spectacular views from the island stretching to the Argyll hills, Arran and the Ayrshire coast. Bute is 24.5 km long and 8 km at its widest point, but less than 2 km at its narrowest. The coast is irregular in shape and with many bays and points the high tide shoreline is approximately 77 km in length. The highest point is the summit of Windy Hill at 278 m. Whilst it is an island lying off the west coast of Scotland, Bute has the advantage of being only a half-hour sail by CalMac ferry from Wemyss Bay, which is itself less than an hour by car or train from the centre of Glasgow, therefore the island is far from remote.

Bute has been described as a Scotland in miniature, having a great variety of habitats and an extraordinarily rich bird life. There are two important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), one at the north end of the island with breeding Hen Harrier, Peregrine, Red-throated Diver and Black Grouse. The other, covering the central lochs, was designated primarily for wintering wildfowl, but Shoveler, Osprey and Water Rail have all bred in recent years. In fact, Bute has over 100 breeding species, but yet more species fall into a category of non-breeding birds that are regularly seen from the island during summer, including Gannet, Cormorant, Manx Shearwater, Guillemot, Razorbill and Sandwich Tern. The island is also important for wintering birds, particularly wildfowl, with seven species of ducks and geese present in nationally important numbers (1% or more of the Scottish population). In particular the central lochs are an internationally important roosting site for wintering Greylag Geese, supporting a major concentration in excess of 1% of the north-west European population. During winter again there are more than 100 species ever-present, with many more that are less frequently observed.

The birds on the island of Bute were systematically recorded as part of the national atlas project, organised by the British Trust for





Plate 27. Portrait of Alexander Wilson by Thomas Sully, c.1809–13.

## Alexander Wilson Bicentenary

B. ZONFRILLO & P. MONAGHAN

2013 marks the 200th anniversary of the death of Alexander Wilson, the greatest American ornithologist prior to Audubon. While Wilson is very much celebrated in North America, he remains something of an unsung hero in his native Scotland. To celebrate his bicentenary, a number of events are being co-ordinated in a cooperative venture involving Glasgow University, Paisley Museum, SOC, the RSPB and the Glasgow Science Festival. Some of these are funded by the British Ecological Society (as part of the Society's Festival of Ecology, which celebrates the BES centenary in 2013), the SOC's *The Birds of Scotland* Fund and Glasgow University. Below is a list of these events, all of which are free, with brief details. Further information will be available on the Paisley Museum web site: [www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/webcontent/home/services/leisure+and+culture/arts+and+museums/els-jcp-paisley-museum](http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/webcontent/home/services/leisure+and+culture/arts+and+museums/els-jcp-paisley-museum), Glasgow University's Hunterian Museum web site: [www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian](http://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian) and on the Glasgow Science Festival web site: [www.glasgowsciencefestival.org.uk](http://www.glasgowsciencefestival.org.uk).

### Exhibitions

- **Alexander Wilson: Paisley's poet, America's ornithologist.** Paisley Museum, High Street, Paisley, 14 June to 1 September 2013.
- **Alexander Wilson and the science of ornithology.** Hunterian Museum of Zoology, University Avenue, Glasgow, 15 June to 15 September 2013.

### Talks

- **Glasgow University, Friday 14 June 2013.** Graham Kerr Building, Lecture Theatre 1. An evening with Alexander Wilson. Come and hear talks about Wilson the naturalist, poet and artist. This includes a talk on Wilson's life, given by Prof. Jed Burtt\*, Ohio Wesleyan University, a co-author of a new biography of Wilson to be published in May 2013. We hope that copies will be on sale.
- **Hunterian Museum Tuesday Insight talks** As part of the Hunterian's regular programme of Tuesday lunchtime '10 minute talks', during the run of the exhibition there will be a number of these on topics related to Wilson and bird research - details will be posted in due course on the Hunterian website.

- **Lunchtime talks at Paisley Museum** (all at 12.30 pm)
  - 8 May 2013. Wilson and Lochwinnoch Paula Baker, Assistant Site Manager for RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve
  - 19 June 2013. Renfrewshire's Frontier Poet, Local historian Alan Steele
  - 26 June 2013. Wings over the Heather, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Ranger Service

In addition, there will be events for children organised by RSPB, in Glasgow and at Lochwinnoch.

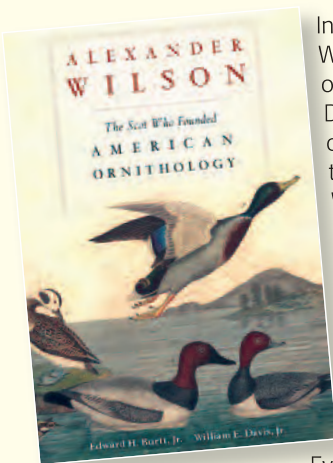
\*Note also that Jed Burtt will also give a special lecture on bird feathers, with spectacular illustrations, during the Glasgow Science Festival on the evening of Wednesday 12 June. This is likely to be of special interest to Club members.

While the above events are free, tickets may be required for the 12 & 14 June talks. Details will be on the Glasgow Science Festival web site.



### Alexander Wilson (1766–1813): ornithologist and poet

Apprenticed as a weaver in 1779, young Alexander Wilson was then just 13 years old, but once fully trained, he worked for relatives engaged in the weaving business. He was well educated, despite his humble birth, and spent much of his free time walking and observing wildlife in the countryside surrounding Paisley, where the mills were situated. He also wrote poetry and it was this that had a major bearing on his crossing of the Atlantic. Not a clamour for his poems in America, but because of the social injustices he encountered and the treatment of weavers by their capitalist employers. These he criticised satirically in his poetic works, in much the way his contemporary Robert Burns would also do with his cronies, but in Wilson's case it led to his inflammatory comments being subject to litigation and accusations of libel. Court cases in the 1790s were as relatively expensive as they are today and this quickly relieved Wilson of any wealth he had accumulated. He spent a short period in prison and was forced to burn his critical manuscripts in public.



In May 1794, Alexander Wilson and his 16-year-old nephew William Duncan had enough of oppression and decided that a life in the New World beckoned and they left for America. They landed at New Castle, Delaware in July 1794, but to earn money he once more resorted to weaving, and travelled to sell his produce.

Eventually, he found living quarters at Gray's Ferry, a small town near Philadelphia, where he was employed as a teacher. There, a local naturalist and ornithologist William Bartram rekindled his interest in birds. Bartram's forte was botany, but he also compiled lists of local birds found in his extensive gardens. With nothing for reference and only a list of local birds to hand, Wilson quickly saw the need for a treatise covering all the species to be found in North America. He

utilised Bartram's knowledge to sort out his birds, their ages, sexes and new species.

Thus, by 1802, he had accumulated enough knowledge and research to launch the publication of his nine-volume work *American Ornithology*. The first volume was published in 1808 and the final volume was published in 1814, a year after his death. Before that, he had met John James Audubon a few times and no doubt these conversations with Wilson, the older man, helped inspire Audubon to produce his own mammoth work *Birds of America*. Wilson's series illustrated 268 bird species of which 26 species were described as new to science. Wilson attempted for the first time to set out the taxonomic relationships of North American birds and describe some of their habits. He travelled widely in America and illustrated every species he shot or obtained. To complete his final volume Wilson sought some elusive water birds and in doing this met his untimely end. Accounts differ from him having drowned while pursuing a bird that had fallen in a river, to contracting dysentery in mid-August 1813 leading to his death ten days later. The latter seems a more likely scenario.

His statue stands outside Paisley Abbey in Renfrewshire where he is acclaimed as 'ornithologist and poet'.

Ornithologist Elliot Coues, one of the first editors of *The Auk*, the journal of the American Ornithologists' Union once commented that if all the ornithological knowledge of American birds before Wilson's *American Ornithology* were to suddenly vanish, then nothing much would be lost. Wilson's book set a standard, perhaps also with Audubon, of what could be achieved by individuals driven by the need to satisfy knowledge and the belief that their legacy would last far beyond their own lifetime. How right they were.

#### Wilson's birds (and modern taxonomy)

Birds named after Alexander Wilson are Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia*, Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*, Wilson's Snipe *Gallinago delicata*, Wilson's Thrush (or Veery) *Catharus fuscescens* and Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla*.



Plates 28–33. (clockwise) Wilson's Plover, Canada Warbler, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Warbler, Hooded Warbler, (centre) Wilson's Phalarope. © Barry Cherieve and Tom Thomas

The Genus *Wilsonia* of the New World wood-warblers (Parulidae) has two other members, the Hooded Warbler *Wilsonia citrina* and the Canada Warbler *Wilsonia canadensis*. Recent taxonomic changes based on molecular examination have now placed Canada Warbler and Wilson's Warbler in the genus *Cardellina* and Hooded Warbler was moved to *Setophaga* (American Redstarts). Like many of these studies however, the taxonomic veracity of the conclusions has not been independently verified - a proof considered standard before modern times. Thus these changes are probably not the final word. Taxonomic shifts have long been evolving, ever since their original naming.

For example, Wilson's Warbler was first described in 1811 by Alexander Wilson, who placed it in the Old World flycatcher genus *Muscicapa*. The species was later moved to its current genus, *Wilsonia*, by the French naturalist and ornithologist Charles Lucien Bonaparte in 1838. However, it did not remain there for long;

zoologist Thomas Nuttall moved it to the now-defunct genus *Sylvania* in 1840, and by 1845, many authors included it in the also-now-defunct genus *Myiodiactes*. In 1899, the American Ornithologists' Union returned the species to *Wilsonia*, where it has remained until recently. For our purposes, we shall keep it there in memory of this famous Scots ornithologist's 200th anniversary.

#### Acknowledgement

Photographs of some of Wilson's birds have been kindly provided by Canadian photographers Tom Thomas and Barry Cherieve; we are grateful for their permission to use these superb shots to illustrate this note.

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# Skye, Lochalsh & Lochaber mini conference, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Sleat, Isle of Skye



Saturday 17 November 2012,  
hosted by [www.skye-birds.com](http://www.skye-birds.com) & SOC Highland Branch

Plate 34. The venue, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

*Set in the heart of the Highlands in one of the most stunning locations in Scotland, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig proved an inspiring venue and unique location for the first ever SOC Mini Conference, with numerous speakers and delegates arriving via Western Isles, or the Small Isles ferries.*

*Advancing heavy cloud cover ushered 91 delegates into the bright and airy atrium of the Gaelic college where attendees enjoyed tea and coffee before settling in for the morning session, which began with a warm welcome to delegates and exhibitors from Club President, Ken Shaw.*

*Ken expressed the SOC's delight to be present in Skye, running the Club's first ever mini conference and sincerely thanked our more widely dispersed members for their continued support despite the long distance from the hub of their 'local' branch. Ken went on to thank Bob McMillan (of Skye-Birds website & SOC member) for all his hard work and commitment in organising the conference and SOC Highland branch for their help and valued support in running and chairing the event. As Club President, Ken echoed the organisers' delight at an attendance of nearly a 100 delegates, many of which were non-members living locally, before passing over to Bob, who with the aid of a*

*PowerPoint presentation eloquently set the scene for the rest of the day's proceedings.*

Moving from Perth to live on Skye in 2003, there was a realisation that opportunities to attend evening lectures in winter were going to be limited. Highland branch of the SOC covers a huge area and it would have been easier to attend branch meetings from our previous home near Perth, than our new home in remote Elgol, on the Strathaird Peninsula. Bird recording in the area had also been fairly sporadic and this influenced me to follow the example in Mull and establish the *Skye Birds* website



Plate 35. Bob McMillan. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

(www.skye-birds.com). In the networks of bird recording in Scotland, local websites are often underestimated in their importance, not just in terms of generating many new records which have been gathered to go into official national systems, but also in recognising the huge amount of untapped interest amongst individuals living in such areas, many of whom are not affiliated to any established organisations. It was this level of interest which first stimulated the idea of a local conference and with Highland Branch firmly behind the concept and Jane Cleaver in post as the Development Officer; the decision was taken to push ahead.

The venue of the Gaelic college, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and its spectacular location overlooking the Sound of Sleat proved ideal. The timing of the conference had been planned to allow delegates to come over on the morning ferry from Mallaig to Armadale and make it back in time for the ferry's late afternoon return leg of the journey.

The conference programme itself was very much locally based, reflecting on some long-term personal research projects, as well as local and national initiatives for the conservation of some of Scotland's most iconic and treasured birdlife: Golden and White-tailed Eagle, Manx Shearwater and Comcrake all featured in the day's line-up.

*Bob McMillan*

### **"30 years of Golden Eagles on Skye and Raasay - a beautiful bird in decline?"**

**Kate Nellist, Golden Eagle Ecologist**

It was a real coup for the conference to have a presentation from Kate on her and her partner Ken Crane's studies on the Skye Golden Eagle population. They began monitoring their local eagles in the late 1970s and from 1984 onwards have been checking all the ranges on Skye and Raasay. Whilst there is justifiably considerable interest in satellite tracking studies today, their work highlights the value of spending time in the field watching the birds - and there can be few, if any, that have spent more time watching Golden Eagles than they. In particular their ability to identify individual eagles has provided an extremely valuable insight into pair dynamics, as well as the startling fact that five individuals are at least 35 years old today.



**Plate 36.** *Kate Nellist.* © David Palmer (www.photoscot.co.uk)

Kate used their records to good effect, displaying breeding histories (number of young produced each year) for individual ranges from 1984–2012, including details of when there was a change in the pair. This included examples of four ranges where breeding success appears to have been repeatedly disrupted by White-tailed Eagles, and indeed one range that was abandoned due to them.

A line graph summarising the cumulative breeding success of all the ranges over their monitoring period was perhaps Kate's most significant slide. Whilst the number of Golden Eagle pairs has remained steady at around 30, there has been a large decline in eaglets fledged each year. As Kate pointed out, Skye has traditionally enjoyed high productivity compared to adjacent areas of the mainland but in recent years this has fallen to match this. The ability to show these long-term trends, produced from a vast amount of records obtained thanks to a truly incredible amount of dedication, highlighted the importance of their work. Their standard of field study is certainly something to aspire to for those of us new to Golden Eagle monitoring.

*Rule Anderson*

### “Corncrakes on Skye and the Small Isles”

**Shelagh Parlane, RSPB Corncrake Officer**

Shelagh started with a recording of a calling Corncrake; a sound familiar to most, if not all, present. However, many have never seen a Corncrake. The bird is generally secretive, calling from deep cover. Concealment is their best defence against predators. Occasionally though, a calling bird will show itself, maybe on top of a boulder or on a dyke.

Formerly known as a Landrail, the Corncrake is a member of the rail family. It was traditionally found in cornfields. The birds migrate to Scotland from Africa, where they winter, a round trip of some 6,000 miles. They return to breed close to their natal site, sometimes to the same patch of nettles or flag iris. They prefer vegetation at least 20 cm high, though not too dense, to enable them to run through it. When the birds return in late April, the meadows are still pretty flat and so provide little cover. However, nettles, docks or flag iris growing along the field margins do provide cover at this time and are a rich source of food for the returning birds. Much time and effort is spent in winter trying to develop these areas of early cover.

The global population is estimated to be between 1.7 and 3.5 million birds. The species breeds widely across Eurasia from the Atlantic to Siberia. Traditionally, Corncrakes were thought to winter in the savannahs of south-east Africa, but one of Bob Swann's ringed birds was found in the Congo. Satellite tracking of birds ringed on Coll has shown that they winter in west Africa. Given the world population mentioned earlier, why be concerned about Corncrakes? 100–120 years ago the birds were found throughout the British Isles, but increasing mechanisation of farming pushed them out. Now they are found only in low-intensity, cattle-based agricultural crofts of north and west Scotland. In the 1980s, the RSPB set about identifying the causes, working to halt the decline. The results determined the way ahead. Crofters received payments to delay mowing if a calling Corncrake was on their land. Mowing practices changed, with cutting starting from the centre of fields, pushing birds to the edges and to safety. One very clear outcome was that if we want Corncrakes, we need crofting, so the key to their

survival was to find a balance where crofting and Corncrakes could co-exist!

The combined efforts of conservationists, crofters and farmers, agencies and government over the last 20 years, has resulted in the number of calling males increasing from 400 to over 1,200, surely a sign of a successful partnership.

The birds arrive in May, laying and incubation starting in the middle of the month. Males stop calling when they pair but start looking for another mate when the first is halfway through laying. Up to 10–12 eggs are laid and females raise two or more broods. Females with chicks are on the go from mid-June onwards. Second clutches are laid in July and females again appear with broods from late July onwards. The adults moult in the period from early July to early September, when they are flightless for 2–3 weeks. Birds depart from the last week of August and are generally all gone by the end of September.

Shelagh wound up her very interesting talk mentioning the summer Corncrake survey which runs from 20 May to 10 July, appealing for *any* information on calling males from anywhere in Skye, even outside these dates.

*David Bain*



**Plate 37.** Shelagh Parlane. © David Palmer ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))



Plate 38. Bob Swann. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

### “Skye, Lochalsh & Lochaber Atlas Results”

**Bob Swann, BTO Scottish Atlas Co-ordinator**

The presentation reminded us of our introduction to the Atlas when Bob Swan visited Skye for a briefing/training session during October 2007. This stimulated interest with excellent tetrad coverage locally over the two fieldwork periods, winter and summer for the years 2007–11. PowerPoint images illustrated comparisons with data from the early to mid-1980s showing winter Stonechats sightings improving by 113%. Other selected species, Dunnock, Skylark and Woodcock showed good winter distribution over our area. Winter surprises included Crested Tit in the far north west of Skye and Nuthatch in Lochalsh during autumn. Turning to summer fieldwork, Bob illustrated the wide distribution and density of Willow Warbler but with Tawny Owls naturally favouring woodland, their distribution was limited. The distinction from winter to summer was well illustrated with Woodcock only featuring at low levels in three southerly 10-km squares during summer, compared to blanket coverage in winter. Nationally, Scotland was shown to be important for the breeding distribution of Wheatears and to a slightly lesser extent Wood Warblers. Numbers of Greylag Geese, Great Skua and Goldfinches had increased. There was considerable satisfaction when Bob announced that all 1,101 10-km squares has been visited in Scotland - a job well done.

*Roger Cottis*

### “Gaelic Names of Birds”

**Tristan ap Rheinallt, Lewis-based Gaelic scholar & birder**

Originally from Wales, Tristan, an excellent birder, has a degree in Gaelic and is now a Lewis-based Gaelic scholar. After wondering what he had let himself in for, he decided that for this audience, Gaelic names of birds in place names was a good introduction. What interest was there in these names for the ornithologist?

Place names with birds are mostly of form: [generic geographical feature] of (the) [bird(s)]. Skye names which fitted the pattern above included: Bidein an Fhithich (‘bidein’ = pinnacle, ‘fitheach’ = Raven, so ‘The Pinnacle of the Raven’, Fhithich being the genitive), and Cnoc nam Fitheach (‘The Knoll of the Ravens’ - Fitheach is genitive plural)



Plate 39. Tristan ap Rheinallt. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

Promising that in this after-lunch slot there would be no more reference to nouns or the genitive case, he then considered what these names can tell us about birds. Existence of a Gaelic name showed that the bird in question was known to Gaelic-speakers. Conclusions are hampered by the general nature of most names, e.g. *iolair* (eagle), *faoileag* (gull), and the fact that the majority of names feature widespread species.

Examples of names and the number of occurrences from Carloway, Lewis, included:

eun	bird (often eagle)	12
gèadh	goose	11
speireag	Sparrowhawk (more likely, Merlin)	6
calman	Rock Dove	6
fitheach	Raven	6
faoileag	gull	5
iolair	eagle	4
sgarbh	Cormorant	3
feadag	Golden Plover	2
arspag	Great Black-backed Gull	2

Although the numbers in this table might relate to the abundance of the species when the places were named, the situation is complex, but the names can still give an indication of past distribution such as traditional nesting sites e.g. a current Merlin nest site near *Druim Gil Speireig* ('The Ridge of the Ravine of the Merlin') and nearby is *Druim Speireag* ('The Ridge of Merlins').

Of the five raptors with the most Gaelic names, three were persecuted to extinction in the 19th century. An average of five names per species hides a range of names, from one or two for rarities, five to eight for common species (12 for Corncrake), and an especially large number for water birds and raptors.

Tristan considered land birds, aquatic species, raptors, local breeding land birds and rarities before ending with some puzzles: why does the common Short-eared Owl only have one Gaelic name? Why does the rare Wryneck have 12 Gaelic names? Perhaps it was more common than now, and has become extinct as a breeding species in Scotland through the removal of trees.

Tristan's talk was an excellent introduction for a non Gaelic-speaking audience and left us with much to ponder.

David Palmar

## "25 years of bird recording in Lochalsh" Brian Neath, Local Naturalist & South West Ross Field Club

1 April 1988 was the first day of the second BTO Breeding Atlas fieldwork. So, when Brian moved to Dornie on that date, he contacted the local co-ordinator and volunteered to help. He received an enthusiastic response: "thanks very much - you're on your own!" So he got stuck in and has been recording birds in Lochalsh almost single-handedly ever since!

Comparisons with his data from the third (2007–2011) BTO Atlas showed the changes he's seen over the years. Each had 83 species probably or definitely breeding but losses include Redwing, Jackdaw and Lapwing and gains Little Grebe, Collared Dove and Goldfinch. Cuckoos have increased, unlike in the rest of UK. He also detailed species found in Winter Atlas surveys, Non-Estuarine Waterfowl Surveys, Heronries Census, Garden Birdwatch and Garden Bird Feeding Survey - without him, the BTO would have missed so much data in Lochalsh. Rarities he's seen in the area include Pallas's Warbler, Scarlet Rosefinch, Roller and Lapland Bunting. One of the most unexpected records was of a Nuthatch feeding in his garden for several months in late 2010; when I moved up from East Lothian in 2011 they'd only recently become established there, so to hear of one up here in Lochalsh was a surprise. With 53 species recorded in his garden and over 100 from the garden, I was amazed by what can be seen.



Plate 40. Brian Neath. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

Lochalsh has a wide variety of habitats, from sea lochs to Munros, and Brian has covered the lot in his 25 years here. His inspiring talk showed the value of regular recording, especially in an area with so few birders! I hope to be able to add to the store of ornithological knowledge in the area but I don't think I'll get near Brian's continuing contribution.

*Paul Speak*

### **"Manx Shearwaters on Rum"**

**Mike Werndly, Countryside Ranger for Rum & Martin Carty, Mallaig-based naturalist**

Another topic of local interest to north-west Scotland is the Manx Shearwater colony on the island of Rum, where 20–30% of the world's population come to breed in burrows high up on the island's hills. We were treated to two talks on different aspects of the work being carried out in relation to the colony.

First Mike Werndly from Scottish Natural Heritage on Rum gave a presentation on the breeding cycle of the birds, their nest sites and then their susceptibility to predation. Nesting in burrows provides protection from avian predators, but not from terrestrial mammalian predators such as the (introduced) Brown Rat. The birds only produce one egg per pair per year, so predation is a serious issue and research is now going on into the ecology of the Brown Rat on Rum - its population dynamics, home range and habitat use.

Mike was followed by Martin Carty from the Mallaig Shearwater Project which has been going



**Plate 42.** Mike Werndly. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

on for six years. Recently fledged young birds from Rum usually migrate south to the waters off the eastern shores of South America. However, many can be found grounded in the fishing port of Mallaig. A particularly high number were found this year and it is thought that strong westerlies blow the birds towards the mainland, where they are disorientated by the bright lights particularly around the fish factory and harbour. The project involves local people and volunteers collecting the birds, which are then held in cardboard boxes overnight before being weighed, ringed and then released at a quiet coastal site. Because of their wide wing span and short legs, the birds really need to take off from sloping ground or water. There has been wide media coverage of the project - on Radio Scotland, Autumnwatch and Landward for instance. There are future plans to investigate why more birds are grounded in one area than another, to investigate alternative forms of lighting around the industrial areas of the harbour and to encourage further involvement with local industry and the wider community.

*Ann Sime*

### **"The Sea Eagle Saga"**

**John Love, Author, Historian & Guide**

For many attendees, hearing about the history of the White-tailed Eagle in Scotland directly from John Love was a highlight of the conference. The talk was extremely well illustrated with John first taking the time to remind us of the considerable differences between Golden Eagle and White-tailed Eagle, emphasising that the White-tailed is very much a 'sea eagle'.



**Plate 41.** Martin Carty. © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))



John's knowledge of the early re-introduction attempts was impressive and I thoroughly enjoyed him walking us through their early history in Scotland, interspersing images of the birds and locations, with photographs of the key people involved. I always have a wee smile when I see that image of a young Roy Dennis with George Waterston on Fair Isle. This re-introduction failed of course, but the band wagon was beginning to roll.

We were lucky to hear the beginnings of the Rhum re-introduction from the 'horse's mouth' and again John took the time to introduce us to the Norwegian ornithologists whose help had made this possible. This re-introduction did work and as John described the complicated start to birds breeding on Mull, I found myself waiting for the iconic image of Madders and Sexton (the species protection wardens on Mull at the time) and to hear the story of the first successful breeding - Dave Sexton now back on Mull doing a great job, Mike Madders much missed.

It was not all plain-sailing of course, and I remember at the time Rhys Green explaining to us that the population wasn't big enough and there was a serious chance of failure - again! Happily further re - introductions followed and today's success became ensured. Towards the end of his talk John updated us with some interesting images of White-tailed Eagles and the local communities, both in Scotland and Norway. There followed a lively discussion about the interaction between White-tailed Eagles and Golden Eagles on Skye. An excellent session, John, as ever; measured and very informative.

*Ken Shaw*

### Raffle

The last item on the day's agenda was the eagerly anticipated raffle - the SOC stand had been inundated with ticket sales since registration that morning! The list of organisations and businesses kindly contributing prizes to the raffle was long and varied including: Misty Isle Boat Trips, Skye Birds, The Scottish Seabird Centre, Isle of Skye Brewing Company, SOC Highland Branch, SOC Headquarters, Hebridean Whale Cruises, BTO, RSPB, Talisker Whisky, The MacDonald Marine Hotel, [photoscot.co.uk](http://photoscot.co.uk) and Brigadoon



**Plate 43.** *John Love.* © David Palmar ([www.photoscot.co.uk](http://www.photoscot.co.uk))

Boat Trips. Thank you to everyone who donated to the raffle and to those buying tickets - you helped to raise £176 for the Club, which will be used by SOC Highland Branch for more outreach work across the expansive Highland region.

### Sunday Fieldtrips

Though officially a one-day event, many delegates elected to stay overnight and several fieldtrips were arranged for the Sunday. Conference goers could take their pick from looking for Otters and their signs with Roger Cottis, birding Broadford Bay and Ardnish with Martin Benson or opt for birdwatching in Portree and Trotternish with myself. More than 30 people joined in the trips and sightings included Greenland White-fronted Goose flocks, Hen Harrier, Waxwing, Slavonian Grebe and several Otter sightings. Conditions were ideal with bright skies and a bit of wind and within the space of an hour one group managed to observe three pairs of Golden Eagles and a couple of single birds, a fitting climax to a memorable weekend.

*Bob McMillan*

*We were delighted to welcome four new members to the Club on the day of the conference: thank you to Alasdair Dawes, Lyn Rowe, Jan Storie and Linda Shove - we appreciate your support!*



Plate 44. *Golden brown*. © Tim Wootton

Tim Wootton's artistic career began, aged 5, by copying illustrations from *Thorburn's Birds* and because his mother was "the unofficial Doctor Doolittle of the village" there were always Jays, Magpies, squirrels and other creatures around the house for him to study.

After graduating with a degree in illustration and then working for 16 years as a freelance illustrator, in 2002 Tim moved to Orkney with his wife and children. Orkney had always appealed as a place to live, mainly because it is full of birds! "As a birder I have always known about Orkney," Tim says. "It is a Mecca destination. Now, birds, light, landscape and seascape are what I'm all about. I am never short of subjects to paint: if I need inspiration, I just go for a walk.

"Every season brings new subjects - ducks, geese and all the waders in winter, for example, and interesting migrants arriving in the spring and autumn. Often I will concentrate on one

species and make a whole series of paintings on that, perhaps eiders or skuas. I make studies and take photographs on site and those, together with stored images in previous sketchbooks, will give me enough reference information for dozens of different paintings.



Plate 45. *Tim Wootton, September 2012*.

"I don't think I will ever run out of ideas in Orkney, so I seldom travel to anywhere else. However, I was privileged last year to be invited by the Artists for Nature Foundation to go to the tiny Channel Island of Sark with other artists and work there. Some of that work has since been published in a book for the Foundation and is included in a travelling exhibition that will visit Guernsey, Sark and finally Nature in Art, in Gloucestershire."

"My work is based entirely on first-hand observation. Many of my drawings and some paintings are started and completed in the field - but usually I gather studies and other reference which are collated in the studio where a more considered approach may ensue."

"My primary concerns are with the representation of the natural environment and the creatures which live there. Since relocating to the Northern Isles ten years ago, my work has predominantly evolved from the seascapes and birds of our watery land. I find myself increasingly drawn to the interpretation of the places where sea meets land."

Tim works in a variety of media, including charcoal and conte, watercolour, oils, acrylics and ink and wash. He has a preference for watercolour, but often it will be the subject matter which dictates the media. For instance, he rarely uses watercolour for seascapes, being more inclined to use oils or acrylics. When working in watercolour he uses heavy quality Fabriano or Saunders Waterford Not papers, at least 425gsm/200lb, which he doesn't need to



Plate 46. *Common Seals, Eiders and Arctic Skua.* © Tim Wootton



Plate 47. *Three Eiders.* © Tim Wootton

stretch. The beauty of watercolour lay in its immediacy and the fact that by adopting an *alla-prima* approach and working across the whole surface simultaneously there's a freshness and spontaneity which perhaps heavier media lack.

In recent years, he has been developing a style he calls 'Sharpie Painting' which entails composing the major elements of the painting in 'Sharpie' pen (fibre-tipped marker) and painting washes of watercolour over this.

He sometimes starts by making a few thumbnail sketches to help plan the composition, and sometimes he makes pen and wash drawings using a black Sharpie fine line marker pen with watercolour. These can be drawings in their own right or act as preliminary work for an oil or acrylic painting. "With the oil and acrylic paintings, which are usually seascapes or landscapes, there is much more of a conscious decision about the composition," he explains. "I have a pretty good idea of what I'm going to do and how it should end up. With watercolour, the process is more spontaneous: there is a philosophical difference between the two approaches.

"However, the greatest freedom is with the ink drawings. I feel I can be braver with these, less serious, so they are quite liberating. Because the initial marks are black marks on a white surface, they are quite unlike anything in nature and so there would be little point in trying to create the

same sort of realistic image that I might achieve in watercolour or a detailed acrylic painting. Instead, they open up different avenues of design and character.

"For me, the most successful wildlife paintings are those that come close to revealing something of the original experience or incident in nature that inspired the painting. My aim is to encapsulate something about the natural world that I have seen and the particular moment when I saw it. So, my paintings are about moments in time. But I don't want them to be frozen moments, such as you might find in a photograph instead I want them to have life and emotion."

Work is executed in a wide variety of media, but more recently this has manifested itself in large charcoal renderings and watercolour paintings.

Tim was announced as the winner of the *Birdwatch / Swarovski Artist of the Year 2011 Award* to a packed crowd during the Society of Wildlife Artists Annual Exhibition at London's Mall Galleries in October. His expansive and naturalistic

charcoal piece entitled "*Pale and Intermediate Phase Arctic Skuas*" received the much-desired award and was presented by wildlife documentary presenter and conservationist Mark Carwardine and SWLA President Harriet Mead.

During the same exhibition, Tim was also elected an Associate Member of the Society of Wildlife Artists; a great personal honour.

The award and election to the ranks of the prestigious SWLA rounds off a spectacular 12 months for Tim, during which he won both a category in the BBC Wildlife Artist of the Year and the PJC Award for Drawing. He was selected to exhibit for the David Shepherd Wildlife Artist of the Year 2011 and won the Wildscape Magazine Wildlife Artist of the Year Award in 2009.

His book *Drawing & Painting Birds* was published in January this year - published by the Crowood Press. The first printing completely sold out in eight months and the book was reprinted later the same year (2011).



Plate 48. *Should I stay, or should I go.* © Tim Wootton

# BOOK REVIEWS

**Birds in a Cage.** Derek Niemann, 2012. Short Books, London, ISBN 978-1-78072-093-7, Hardback, 312 pages, £20.00.

This moving and most interesting book tells how four British officers incarcerated together in Warburg POW Camp in Germany in 1941 overcame hardship by devoting their time to studying birds (without binoculars). Not only did they involve fellow prisoners, but also some of the German guards, at great risk to all. Following their wartime experience, all four went on to become major figures in wildlife conservation. Among them was SOC's co-founder George Waterston, and in 2011 the book's author Derek Niemann (editor of RSPB's children's magazines) came to Waterston House to see material relating to George in the SOC archive. Crucial items there which were used in the book were George's "secret" notebook *Birds seen in Crete* (before he was captured in 1941), with an official POW camp stamp on it, and correspondence about those Cretan observations from a senior German officer and eminent ornithologist, Erwin Stresemann. The correspondence is dated August 1943 and George was repatriated on grounds of ill health shortly afterwards. Stresemann evidently helped secure that repatriation, and he maintained his friendship with George and another of the prisoners, John Buxton, for the rest of his life.

SOC members will learn much in this book about George Waterston, who studied Wrynecks and planned

a bird observatory on Fair Isle while at Warburg, and who did so much subsequently to promote ornithology and conservation in Scotland. They will learn more, however, about the other three prisoners, simply because they wrote more (there is nothing published by Waterston in the Bibliography). John Buxton, a gifted poet as well as ornithologist, was brother-in-law to Ronald Lockley who established Britain's first bird observatory on Skokholm. He wrote the first Collins New Naturalist bird monograph *The Redstart* (1950), based on his POW studies of that species, but, although remaining active in conservation, he became a lecturer in English at Oxford University. John Barrett (and Richard Purchon) spent hundreds of hours observing breeding Chaffinches and Tree Sparrows at Warburg, while also acting as lookouts for the camp's escape committee! Barrett subsequently became warden at Dale Fort Field Studies Centre in Pembrokeshire, where perhaps he is best remembered as author of *Collins Guide to the Seashore*, published in 1958. The most information concerns Peter Conder, and this is because a previously unknown cache of letters from him was made available to Derek Niemann, and that was the spur for this book. Conder studied several species while a POW, notably migrating Skylarks and corvids (and at one point tried to assess whether animal dung or human dung was more attractive to ravenous crows!), Black Redstarts and Goldfinches. He managed to escape from a marching column at the end of the war. Later, after a spell as warden of Skokholm, managed by John Barrett, he joined RSPB and was its director from 1963 to 1975. He worked on Wheatears for more than 40 years and his monograph *The Wheatear* was published by

Christopher Helm in 1989. There were other ornithologist POWs of course, and correspondence about birds between Barney Thompson, another prisoner at Warburg, and his brother Peter back home is especially poignant because Barney survived the war but Peter, a bomber pilot, did not.

There are so many fascinating and often harrowing stories in this book, and all four main characters suffered after-effects from their incarceration. It is well illustrated with photographs and drawings (by Rob Hume), and, especially because of George Waterston's importance in SOC's history, I cannot recommend it highly enough.

*John Savory*

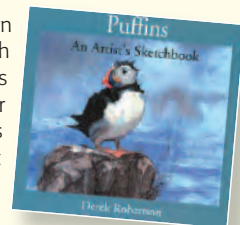
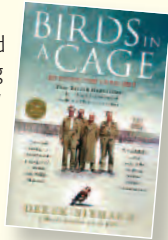
**Puffins: an artist's sketchbook.** Derek Robertson, 2012. Woodlands Studios, Fife, ISBN 978-0-9539324-3-6, softback, 48 pages, £9.99.

This well-known Scottish artist/author has produced another sketchbook of his work, the latest subject being the study of Puffins.

Several short chapters tell of his experiences with this bird on various Scottish islands, notably the Isle of May and St. Kilda. It is beautifully illustrated with 23 colour paintings and 19 black-and-white sketches/photographs.

At a modest price it is good value and well worth adding to your bookshelf.

*David Clugston*



**Birdwatching on Mull and Iona: a pocket guide with maps.** David Sexton & Philip Snow 2011. Brown and Whittaker, Tobermory, ISBN 9781904353140, paperback, 40 pages, £4.95.



This is a reprint of this popular guide, originally entitled *Birds of Mull* (1987), and has been brought up to date. The book is conveniently divided into area sections and with Mull being a large island enables the reader to quickly locate what may be looked for in a chosen locality. A selection of excellent maps is accompanied by good useful species illustrations by Philip Snow. Providing many useful tips and local information, this is a must-have for anybody visiting these bird-rich and beautiful islands.

Keith Macgregor

**Southern African LBJs Made Simple.** Doug Newman & Gordon King, 2011. Struik Nature, Cape Town, ISBN 978-1-7707-799-7, paperback, 136 pages, £14.99.

While some birders might feel lucky to have relatively few "Little Brown Jobs" to contend with in Britain, the authors of this excellent and innovative little volume categorise almost 170 southern African species as LBJs. These include cisticolas, prinias, scrub-robins, pipits, and over 30 species of lark, plus females of the likes of canaries, bishops and weavers. Some of the latter are more green and/or yellow than brown, but it is certainly useful to have them on board.



A detailed introduction provides the *modus operandi* of identifying LBJs via the characteristics and habits of the various families and 'visual groups'. Generally high-standard photographs of each species and their habitats, annotated illustrations highlighting key features, and 'at a glance' tips aid identification. A quick look at distribution will make the elimination process easier for many species. The maps could perhaps have been larger and brighter to facilitate this.

The included CD of songs, calls and wing-snaps is outstanding and a pleasure to listen to in its own right - the evocative Greater Honeyguide certainly brightened up a dreich Scottish day for me. A series of comparative recordings with helpful commentary is included.

A tremendous amount of useful information has been cleverly incorporated into this book and it will surely make LBJ misery in the subcontinent a thing of the past. Definitely one to take down south along with your regional field guide.

Mike Fraser

**Bird Sense: what its like to be a bird.** Tim Birkhead & Katrina van Grouw (illustrator), 2012. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, ISBN 9781408820137, hardback, 288 pages, £17.

This book is in many ways a companion volume to Tim Birkhead's *Wisdom of Birds* (voted BB/BTO Best Bird Book of 2008). In that work he traced the scientific world's acquisition of knowledge (or wisdom) of all things avian. In *Bird Sense* he does the same but concentrating on the sensory powers of birds. There are predictable chapters on seeing, hearing, smell, taste and touch but also, perhaps less expectedly, magnetism sense.

The narrative is as much about the scientists as the birds themselves. Inspired researchers are celebrated and their landmark discoveries catalogued - but in a style that sometimes reads like a detective novel. The research story is brought right up to date with descriptions of very recent discoveries and I was treated to more than a few satisfying well-I-didn't-know-that moments.



The gaps are a reflection of how little the scientific world knows about some areas of bird biology. The author draws attention to our mystification as to how flamingos can detect distant rain for instance, and on more than one occasion he comments that 'this would make a good PhD project.' This is particularly true for his final chapter on bird emotions - a controversial and notoriously difficult field of study to be objective and quantitative.

Tim Birkhead's storytelling ability is excellent, especially when the stories describe his own experiences. Each time a paragraph started with something like, 'The most memorable thing about my brief encounter with...' I had a warm glow and thought, 'I'm going to enjoy this bit'.

The illustrations by Katrina van Grouw are good, but sparse.

In summary this is a volume packed with science but made very accessible and enjoyable to read.

Mike Bagshaw

**Jewels Beyond the Plough: a celebration of Britain's grasslands.** Richard Jefferson & John Davis, 2012. Langford Press, Peterborough, ISBN 978-1-904078-41-8, hardback, 168 pages, £38.00.



This book is yet another masterpiece in the Langford Press Wildlife Art Series. Its aim is to

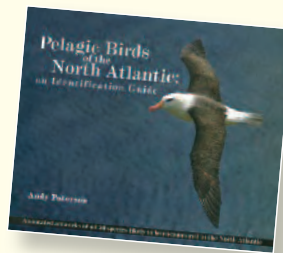
inspire and raise awareness of the beauty and value to society of our wildflower-rich grasslands. In this it succeeded for me, and both the informative text and the cleverly composed illustrations impressed me greatly.

Richard Jefferson is an ecologist and Senior Grassland Specialist for Natural England. After a Foreword by Chris Packham, and a contrast of the "Wee Grey Fergie" with modern tractors, his text is divided into 13 sections dealing with different categories of grassland and associated flora and fauna. Thus, an introduction to grasses and grasslands is followed by evolution of landscape through the ages, old meadows and pastures, downland to upland, and grasslands that are either calcareous, acid, marshy, Scottish machair, coastal and flood plain, water meadows, or roadside verges. At the end there is a helpful gazetteer and map of British nature reserves (14 in Scotland) containing areas of semi-natural wildflower grasslands of different types, a glossary of grassland names and terms, references, and a comment on modern farming. My one reservation is that the conservation message, alluded to frequently, could have been made more explicit.

John Davis, who has illustrated magazines and books over many years, is an excellent wildlife watercolourist and his many lovely landscapes in this book, with their prolific wildflower foregrounds and representative fauna, are truly evocative. His plants, insects, mammals and birds (including a stunning frontispiece in oil of a redshank with chicks in a meadow), while seemingly done quite loosely, contain just the right amount of subtle detail and are beautifully portrayed.

*John Savory*

**Pelagic Birds of the North Atlantic: an identification guide.** Andy Paterson, 2012. New Holland, London, ISBN 978-1-78009-228-7, paperback, 32 pages, £9.99.



This slim, flexible, ring-bound booklet covers the 56 species that may be seen in the North Atlantic, complete with 272 black and white illustrations of all the species, mostly shown in flight, and usefully depicting both upper and underparts. Adjacent to each picture are brief notes commenting on the salient features likely to be seen on what often may be distant views. The author is a widely experienced ornithologist and long involved with seabirds and their distribution. Any keen seabird enthusiast should find this small booklet invaluable, presented as it is on waterproof paper.

*Keith Macgregor*

**All the Birds of Nova Scotia.** Ian A. Maclaren, 2012. Gaspereau Press, Halifax, Nova Scotia, ISBN 9-781554-471164, hardback, C\$47.95.

It may seem strange for SB to host a review of a book from a Canadian province but, over the past decade, around 75 North American landbird vagrants of 25 species have been recorded in western and northern Scotland. Of these, many are species found regularly in Nova Scotia from where oceanic migrants are prone to being drifted off course across the Atlantic by unfavourable winds. Many waders suffer a similar fate - hence the link between 'new Scotia' and 'old Scotia'.

An introduction reveals the book's scope and information sources, followed by an explanation of weather patterns affecting migration. The remainder describes status and identification issues, but not biology, of every species found in the province, including vagrants. The 124 supporting photographic plates portray characters that separate subspecies and closely related species, although some locally sourced images are of variable quality. Aimed at local birders accompanied by standard field guides, the value of the book to UK birders is to highlight further vagrant species that may arrive in future. The author, a prominent Canadian birder, enthuses about



the importance of photographing vagrants and gives some interesting hints on identification that might not appear in European field guides.

*Norman Elkins*

# RINGERS' ROUNDUP

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

## Shag wreck

After two very severe storms in quick succession in mid-December 2012 there followed a serious wreck of Shags (lot of birds dying) in north-east Scotland. Over 200 were found dead between Peterhead and Burghead on the Moray coast in late December 2012 and early January 2013. The casualties included a number of individuals marked with field-readable coded rings (see Plate 49). Fortuitously, the wreck occurred in the midst of an intensive field resighting project run by the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and the University of Aberdeen, meaning that both the ringed individuals that succumbed, and others that have so far survived, have known breeding success and winter histories.

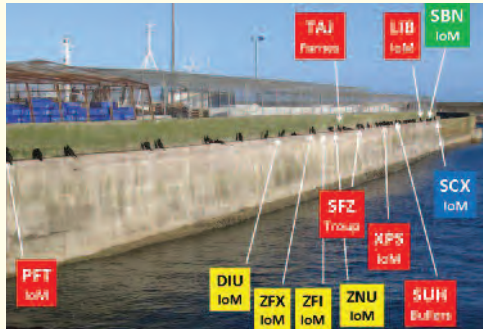


Plate 50. One of the Shag roost ledges at Fraserburgh showing the roost spots of darviced individuals 5 November 2012 © Jane Reid



Plate 49. Some of the dead Shags picked up in an afternoon at Fraserburgh, several with darvic rings © Raymond Duncan

Plate 50 shows one of the roost piers at Fraserburgh with the birds basking in the sun (!) pre roost in November. Ringed birds and their traditional roost spots are arrowed and labeled with their ring code and place of ringing (IoM = Isle of May). Sadly after the storm, four of these old friends were lost. Yellow ZFI and ZFX, winter roost neighbours, but not a breeding pair, were particularly hard to bear. ZFX was ringed as a chick on the Isle of May in 2003, returning there to breed from 2008 onwards, and recorded back on its ledge at Fraserburgh in the intervening winters. ZFI had a similar history.

If there is any consolation at all to this story, it is that the wreck was fairly localized and good numbers were reported alive and well at Portknockie and North Sutor further along into the Moray Firth and in Fife during or not long after the wreck.

Please check all Shags for darvics and report to [shags@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:shags@ceh.ac.uk). There's a reward for west coast winter sightings (and we'll know if you're cheating!).



### Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls on their travels

The maps (Figures 1 and 2) by Euan Ferguson show the results from recent darvic ringing of Scottish Lesser Black-backed Gulls, mainly of chicks ringed at colonies on Horse Island in the Firth of Clyde and on St Serfs Island on Loch Leven; and Herring Gulls, mainly of summer immatures and adults ringed in North-east Scotland.

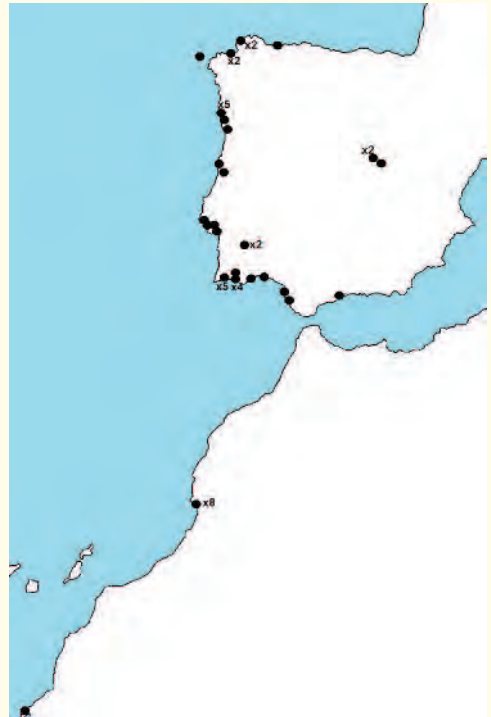
The migration south into Portugal, Spain and even Africa of Lesser Black-backed Gulls for the winter contrasts with the movements of our more 'resident' Herring Gull, but who would have expected a picture of such widespread winter dispersal throughout England and across onto the continent of 'oor toon gull'? With individual



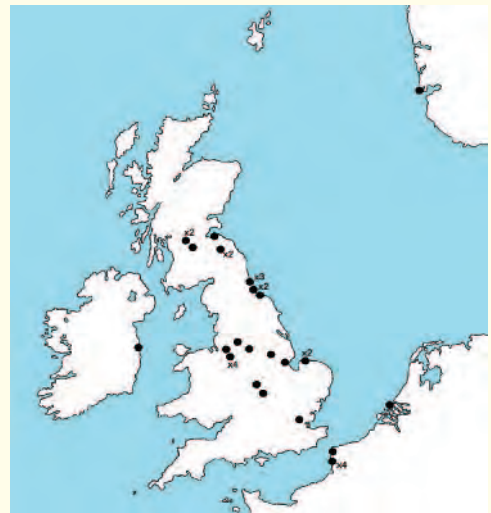
**Plate 51.** A Horse Island Lesser Black-backed Gull chick on a pelagic trip with some Wilson's Petrels off north-west Spain, September 2012. © Antonio Gutierrez Pita



**Plate 52.** A St. Serfs Island Lesser Black-backed Gull chick on a sunny(!) beach at Chipiona in Spain, November 2012. © Rafa Garcia



**Figure 1.** Lesser Black-backed Gull movements



**Figure 2.** Herring Gull movements

inscribed darvics and an avid band of gull ring readers along their flyways this is an excellent way to monitor these species movements, fidelity and survival in times of changing climate, food supplies and intensive urban resistance.

For yellow darvics/black inscription beginning T and 3 numbers please email: e.ferguson17@hotmail.co.uk

For white darvics/red inscription ending with C please email: iainlivcrg@googlemail.com

For any others please email: pete.rock@blueyonder.co.uk

### Scottish Common Gull chick in Spain!

Scottish Common Gull chick ET47509 from Loch Tarff in the Highlands has featured several times previously in this round-up. Last update, it was seen back in Sligo Harbour, Ireland by Michael Casey in October 2011 for its eight consecutive autumn. So, it was rather a surprise when a sighting from 180 chicks darviced at a colony in Donside, North-east Scotland in 2012 came from Santa Cruz de Oleiros in north-west Spain on 1 November from Sergio Paris (plate 53). This is only the second BTO-ringed Common Gull in Spain from over 90,000 birds ringed. The other was ringed in Kerry, Ireland in 1957 and found 7 miles away from this one!



Plate 53. Common Gull 2XKN in Santa Cruz de Oleiros, north-west Spain, 1 November 2012. © Antonio Lopez Porto

### How to census and monitor Jack Snipe?

Ian Livingstone and other Clyde Ringing Group members like to get wet and muddy for a good cause... catching, ringing and counting Jack Snipe. Plate 54 shows a record catch of six in one net! Retraps have demonstrated a degree of site fidelity within and between winters. One exciting find was a ringed bird (above the knee), which had been ringed in the Netherlands.



Plate 54. Jack Snipes in the hand, Strathclyde, November 2012. © Adam Cross

## Waxwings

Everybody will have been aware of another invasion of Waxwings in autumn 2012. We seem to be on a run of bi-annual arrivals now, after previous invasions in 2008 and 2010. Three colour-ringed birds from North-east Scotland went their very different ways, showing how difficult it is to know how many are actually in the country and how unpredictable their movements can be.



Plates 55–56. Waxwings NW49062 (colour rings dark blue/light green) and NW50152 (colour rings white over light green over light green) in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, 6 December 2012. © Stephen Clarkson



Plate 58. Waxwing NW31182 in Whitehead, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, 18 December 2012. © Cameron Moore

**NW31182:** Juv male 30/11/12,  
Aboyne, North-east Scotland  
Photographed 18/12/12, Whitehead, Co.  
Antrim, N. Ireland - 316 km SW

**NW49062:** Juv 5/11/12,  
Kincorth, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland  
Photographed 06/12/12, Leamington Spa,  
Warwickshire, England - 541 km S

**NW50152:** Juv fem 28/11/12,  
Aberdeen, North-east Scotland  
Photographed 06/12/12, Leamington Spa,  
Warwickshire, England - 541 km S

**NW65180:** Juv fem 07/12/12,  
Aberdeen, North-east Scotland  
Photographed 23/12/12, Huissen, Lingwaard,  
NETHERLANDS - 775 km SE



Plate 57. Waxwing NW65180 (colour rings yellow/white/orange) in Huissen, Lingwaard, Netherlands, 23 December 2012. © Niek and Cheis Klaassen

## Osprey

In the early days of recolonisation of the Osprey in Scotland it was shown by ringing that Scandinavian birds were involved. A recent sighting suggests there may also be some exchanges the other way. John Brain and Hugh Insley ringed an Osprey chick (white darvic KU) near Inverness on 2 July 2009. It then turned up near Hildal, Hordaland in Norway on 4 September, shortly after fledging following a westerly gale. Interestingly, it was resighted on autumn migration on 21 September 2012 at Makkum, Friesland in the Netherlands, suggesting that it may have transferred to the Scandinavian breeding population, perhaps after successfully migrating south from Norway in 2009?

## West coast waders; Dunlin and Turnstone

Thanks to David Jardine and John Bowler for some recent colour-ring sightings of passage waders on the west coast islands.

Two **Dunlin** colour-ringed at the same site at Santarem, Portugal on 30 January and 30 April 2010 were resighted on the Isle of Colonsay, on spring passage, one only 20 days after ringing, whilst a colour-ringed **Turnstone** resighted in Milton Harbour on the Isle of Tiree on 23 October 2012 had been ringed as an adult male on its breeding grounds at Alert, Ellesmere Island, Nunavut, Canada on 2 June 2008.

John comments, "Oddly perhaps, this bird was in exactly the same spot as another colour-ringed Turnstone (a female ringed on 25 June 2006 at Alert, Ellesmere Island, Canada) that wintered in 2008/09. We have over 1,000 Turnstones wintering here, so it's bizarre that I should find two ringed birds in this very small flock and not elsewhere (I've checked through hundreds of birds in the last few winters including the Milton Harbour flock)."

These movements demonstrate the site fidelity and rapidity of the huge numbers of waders passing through Scotland every spring and autumn on their way to and from breeding and wintering grounds far to the north and south.

## Have you seen our Sparrowhawks?

The ecology of urban Sparrowhawks has been studied within Edinburgh since the late 1980s, however, despite ongoing monitoring of a number of nests across the city, little is known about the dispersal strategies and survival rates of juvenile birds once they fledge the nest.

In an attempt to improve our understanding of the behaviour of these juvenile birds, 32 Sparrowhawk chicks from eight nest sites in Edinburgh have been ringed with unique colour rings this year. You can greatly assist this research project by watching for and reporting observations of these colour-ringed birds.

The colour rings are white, uniquely coded with two vertical alphanumeric characters (i.e. letter over number or letter over letter) and are placed on the right leg. To provide ease of visibility, these codes are repeated twice around the circumference of the ring. The rings can be read on a perched bird at a distance of c.20 m with binoculars or up to 75 m using a scope. If you don't have such equipment, taking a picture with a digital camera will often allow the ring to be read once the picture is uploaded. A small unique metal BTO ring has also been applied to the left leg of the chicks, but these cannot be read unless the bird is in the hand.

If you observe one of these colour-ringed Sparrowhawks, please record the rings code, date and time, as well as the location. **Please report all sightings to Alan Heavisides, even if you were unable to determine the ring code.**

*Alan Heavisides (Chairman of the  
Lothian & Borders Raptor Study Group)  
Email: alanheavisides@yahoo.com*



Plate 59. *Eastern Olivaceous Warbler*, Kilminning, Fife, October 2012. © John Anderson

## Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Kilminning, Fife, October 2012 - first record for mainland Fife

**B. ALLAN**

The weather forecast for the weekend of 13–14 October looked good for birding on the east coast and on the Sunday I was able to head across to Fife Ness and see what was about. I arrived at Kilminning, about half way to the point at Fife Ness from Crail, at 8.00am and it was clear from the outset there had been a significant fall of migrants. It was generally overcast with a few bright spells and occasional light rain. After a couple of hours I met Rab Shand, and he had just found a Yellow-browed Warbler, which we quickly relocated and soon after a Red-breasted flycatcher was found in the same general area. I decided to search other areas alone and headed to Fife Ness Muir where I located another Yellow-browed Warbler. I left quite happy but the draw of all the vegetation cover at Kilminning lured me back and I headed down to the seaward car park. On arrival there was a minibus of visiting birders scouring the south-east area of the car park, so I decided to get away from the crowd and walked over the

mound toward the ruined toilet block. Some light rain started to come down and so I took some shelter behind the toilet block. When it stopped, I walked over the next rise and stopped to scan the rose bushes. A male Blackcap appeared almost immediately, and as it 'chacked' away I stood looking into bushes on the embankment checking for any movement.

Then, out of the blue, a bird appeared in the rose bushes, and surprisingly it wasn't just a head or tail but the entire bird was in full view, instantly. I knew I had something good, and quickly took mental notes: long pale grey warbler, thick strong grey legs, very long, thin bill, very plain look, no noticeable wing panel. Thirty seconds and it was gone. As I waited, I was thinking Olivaceous Warbler, and started eliminating other possibilities: leg colour not right for Blyth's Reed, size wasn't huge and the bill too thin for Olive-tree, no wing panel and bill shape wrong for either Melodious or Icterine

Warblers. Thankfully the bird re-appeared and I got a better look: it had a square-ended tail - again eliminating Blyth's Reed, and a short supercilium that stopped just behind the eye, and long, pale buff undertail coverts. Then the bird pumped its tail and called simultaneously and I recalled the seeing birds in Bulgaria doing exactly the same thing. Mentally, I shouted Eastern Olivaceous! Then I remembered where I was and recalled the bird claimed as an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler earlier in the autumn at the same site, and thought no one would believe this.

I desperately needed to get other people to see this bird. I knew Rab Shand had been in the area and hoped he was still present. I phoned him and eventually got a broken garbled message to him including the words "big grey hippo", "big grey legs", "big plain warbler", "Kilminning bottom car park, get here now". The bird showed sporadically in the ten minutes it took Rab to get to me.

Thankfully, the bird showed within a few minutes of his arrival, but Rab's first views were with the bird in the shade of the bush and he commented on it looking like a Blyth's Reed, as it seemed brownish. I procrastinated mentioning the leg colour was wrong and the bird was all

grey and eventually when the bird came out into full view Rab concurred with the salient points I had noted earlier. I remember saying to Rab "tell me why it's not an Eastern Olivaceous" and I think his reply was something like "Aye". That day, the bird showed reasonably well for four other birders, but later the bird disappeared.

Luckily the bird remained in the area for over five weeks, until 20 November, making it the longest saying British record. It showed well for most of its stay and was admired by hundreds of birders.

### Description

The bird was a little smaller and slimmer than the nearby male Blackcap. It had overall pale grey concolourous upperparts, with silky very pale underparts. The only dark area on the wing was the alula which was a few shades darker than the other wing feathers. The supercilium was short and pale, creamy-white, stopping just behind the eye and was slightly darker edged above. The lores were darkish, showed a little warmth in tone and contrasted with the pale white throat. The undertail coverts were long and cream-coloured, and the tip projected further back than the tips of the wing projection. The tip of the primaries reached the furthest tip of upper tail coverts. The tail was long, grey, and square-ended, with a paleness noted to the inner web of the outer tail



Plate 60. Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Kilminning, Fife, October 2012. © Barry Farquarson

feathers. The bill seemed ridiculously long, and was broad at the base. It was pale, fleshy-coloured with a dark culmen, and a paler tip. The legs were strong and pale greyish-blue. It often gave a harsh 'chack' call - very similar to that of a Blackcap. The bird was not particularly skulking and often showed very well at close range at which time it was possible to observe its habit of pumping its tail in a downward direction, especially when it was calling.

When I returned home I was keen to eliminate two other similar species to be absolutely certain of the identification. I ruled out Upcher's Warbler on the fact that that species swings its tail from side to side (and doesn't pump it up or down), the thinness of the bill on the Kilminning bird was not as big and robust as on Upcher's and also on that species the leg colour, is more brownish-grey. I eliminated Western Olivaceous Warbler by the lack of any warm brownish plumage tones to the upperparts of the Kilminning bird and the fact that the tail-pumping behaviour is not seen in Western Olivaceous.

*This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee.*

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### Status in Scotland

All records of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler in Britain are believed to be of the eastern subspecies (*Iduna pallida elaeica*). This is the most widespread and numerous form and breeds from coastal Slovenia, Croatia, and Albania, Hungary, Romania and the western Black Sea coast south-eastwards through Greece, Turkey and the Caucasus to Syria, The Lebanon, Israel and Jordan, and eastwards through northern Iraq, Iran, to Central Asia, and along the south-west coast of the Arabian Gulf. The entire population is migratory and winters in East Africa.

There have been 17 accepted records of this species in Britain to the end of 2011 with eight of these in Scotland:

**1967, 24–26 September:** One, Isle of May.

**1995, 5–13 June:** One, Fair Isle.

**2000, 13–21 September:** First-winter, Collieston, North-east Scotland.



**Plate 61.** Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Kilminning, Fife, October 2012. © Tristan Reid

**2002, 18–28 August:** Adult, Sandwick/Hoswick, South Mainland, Shetland.

**2008, 23–25 September:** First-winter, Harrier, Foula, Shetland.

**2009, 21 June:** One, the Plantation, Fair Isle.

**2010, 11–12 September:** First-winter, Ireland, South Mainland, Shetland.

**2011, 2–3 September:** First-winter, Taft & Schoolton, Fair Isle.

The status section of the article about the discovery of the Foula bird in 2008 (Gordon & Scott 2010) covered the distribution and occurrence pattern of this species in Britain. It also contained details of the taxonomic revision in 2002 which split Olivaceous Warbler into Eastern and Western Olivaceous Warblers (becoming *Hippolais pallida* and *H. opaca* respectively). Since then these two species have been the subject of further taxonomic studies and are now reclassified as members of a new genus *Iduna* (Sangster *et al.* 2011), with three other species on the British List also now placed there: Thick-billed Warbler [*I. aedon*], Booted Warbler [*I. caligata*] and Sykes's Warbler (*I. rama*).

**Gordon, P.R. & Scott, M.S. 2010.** Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Foula, Shetland, 23–25 September 2008 - the fifth Scottish record. *Scottish Birds* 30(1): 70–72

**Sangster, G., Collinson, J.M., Crochet, P.-A., Knox, A.G., Parkin, D.T., Svensson, L. & Votier, S.C. 2011.** Taxonomic recommendations for British birds: seventh report. *Ibis* 153: 883–892.



Plate 62. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Scalloway, Shetland, October 2012. © Hugh Harrop

## Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Scalloway, Shetland, October 2012 - the first record for Scotland

**R.M. FRAY**

The weekend of 13/14 October 2012 produced a veritable glut of Olive-backed Pipits in Shetland, with at least ten found in the islands during the two-day period. Try as I might, I couldn't rustle up one myself in my usual south Mainland haunts; I put this down to a combination of work commitments, bad luck and general incompetence. Monday 15 October dawned cool and relatively calm, with a light easterly breeze; ideal weather for finding myself an Olive-backed Pipit, or perhaps something a little more interesting. However, a change of scenery was required. I have always liked the look of Scalloway - Shetland's ancient capital and 'second city'. It contains lots of mature gardens and big (by Shetland standards) groups of trees. And, I surmised, nobody would have looked there over the last few days.

I arrived at Scalloway during the late morning and had a good look round the likely spots. Small flocks of Bramblings and Siskins were all very nice, but not really what I had in mind, and after a couple of hours I was beginning to think of moving on to pastures new. My last port of call was the area around Scalloway Health Centre, and the aptly-named Sycamore Avenue. Whilst having a small ponder over which direction to set off, a small black and white bird bounded across in front of me and landed in the tall sycamores adjacent to the Health Centre. Great Spotted Woodpecker seemed the likely candidate, as I was aware one had been frequenting Scalloway for a few days previously, but following the bird through bins as it alighted in the trees sent me in to panic mode. This was no Great Spot - it was tiny! Prominent black and

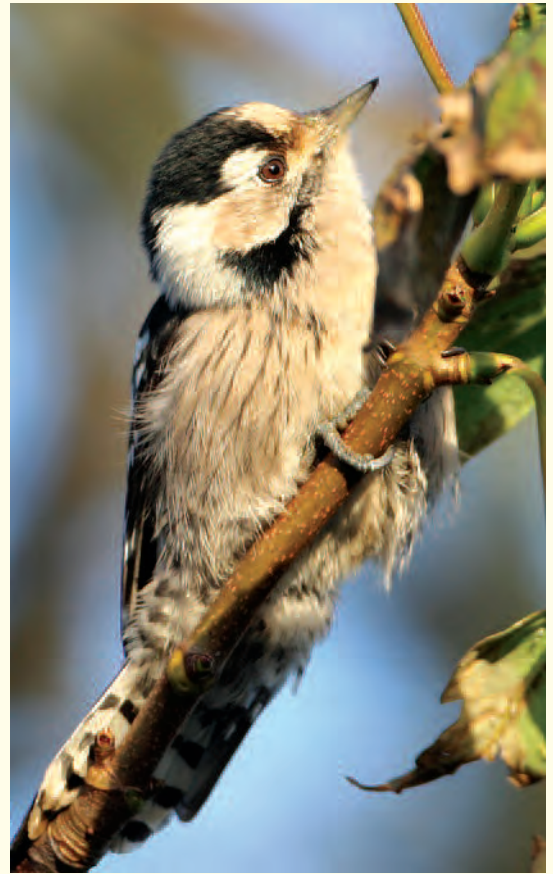


white 'laddering' on the upperparts and a lack of red anywhere in the plumage, combined with its diminutive stature, instantly suggested Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. A rather frantic session of waving the camera in its general direction followed, after which the bird moved away through the trees and was lost to view.

It was now time to collect my thoughts. I had just seen a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker; in a tree in Scalloway. This was obviously a ridiculous notion. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker wasn't on the Shetland List, and nobody had ever seriously considered it as a realistic candidate to turn up in the islands. I was faced with the prospect of a single-observer record of a completely unlikely addition to the Shetland List. Was I making some elementary mistake? The photos on the back of my camera told me otherwise. I needed a bit of moral support, so rang Gary Bell. He didn't answer. My text to him along the lines of "ring me or get to Scalloway NOW!" prompted him to ring me back. "Lesser Spot isn't on the Shetland List is it?" I enquired. "It's not even on the Scottish List. Why do you ask?" "Because I've just found one in Scalloway." Silence. Given the news just imparted to him, I assumed Gary was quickly checking for the phone number of the nearest social worker so that I could get the help I quite clearly needed. I went through the events with Gary, and he was persuaded to set off for Scalloway to help with the search. I managed to release the news via the local text grapevine and waited for the inevitable querying of my sanity. First on the phone was Dave Okill: "are you joking?" he asked in his dulcet Scouse tones. Next was a downright rude text from a BBRC member (no names, but he lives on Unst) speculating on what sexually-transmitted disease I had contracted that meant I was visiting Scalloway Health Centre! Fortunately, after a couple of hours, the bird was relocated in gardens not far from the Health Centre, and showed on and off during the evening and over the following few days; it was last reported on 19 October.

#### **A minor issue**

As can be seen from the accompanying photographs, identification as Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was straightforward. With regards to ageing and sexing of the bird, the combination of buff forehead patch (as opposed to white), buffy ear coverts, and rather ill-defined, not-quite-black,



**Plate 63.** Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Scalloway, Shetland, October 2012. © Jim Nicolson

streaking on the underparts rendered the bird a juvenile. The lack of red on the crown meant it had to be a female.

The British form of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor comminutus*) is endemic and resident, and is restricted to England, Wales and the Channel Islands; it does not occur in Scotland or Ireland. It has declined significantly and very rapidly since around 1980, following a shallower increase; it had already contracted in range between the first two atlas periods (Gibbons *et al.* 1993), and has subsequently disappeared from many more of its former localities. The species easily qualifies for the 'Birds of Conservation Concern Red List' (Eaton *et al.* 2009), and indeed has become so scarce that all breeding records since 2010 have been compiled by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. This subspecies is not known to move any great



Plate 64. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Scalloway, Shetland, October 2012. © Larry Dalziel

distance, and the likelihood of an English or Welsh bird suddenly deciding to move northwards to Shetland seems unlikely.

Cramp (1985) states that up to 20 races of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker are described for the Western Palearctic alone, although variation is probably clinal and only nine races are generally recognised. Of greatest interest in relation to the Scalloway bird is the nominate race (*D. m. minor*), which breeds in Fenno-Scandia and from eastern Poland to western Siberia. Although Lesser Spotted Woodpecker has been one of the most strongly declining bird species in Europe, with widespread rapid decreases since 1980 (Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme 2007, 2011), some populations in Fenno-Scandia have stabilised or even increased during the last 10 to 15 years, and this species has been removed from the national 'Red Lists' in both Finland and Norway (Gohli *et al.* 2011).

The race *minor* is nomadic or partially migratory, moving into southern parts of the breeding range or slightly beyond. In some autumns, this movement assumes the character of a small-scale irruption (thought to be in response to food shortages or hard weather, and often in conjunction with larger movements of Great Spotted Woodpeckers), and during such times birds may reach the Black Sea, central Europe and the Netherlands, although always in small numbers. The largest recorded irruption of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers was in the autumn of 1962, when records included 20 at Revtangen (south-west Norway), 250 at Falsterbo (southern Sweden), and 40 in Denmark. Subsequent smaller irruptions in Europe have

been most apparent in the east Baltic region, although in autumn 1972 birds attributed to *minor* were reported from Germany, Switzerland and the Channel Islands.

Autumn 2012 saw an irruption of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers throughout northern Europe; although precise details are conspicuously difficult to access, reports on the internet site *Birdforum* include several hundred flying west over the Baltic Sea at Puise (western Estonia) in late September, and 133 migrating past Hanko Bird Observatory (Finland) in mid-October. Interestingly, one was trapped on the island of Utsira, off the western coast of Norway (only about 220 miles from Shetland), the day before the Scalloway bird was found, although photographs show that it was a different individual to that seen in Shetland.

Although circumstantial evidence points to the Scalloway bird being a continental immigrant, confidently attributing it to the nominate race *minor* (which is not currently on the British List) is somewhat speculative. To be 100% certain would have probably involved trapping the bird and taking biometrics and DNA samples. However, observations in the field, and subsequent examination of photographs, do suggest that it was a *minor*, based on, amongst other things, the distinctly buff/off-white forehead, ear-coverts and underparts, and the extent of streaking on the underparts. In addition, nominate *minor* is slightly larger than the British race *comminutus*, and several observers commented that, although the bird was obviously small, it did not seem as tiny as expected; one estimate was that it was perhaps 20% larger than nearby House Sparrows.

### Associated arrivals in Shetland

Late autumn 2012 was notable in Shetland for the appearance of above-average numbers of other species that had irrupted out of northern Europe. Blue and Great Tits were to the fore, with about 17 of the former and 26 of the latter recorded, including a Blue Tit in Lerwick that had been ringed in Norway. Large numbers of Waxwings descended on the islands from late October onwards, whilst at least three Great Spotted Woodpeckers and a single Treecreeper also arrived. At one stage in October, Scalloway alone held four Blue Tits, four Great Tits, a Great Spotted Woodpecker and the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - a list of birds more reminiscent of a woodland in southern England rather than a few wind-blown trees in Shetland!

### Status in Scotland

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker has a chequered history in Scotland. At the time of the publication of *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007), there was one accepted national record of this species, involving up to three birds occasionally visiting a bird-table in a garden next to Duchray Castle, Aberfoyle (Upper Forth) during September 1968 and January 1970. The birds were apparently absent during the intervening period, and were never seen by other observers who went searching for them. In addition, Forrester *et al.* detail a number of other, earlier, unaccepted records, including reports from Orkney in 1774 and 1823, Dumfries & Galloway in 1860, 1865 and 1905, and Renfrewshire in 1904 (the latter of which involved a nest with seven eggs which was subsequently identified as belonging to a Wryneck). More recently, birds were reported in Perth & Kinross between 1968 and 1972, and Badenoch & Strathspey in 1980 and 1982, but these records were considered open to doubt and no supporting evidence was ever submitted.

In 2011, as part of its remit to examine older records, the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) announced that, after review, the Upper Forth reports in 1968 and 1970 were considered unproven; this resulted in Lesser Spotted Woodpecker being removed from the Scottish List (McInerny 2011). The Scalloway individual therefore becomes the first Scottish record, less than a year after this species was removed from the Scottish List. I doubt

anybody would have predicted that its reinstatement would be so swift!

As a footnote, I never did find myself an Olive-backed Pipit during the autumn of 2012, although birders looking for the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Scalloway did unearth one there, so my initial idea was not without merit. Bumbling into a first for Scotland was, however, ample compensation.

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*This record is subject to acceptance by the Scottish Birds Rarities Committee.*

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# Detection and identification of immature drake Black Scoters

N. LITTLEWOOD



**Plate 65.** *First-winter drake Black Scoter, 19 February 2009, Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada. ©Jukka Jantunen (www.birdphotos.ca). Early in its second calendar year, the colour tones on this bird's bill are rather subdued and there is no sign of a raised profile to this basal area. However, the pale area extends to the bill base and cloaks the upper sides of the basal half. Taken together with the flat-crowned, square-headed profile, a vagrant at this age should be readily identifiable given sufficient views. Note also that the slender droopy-tip to the bill, set off with a sharply curved nail, is shown well in this photo.*

The Blackdog and Murcar coastline, north of Aberdeen, hit the birding headlines in June 2011 with the detection and identification of a first-summer drake White-winged Scoter (Baxter *et al.* 2011). Although the species had been mooted as a potential vagrant to Britain, few people knew what first-summer birds looked like and it took sharp eyes and some detective work by the finders to nail the identity. The month then culminated in the finding of an adult drake Black Scoter (Littlewood 2011), a further addition to North-east Scotland's list. This meant that the site had, in a single month, notched up all of the world's scoter species that are currently recognised by the BOURC.

Fast forward to 2012 and, on 14 June, I was lucky enough to be able to study a group of Common Scoter that was sat close to shore, a short way beyond the surf line. Among these birds, one with rather more extensive yellow across the bill caught my attention and I soon realised that it was a Black Scoter. But, rather than being a return of the adult drake from 2011, this bird was clearly a first-summer drake. Although this would be the first Western Palearctic record of a Black Scoter that was not an adult drake, given these good initial views, the identification was straightforward. The critical factor was the extent and shape of yellow on the upper mandible, with structural features providing further supporting evidence.

### The history of Black Scoter identification in Europe

The first European Black Scoter was recorded in the Netherlands in 1954. There have subsequently been around 45 records spread from Spain in the south-west up to Finland in the north-east (Wegst & Kratzer 2010). Prior to the 2012 Blackdog bird, all records had been of adult drakes and indeed, even as late as the early 1990s, some references cautioned that vagrant Black Scoters could only be identified in this plumage (e.g. Astins 1992). However, Alderfer (1992) described how immature males were sufficiently distinctive to be identified in their first winter, whilst Waring (1993) provided features by which even some females might be detectable. Subsequent to the splitting of Black Scoter from Common Scoter by the BOURC (see Collinson *et al.* 2006 for a full explanation), the identification of Black Scoters in immature and female plumages has been explored by Garner (2008), whilst further useful pointers and photographs were provided in the write-up of a recent adult bird in Northumberland (Bradbury 2011). Meanwhile, Wegst & Kratzer (2010) provided a comprehensive overview of identification in all plumages.

### Identification

As with most or all records of adult drake Black Scoters in the UK, the Blackdog bird of 2012 was detected and identified primarily on characteristics of the bill. Crucially, the yellow area reached back to the bill base and down to a narrow black border running along the cutting edge. On adult drakes this coloured bill base can show an exaggerated convex bulge in profile. The shape on immature birds is variable, but usually more subtle. Nonetheless, the Blackdog bird showed a slightly raised profile to this basal area, the extent of which perfectly matched the yellow-orange colouration. Thus it was very different to the straighter, or slightly concave, shape shown by Common Scoters along the greater part of the bill length, with the coloured portion being more restricted in extent.

### Ageing on plumage

The Blackdog bird showed mottled sooty-brown body feathers, a dark brown crown and hind-neck with slightly contrasting paler lower cheeks and fore-neck. Thus the bird somewhat



**Plate 66.** First-summer drake Black Scoter, Blackdog, North-east Scotland, 14 June 2012. © Nick Littlewood. The general plumage of this bird was not dissimilar to that of an adult female Common Scoter, although the body was darker and the pale area on the cheeks and foreneck was less extensive. The image here also shows the dark chin-strap that was particularly apparent on this bird.



**Plate 67.** First-summer drake Black Scoter, Blackdog, North-east Scotland, 14 June 2012. © Nick Littlewood. Here two Common Scoters mask much of the Black Scoter, but the raised profile to the yellow basal area of the bill is readily apparent.



**Plate 68.** First-summer drake Common Scoter, Blackdog, North-east Scotland, 20 May 2012. © Nick Littlewood. This bird attracted attention due to the rather extensive, triangular coloured area of the bill. Such birds are not unusual. Compared to drake Black Scoters of the same age, note that the coloured portion of the bill does not extend to the bill base and that the colour tends towards orange rather than yellow, as is more typical on immature drake Black Scoters.



**Plate 69.** First-summer drake and three female Black Scoter, Tsawwassen, British Columbia, Canada, 6 April 2012. ©Jim Martin ([www.crazym.ca](http://www.crazym.ca)). The drake is a little more advanced, plumage-wise, than the Blackdog bird, but shows a very similar bill pattern and profile. Note also that although some females can show more extensive yellow bill marking than Common Scoter, many do not, and under typical field conditions, these birds would be exceedingly difficult to detect if found within the normal range of Common Scoter.

resembled a female, although the contrast of paler and darker areas on the face was less pronounced than in females of both species which are much cleaner and whiter in the face.

It has been suggested that the plumage of immature drake Black Scoters develops more slowly during the first year following hatching than does that of Common Scoters (Waring 1993). However, this was not especially apparent in June and July 2012 at Blackdog when first-summer drake Commons displayed a variety of plumage stages, including some on which maturation was less advanced than on the Black Scoter. First-summer birds typically show a paler, off-white belly than the flank and body plumage and this was indeed apparent on the Blackdog Black Scoter as it preened.

#### Bill features of immature drake scoters

Early in its second year of life, the Blackdog Black Scoter had developed a bill that, whilst not quite so eye-catching as that of an adult drake, nonetheless resembled it in most ways. In particular the coloured area extended back to the bill base and down to a uniform black border along the lower edge. The coloured area appeared mainly yellow, whilst that on the 2011 adult at Blackdog was a rich fiery orange. This feature is probably to some extent age-related, with immature birds showing yellow bill bases, whilst the colour on adults varies from yellow through to orange.

Immature drake Common Scoters can show a significant extent of colour. The bird in Plate 68 demanded attention, with the triangular shape of the bill colour superficially recalling Black Scoter. However, the coloured area did not extend far enough down the bill sides for that species and, most crucially, the entire circumference of the bill base was black. The orange colour on this first-summer drake Common Scoter is typical for the species, but differed from the yellow base of the Black Scoter's bill, and may provide a further supporting clue in the identification of putative birds.

#### Structure

Drake Black Scoters in all plumages appear to be bulkier birds than Common Scoters and this is especially apparent around the head and neck. In particular, Black Scoters tend to show a steeper forehead, flatter crown and fuller nape giving a rather squarer-headed appearance than is the case with Common Scoters. Furthermore, the neck of Black Scoter is thicker and does not give the slender or even sinuous-necked appearance often given when an alert Common Scoter raises its head.

It has been suggested that Black Scoters sit higher on the water than Common Scoters (e.g. Astins 1992). I have not found this a useful characteristic to focus on so much as Black Scoters simply giving an impression of a greater bulk. Black Scoters are also said to hold their tail



**Plate 70.** *First-summer drake Black Scoter, 15 July 2012, Sandy Hook National Park, New Jersey, USA. ©Mike Kolakowski. This bird shows a rather smoother bill profile than most, but would nonetheless be readily identifiable as a vagrant by the extent of the yellow area. Note also the stocky, square-headed appearance.*

erect in a Ruddy Duck-like manner more so than do Commons. This habit was certainly noted on the Blackdog birds in both 2011 and 2012, but again it is not especially useful as an identification feature with Common Scoters frequently adopting the same position. However, the tail of Black Scoter is also slightly shorter and this feature is detectable on reasonable field views.

## Behaviour

A particular behavioural trait displayed by the first-summer bird at Blackdog may circumstantially support the identification of other distant putative Black Scoters. When interacting with other scoters, the Blackdog bird was at times seen to adopt a rather peculiar posture with the head raised and the bill held open and slanted slightly downwards for periods of a second or more. This was commented upon and witnessed several times (Paul Baxter pers. obs.) and is probably related to the longer call of Black Scoter. The posture is also illustrated well for the 2011 Northumberland bird in Bradbury (2011). Furthermore, the 2012 Blackdog bird was, at times, especially aggressive, chasing other birds that came close to a female Common Scoter with which it, at least temporarily, appeared to be paired.

An additional potentially very useful trait that may aid in securing the identification of a Black Scoter is the apparent propensity for the species to frequent the surf line (Garner 2008). Certainly both the 2011 and 2012 Blackdog birds were rather close to shore when first discovered though, after the first few days, both subsequently spent the remainder of their stays at typical scoter distance.



**Plate 71.** *Female Black Scoter, Walnut Point, Talbot Co., Maryland, 22 August 2006. ©Bill Hubick (www.billhubick.com). A bird showing some yellow marking along the culmen. Any such birds should be closely grilled to fully decipher structural features. For more on the identification of female Black Scoters, see Garner (2008), Waring (1993) and Wegst & Kratzer (2010).*

### Identification pitfalls

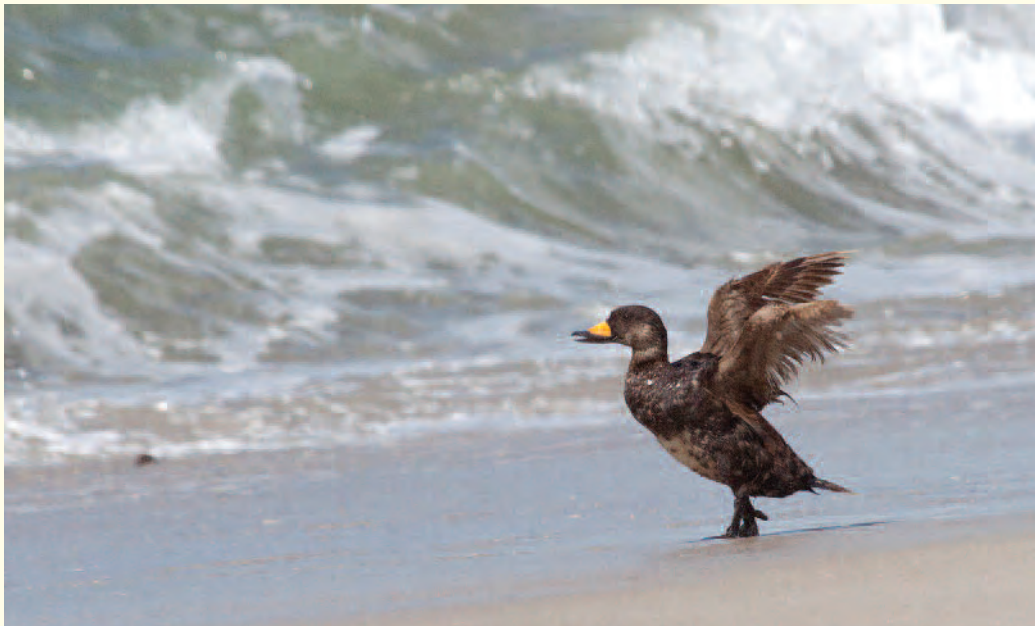
When faced with the identification of any vagrant birds, the possibility of variation within a commoner species needs consideration. This is particularly the case for Black Scoter. Variation in the extent of colour on the bills of Common Scoter, together with the often challenging conditions under which birds are observed, necessitates that a candidate Black Scoter needs to be viewed from a variety of angles, especially from the side, to ascertain fully the extent and shape of bill colouration. Common Scoters showing a greater extent of yellow than typical birds are not that unusual (one was described by Garner 1989; see also Wegst & Kratzer 2010).

An adult drake probable hybrid between Common and Surf Scoter in Moray was described by Pullan (1998). This bird showed an entirely orange bill and was apparently reported at times as a Black Scoter by unsuspecting viewers. A further bird with an entirely orange bill, considered possibly to be the same hybrid combination, was also at Blackdog at the same time as the 2012 Black Scoter (see Plate 74). This latter bird developed scattered white nape feathering later in its stay, supporting identifi-



**Plate 72.** First-summer drake Common Scoter, Preston Dock, Lancashire, England, 26 June 2011. © Paul Slade. This bird has moulted its head and most of the body feathers, but still shows juvenile wing and mantle feathers.

cation as this hybrid combination. Immatures of this hybrid combination have not been described, but observers faced with a possible immature drake Black Scoter should at least bear in mind the possibility of hybrids showing extensive pale bill colouration.



**Plate 73.** First-summer drake Black Scoter, Cape May, New Jersey, USA, 10 July 2009. ©Tony Leukering. Immature drakes of both species may show a pale belly and, whilst birds rarely show as well as this one, the feature can be readily seen on preening birds.





**Plate 74.** Drake possible hybrid Common × Surf Scoter, Blackdog, 9 August 2012. ©Nick Littlewood. The extensively orange bill on such a bird may, at a distance, recall Black Scoter. However, the similarities are superficial. As well as structural differences, closer examination shows that the black lower border to the bill of a Black Scoter is lacking here. Furthermore, in the case of this bird at least, white at the bill base and on the nape further hinted at the likely identity.

#### Identification summary under typical field conditions

Given good views, immature drake Black Scoters are relatively straightforward to identify. More typically, it is likely that the observer will be faced with a distant bird among a dense 'soup' of other scoters, often disappearing behind waves or diving repeatedly. Throw in wind, rain and poor visibility and the challenge to secure a safe identification may be considerable. Features of the bill will still likely draw attention initially to a putative Black, whilst a bird that is repeatedly detected and, most importantly, stands out from the crowd in side-profile as well as head-on warrants close scrutiny. Structural differences from Common Scoter, especially around the head, are usually pretty clear, even at a distance. Poorly-seen birds may have to be left as 'possibles', but, in combination, the features described here produce a bird that can be surprisingly distinctive.

#### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Paul Baxter for useful comments that considerably improved the manuscript. Thanks also to the photographers credited alongside the images for permitting their use, to Lisa Becker for translating parts of Wegst & Kratzer (2010) and to Rose Toney for proof reading.

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# Lapland Buntings in Scotland in spring 2011 (with additional comments on the autumn 2010 influx)

S.L. RIVERS



Plate 75. Lapland Bunting, female, Moray & Nairn, May 2012. © David Davenport

This short article is a follow-on from the previous paper (Rivers & Forsyth 2012) which documented the record-breaking influx of Lapland Buntings into Scotland (and Britain) in autumn 2010. Given the huge numbers of birds involved in that influx it is not surprising that the following spring also produced record numbers in several recording areas, not just the Northern and Western Isles.

## Early winter records in Scotland in 2011

A small number of birds from the 2010 influx had lingered in Scotland into late November and December. Consequently several recording areas reported birds in the following January and February.

Though none were reported from Shetland or Fair Isle, on Orkney two were noted at Lairò Water, Shapinsay on 8 January; one at Birsay Links, Mainland on 9 January and one on North Ronaldsay on 26 February. On the Outer Hebrides five were still on the Bornish machair (South Uist) on 1–2 January; five were in a garden on the Eye Peninsula (Lewis) on 7 January; two at Eochar (SU) and 10 at Kilpheder (SU) on 9 January; one on Balemòr (North Uist) on 21 January; at least eight were at Eochar on 30 January.

In Fife up to eight were present on Crail Airfield, Fife Ness (Fife) during January. In Argyll three were at Oronsay airstrip, Colonsay on 8 January; two at Ardnave RSPB Reserve, Islay on 9th and 16 January; one at Saligo Bay, Islay on 23rd and 27 January and 2 February, and one at Killinallan, Islay on 2 February. Two were at Priestside, near Dumfries (D&G) on 20–21 February and one at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 27 February.

## Spring records in Scotland in 2011

Mid-March saw a number of birds beginning to move north again, particularly on the west coast areas of Argyll and the Outer Hebrides. The biggest numbers occurred in mid to late April, with a few noted in early May and the last was one still on Fair Isle on 29 May.

**Shetland:** one was at Copister, Yell on 26 March. There were 10 at Quendale, South Mainland on 15–16 April; 10 at Virkie, South Mainland on 16 April; a male at Haroldswick, Unst on 17th; five at Lamba Ness, Unst on 20th, 15 at Quendale and 17 at Virkie on 20–21st; three on Foula on 21st; four there on 22nd plus one at Skaw, Whalsay; five at Uyeasound, Unst on 24th; three there on 25th plus two on Foula, and one on Foula on 28 April. In May singles were at Cullivoe, Yell and Westing, Unst on 1st; one at Baltasound, Unst on 3rd; two on Foula on 6th; one at Northdale, Unst on 9th, and finally one on Foula on 17 May.

The count of 17 birds at Virkie in April constitutes the highest spring site counts recorded in Shetland. The previous highest counts were of five birds on Foula on 10 May 1954, and four on Fetlar on 30 April 1977.

**Fair Isle:** singles were noted on 6 March and 18–21 March. In April there was one on 2–3rd; up to two on 4–6th; one on 9–10th; up to three on 11–12th; up to five on 15–17th; up to nine on 19th; two on 20th; six on 21st; 10 on 22nd; two on 24th; three on 25–26th; 14 on 28th; 10 on 29th; and nine on 30th. In May eight were seen on 1st; six on 2nd; two on 4th; and then singles noted on 8–9th, 11th and 21–29 May.

The count of 14 birds on 28 April is a new record spring day count for the island. The previous highest count was of six on 24 April 1961 and 23rd and 26 April 1988.

**Orkney:** on North Ronaldsay one was seen intermittently during March, with an influx of 16 birds on 30th and 20 present on 31 March. There were peak counts on North Ronaldsay of 65+ birds on 10 April and of 75 on 14 April, with 'up to 40' noted on several other dates mid-month. Five were present on 1 May and two on 4–5 May. Elsewhere on the islands there was one on Egilsay on 8 April; one at South Ronaldsay on 12th; 15 at Loch of Tankerness, Mainland on 13th, one near Stromness, Mainland on 15–16 April; four at South Walls, Hoy on 16th; two on Egilsay on 17 April; one on Burray the same day; five at The Gloup, Deerness on 21st, a summer-plumaged female on Westray on 28 April, and one was at Loch of Skail, Mainland on 1 May.

The count of 75 birds on North Ronaldsay on 14 April vastly exceeds the previous spring highest day counts on North Ronaldsay (and Orkney/ Scotland) of seven birds on 25 April 1988 and 30 March 2008, and is a new record spring site count for these recording areas and for Scotland.

**Outer Hebrides:** there were reports of returning birds from 13 March when two were seen at Eochar (South Uist), with five there on 20th, and seven at Butt of Lewis (Lewis) on 26 March - a new peak count for the month. Birds were noted throughout April with highest counts from Balranald (North Uist) peaking at 54 on 19th, with two nearby at Aird an Runair and 21 at Drimsdale (SU), the same day. Elsewhere there were two at Peninerine (SU) and three at Culla Bay (Benbecula) on 2nd; six at Ardvule and seven at Askernish (both SU), on 12th; two at Grenitote (NU), and singles at Barvas and Breinish (both Lew), on 15th; 10 at Clachan (NU) on 17th; one at Eoropie on 18th; three at Siadar on 20th; and one at Butt of Lewis (all Lew) on 23rd; one at Rubha Ardvule and six at Drimsdale (both SU), on 26th; two at Siadar on 28th; a singing male at Labost (Lew) on 29th and a female at Butt of Lewis on 30th. The last sightings were singles at Balranald (NU) on 1st and 5 May, and Siadar, Lewis on 4 May

The 54 birds at Balranald on 19 April constitute a new spring site count record for the Outer Hebrides. The previous highest 'spring' counts had been four at

Balranald (NU) on 29 April 1989, and four near Loch Carnan (SU) on 24 January 1997.

**Highland:** a female was at Kirkton Bay, Lochalsh on 28 March; a male at Kildonan, Isle of Eigg on 3–6 April (first island record); a male at Achnahaird Campsite, Enard Bay on 10th; one at Morefield, near Ullapool on 13th; a male at Elgol, Skye on 13 April, with three males and a female there on 14–16 April at least; a female at Corntown, near Conon Bridge on 17th; one at Achiltibuie on 19th; two at Traigh House, 4 miles SSW of Mallaig on 23 April, and two were reported at Broadford, Skye on 25 April.

The four birds at Elgol, Skye on 14–16 April constitute a new highest spring site count for the recording area. Two at Glen Goibhre, on 1 February 1987 was the previous largest first-half of the year count.

**Moray & Nairn:** three were at Spey Bay on 15 April - a new record spring site count for the recording area, exceeding two birds seen near Aldunie, Cabrach on 21 March 1988.

**Perth & Kinross:** six were near Carn na Gabhar, Beinn a' Ghlo on 10 April. This constitutes a new record day count for the recording area.

**Argyll:** one was present around Oronsay airstrip, Colonsay from 9–12 March, and three were at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 28 March. In April one was at Balephetrish, Tiree on 11th; one at Traigh nan Gilean, Tiree on 12th; two at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 24th, and one at Ardnave RSPB Reserve, Islay on 28 April. One was present at Heylipol Church, Tiree on 1–9 May.

A count of at least four at Kilchoman, Islay on 6 April 1988 remains the highest spring site count for the recording area.

**Clyde Islands:** four were at St. Ninian's Bay, Isle of Bute on 10 April - the first sighting for the recording area.

### Additional autumn 2010 records

**Moray & Nairn:** A sighting of six birds at Inchroy, Glen Avon on 10 November 2010 was still being assessed by the local records committee at the time the previous paper was written but has now been accepted. It constitutes the highest day count for the recording area, just exceeding the previous record of five at Spey Bay on 19 October 1977.

### Scale of the 2010/11 Lapland Bunting influx

It is no surprise to find that several recording areas in England, Wales and Ireland also experienced record numbers of Lapland Buntings during the 2010/11 influx. The nine recording areas in England with new record

site counts are all from the south-west of the country or the south coast, plus five inland counties/recording areas, while only four of the 14 Welsh recording areas plus the Isle of Man also returned new peak counts (Pennington *et al.* 2012).

The description of the 1993/94 influx of Lapland Buntings in *Birds in England* (Brown & Grice 2005) omitted details of birds noted on the English east coast, particularly at Flamborough Head, Yorkshire (Ian Wallace *in litt.*). This arrival involved birds of Scandinavian/Russian origin and was correlated with large movements seen in continental Europe. Sightings at Flamborough occurred from 11 September 1993 to 27 March 1994 with a peak count of 416 birds on 28 October and an overall bird-days total of 2,334 sightings. The total number of birds in Yorkshire alone in this period was conservatively estimated at 1,500–2,000 individuals (Flamborough Ornithological Group Report 1993; Ian Wallace *in litt.*). While it is clear that the 2010/11 influx brought the greatest number of birds ever recorded in Scotland, this may not be the case in England. Given the number of birds involved in the arrival in 1993/94, and that fewer than a quarter of English recording areas (9/42) had a new record site day-count during the 2010/11 influx (Pennington *et al.* 2012), it would appear very likely that the former event brought higher numbers to England. However, the number of birds present in Scotland during the winter of 1993/94 was calculated to be below 100 birds (Forrester *et al.* 2007), with only North-east Scotland experiencing high totals in that period. Though Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Kent and counties from Dorset to Cornwall, plus the Isles of Scilly also had exceptional numbers during the 1993/94 influx, none recorded totals in excess of 110 birds. Therefore, it appears that the influx of 2010/11 was indeed the largest recorded in Britain, albeit from a different vector and population than that in 1993/94.

The influx did not just involve birds reaching Britain, and the true enormity of the movement is more apparent from the fact that sites in Iceland, southern Norway,

Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Spain and Poland all experienced record numbers of birds (Pennington *et al.* 2012, Yésou 2013, Lawicki 2013).

### Acknowledgements

My thanks to all the Scottish bird recorders who provided details on the numbers of Lapland Buntings in their respective areas during the 2010/11 influx, and to Angus Murray for information from *Birdline Scotland* records. I am particularly grateful to Ian Wallace for drawing my attention to the extent of the Lapland Bunting influx of 1993/94 in England, and in particular for details of numbers at Flamborough and elsewhere in Yorkshire.

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# Scottish Bird Sightings

## 1 October to 31 December 2012

### S.L. RIVERS

**Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.**

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayr; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

The momentum of autumn migration continued unabated from September. Once again the Northern and Western Isles picked up most of the rarities, including a rather unexpected first for Scotland, but the mainland was not entirely unrewarded. On Shetland there were exceptional numbers of Olive-backed Pipits from mid-October to early November and of Hornemann's Arctic Redpolls from October into December. Also unusual for those islands was the widespread arrival of Blue Tits and Great Tits in mid-October, some lingering to the end of December. Similarly unexpected was a large influx of Long-tailed Tits noted in Orkney, Highland, Argyll and the Outer Hebrides.

**Ross's Goose:** one was seen at Loaningfoot, near Southernness Point (D&G) on 24 November. **Snow Goose:** two white-phase birds were at Coull, Islay (Arg) on 2–3 October; one was near Stromness (Ork) in mid-October, with up to three different birds on Orkney in November; two white-phase birds were in the Balranald/Knockintorran

area, North Uist (OH) from 18 October to 18 December at least. A blue-phase bird was noted near Loch Gruinart, Islay (Arg) on 1 November, and one at Skinnet/Halkirk, near Thurso (Caith) on 29 November to 2 December. **Vagrant Canada Geese:** presumed Nearctic birds were noted as follows - a Lesser (race *parvipes*) was at Loch Gruinart, Islay (Arg) from 3 October, with a Richardson's (race *hutchinsii*) there as well from 4th. Five *hutchinsii* were at Loch Indaal, Islay on 23 October, with four there and one at Gruinart on 27 October, one in the Gruinart area throughout November, and at least two still on the island in December. A Richardson's was near Tayinloan, Kintyre (Arg) on 1–2 November, with it or another at Kilchenzie, near Campbeltown, Mull of Kintyre from 22 November to 24 December at least. A Richardson's was on Berneray, North Uist (OH) on 14–15 November, and one was near Kirkbean (D&G) on 16 November, with it or another on Preston Merse near Loaningfoot/ Southernness Point (D&G) from mid-November to 22 December at least. A Todd's (race *interior*) was in coastal fields between Rhunahaorine and Tayinloan, Kintyre at the end of October, with it or another near Campbeltown, Mull of Kintyre on 20 December. Four were on Islay from end October to mid-November, and an adult Todd's was NW of Southernness Point at the end of December. **Red-breasted Goose:** an adult was on Islay (Arg) from 21 October to end December; an adult was at Preston Merse near Loaningfoot/Southernness Point (D&G) from 19–31 December.

**Mandarin:** an unusual record was a drake on Loch Leodasay, Clachan on

3 December before relocating to Baleshare, both North Uist (OH) from 7–31 December. **American Wigeon:** a drake was on Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 4 October, and again on 24–28 October; a drake was at Kirk Loch, Lochmaben (D&G) on 13 October to 2 November; one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve, (NES) from 31 October to 5 November and again from 3 December to the end of the year; a drake was at St. John's Loch, near Dunnet (Caith) from 3–18 November. A drake was at Udale Bay (High) on 24–31 December. **Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were noted as follows: at Kinneil (UF) on 5 October; on Shapinsay (Ork) on 12 November; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve from 18 November; on Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) from 18–21 November; on Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 22 November; on Loch Mor/Loch Sandary, Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 3–31 December, and at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve during November and again from 23–31 December. **Black Duck:** the presumed returning drake was at Loch Sunart, Strontian (High) on 23–28 December at least. **Blue-winged Teal:** a drake was seen at Threave (D&G) irregularly from 29 November to the end of December.

**Ring-necked Duck:** a female was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 19 October; an immature was on Loch Holsta, North Uist (OH) on 6 November and 28 November to 2 December at least; a drake was at Loch Alvie, near Aviemore (High) on 7–8 November, and a drake at Loch Watten, near Lynegar (Caith) on 10 November. **Lesser Scaup:** two drakes were at Loch Watten, near Lynegar (Caith) on 10 November, with one



Plates 76–77. Gyrfalcon, Kilpheder, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, December 2012. © John Kemp

remaining to 13th, and one or other at St John's Loch, near Dunnet (Caith) on 18 November. A drake was at Soulseat Loch, near Castle Kennedy (D&G) on 26 November, and a first-winter female at Loch of Ayre, St Mary's (Ork) from 20 December to 2013. **King Eider:** a drake lingered off Burghead (M&N) from September to at least 27 December; a drake was at Roseheart (NES) on 29–31 December, and a near-adult drake was at Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 31 December. **Surf Scoter:** the bird at Muckle Roe, Central Mainland (Shet) remained from September to 3 October; a juvenile was at Bunesan Bay, Mull (Arg) on 1 October; a drake was in Inganess Bay and Kirkwall Bay (Ork) from 17–19 October at least. In Fife a drake was in Largo Bay from 13 October to the end of December, and one flew past Kinghorn on 17 December; a female was off Embo (High) on 27–29 October, and an immature bird was at Loch na Reivil, North Uist (OH) from 29 November to 10 December at least.

**Black-browed Albatross:** one flew past Frenchman's Rocks, Islay (Arg) on 8 November. **Eurasian Bittern:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from 4 November; one at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 16 November, and one at Castle Loch LNR, near Lochmaben (D&G) from at least 24 December to 2013. **Cattle Egret:** the bird at Kilmuir Church/ Balranald, North Uist (OH) in September remained to 4 October. **Little Egret:** in October one was noted at the Eden Estuary (Fife) on several dates, one on the River Don, Aberdeen on 13 October; at least four were in D&G at the end of October and throughout November, with at least two still in December. In Lothian there was one in Belhaven Bay, Dunbar (Loth) from 10–29 November, one at Musselburgh on 2 December with at least two at Tynninghame Bay, near Dunbar from 14 December. One was at Skinflats (UF) on 16 December. **Pied-billed Grebe:** a 1st-winter bird was at Loch Smerdate/Loch na Bagh, South Uist (OH) on 26–30 November and 5–10 December.

**Hobby:** one was on Yell (Shet) on 19 October. **Gyrfalcon:** a white-phase bird was at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 18 November, presumably the same bird was at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 1 December, Ardivachar, South Uist on 3 December, Balranald/Baleshare on 11 December, while another [on plumage] was at Loch Paible, North Uist on 16 December, then Kilpheder and Orosay, South Uist on 17–18th. A dead white-phase bird was found at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 1 December. One was at Mull Head, Deerness (Ork) on 13 December, with presumably the same juvenile bird near Stromness Water Works on 22 December. **Spotted Crane:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 13–14 October. **American Coot:** one was seen near Daliburgh, South Uist on 26 November.

**American Golden Plover:** on Shetland one remained at Veensgarth, Central Mainland from September to 10 October, and one was at Tingwall, Central Mainland on 12–13 October; on Orkney one lingered on North Ronaldsay from September to 29 October, with a juvenile at The Loons, Marwick, Mainland on 5 October. About seven to nine birds were present on the Outer Hebrides in October; a juvenile was at Barrapol/Sandaig, Tiree (Arg) on 1–9 October, and one lingered from September to 13 October at The Wig, and then Kirk Loch, Lochmaben (both D&G). **White-rumped Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Northton, Harris (OH) on 18 October, and a juvenile at Brora (High) on 28–30 October. **Baird's Sandpiper:** one was reported at Northton, Harris (OH) on 19 October, and one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 26 November. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** on the Outer Hebrides about seven different birds were seen in the first half of October, including three at Loch Grogarry, North Uist between 2–7th. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** two remained at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from September to 5 October; singles

were at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 13 October and at Loch Hempriggs, near Wick (Caith) on 14 October.

**Long-billed Dowitcher:** a juvenile was at Loch Grogarry, North Uist (OH) from 4–8 October; a juvenile was in the Baleshare area, North Uist, on 23rd and 26 October, with presumably the same individual also seen on 11th and 16 November. **Spotted Sandpiper:** a juvenile remained at Lower Voe, Central Mainland (Shet) from September to 2 October. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** One was at Little Kilmory, Isle of Bute (Arg) on 1–3 October.

**Bonaparte's Gull:** an adult was off Rubha Reidh, near Melvaig (High) on 16 October. **Laughing Gull:** a second-winter at Rosehearty (NES) from 19–31 December also visited Phingask Bay, Fraserburgh (NES) on 29 December. **Mediterranean Gull:** a good series of sightings away from the usual Firth of Forth hotspots included: an adult near St. Mary's, Holm (Ork) on 1–3 October with it or another at Graemeshall Loch, Holm on 4 November and an adult at Stromness (Ork) the same date. An adult was at Burghead (M&N) on 7 October; a second-winter at Blackdog (NES) on 24 November; an adult at Rosehearty (NES) on 20th and 29 December; a second-winter at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 25 October, with one at Arbroath (A&D) on 2 December, and one was at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) on 30 November. In Upper Forth one was at Blackness on 7 October and Kinneil occasionally during the month, and one was just north of Stenhousemuir on 18 November. In Lothian one was at Dunbar on 15 December, and one at Dirleton on 16 December. In Argyll one was at Machair Bay, Islay on 21 October, a first-winter was on Islay on 22 October and an adult was at Lochgilphead (Arg) on 1–2 December. In Ayrshire one was at Maidens on 14 October, with two there on 16–18 October, six at Largs on 6 November, one at Doonfoot on 8th and 28 November, an adult at Barassie from 18 December to 2013,

an adult and a first-winter were at Doonfoot on 29 December, and a first-winter was near Tarbolton on 30 December. One was at Soleburn /Loch Ryan (D&G) throughout October and again on 10–11 November, with it or another nearby at Stranraer in November and December. **Ring-billed Gull:** the presumed returning adult was present at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) to 16 October. **Glaucous Gull:** earliest records in the period included singles on Yell and on Unst (both Shet) on 4 October; on Fair Isle on 9 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12 October; at Eorpie, Lewis (OH) on 13 October, and one at Machir Bay, Islay (Arg) on 7 October. Fairly widespread in northern and western areas by November, but numbers still scarce. **Iceland Gull:** virtually none were reported in October, but did include one on North Ronaldsay on 1–2 October. Reported in small numbers in north in November, and rather more numerous and widespread by late December.

**Turtle Dove:** reports included one at Huxter, West Mainland (Shet) on 5 October, and up to four birds present on the Outer Hebrides in the first half of October. **Hoopoe:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 14 October, with it or another on Whalsay (Shet) on 1–3 November. **Wryneck:** one was at Barns Ness (Loth) on 1–3 October, and one at Helendale, Lerwick (Shet) on 21 October. **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker:** a first-winter female was at Scalloway, Central Mainland (Shet) on 15–19 October - the first record for Scotland since the species removal from the Scottish list after an SBRC review in 2011. Its arrival coincided with an influx of Blue Tits and Great Tits to Shetland. **Golden Oriole:** one was at Sandness, West Mainland (Shet) on 18–20 August, one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20 August, with another at Ollaberry, North Mainland (Shet) on 10 September. **Isabelline Shrike:** one remained near Toab, South Mainland (Shet) from September to 5 October. **Red-backed Shrike:** on Shetland singles were at Sandwick, South

Mainland on 1–3 October, Grutness, South Mainland on 5–6th and Whalsay on 14–16 October. A juvenile was at Eorpie, Lewis (OH) on 7 October. **Great Grey Shrike:** one was on Fair Isle on 11–18 October, and one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 14 October.

**Firecrest:** one was at Gartantoid, Loch Gruinart, Islay (Arg) on 14 October; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve, (NES) on 14 October; one at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 18 October; one at Tobermory, Isle of Mull (Arg) on 13 November; and one at Old Kinord (NES) on 31 December. **Blue Tit:** an exceptional influx occurred on Shetland with birds reported widely: the first were two at Vidlin, Central Mainland on 14 October, but reports continued to the end of the year, mostly ones and twos, but with a peak count of up to 12 at Vidlin on 21 December. One was on Fair Isle on 24–28 October (first there since 1989), and singles on Orkney near Loch of Tankerness, Mainland on 31 October, on St. Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay from 7 November into December, and on Stronsay in December. **Great Tit:** exceptional numbers were noted on the Northern Isles. On Shetland the first were two on Out Skerries (Shet) on 14 October, and reports continued to the end of the year, mostly singles but with a peak count of four at Scalloway, Central Mainland on 19 October. One on Fair Isle on 13–17 October was joined by a second from 18th to at least 28 October, with one still on the island throughout November and December. On Orkney there was one on Sanday and a male on Shapinsay during December. **Woodlark:** one was on Fair Isle on 16–31 October, and a first-winter on the Isle of Eigg (High) on 27–28 October. **Red-rumped Swallow:** three were reported at Addiewell railway station (Loth) on 20 October; a first-year was at Mirbister, Harray (Ork) on 22 October, and one at Blackness (UF/Loth) on 3–4 November. **Long-tailed Tit:** unusual numbers (dark-headed subspecies) were noted



Plate 78. Woodlark, Isle of Eigg, Highland, October 2012. © Bob McMillan

outside the normal range, with singles on Shetland from 1–11 October. Larger numbers were noted on Orkney with three at Windwick, South Ronaldsay from 11 October, followed by up to six there on 16th, up to eight at Langskail Plantation, Tankerness on 22nd, at least six at Binscarth Wood/Finstown on 3–9 November, 10+ there on 17th, five still on 18 November, and then birds present at Finstown to 1 December, three at Echnaloch Bay, Burray on 5th, and five in Kirkwall on 6–26 December at least. A notable influx of birds occurred on the Outer Hebrides, starting with a group of at least six on Barra on 11 October, peak counts of 20+ on Barra on 15–18th and 20 at Northton, Harris on 17–18 October, and 12 in Stornoway on 5 November, and the last report was of a group of four at Loch Eynort, South Uist on 9 December. On Skye (High) a flock of nine was at Ose on 20 October, c10 at Caroy on 22 October, 24 at Kyleakin on 25 October and 6 November. Many more than usual were noted in Argyll, with up to 38 on Tiree on 14 October.

**Greenish Warbler:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 18 August, and one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 23–24 September; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14–15 August. **Arctic Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 2 October; one was at Ronas Voe, North Mainland (Shet) on 21–22 October, and one at Helendale, Lerwick (Shet) on 6–11

November. **Pallas's Leaf Warbler:** one was at Hatton Water Works, near East Haven (A&D) on 12–15 October, one at Easter Muchalls, (NES) on 13–15 October, and one on Rousay (Ork) on 10 November. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** up to 40 birds were noted in Shetland to mid-October, with a late bird at Brae, Central Mainland on 3 November. Up to 11 birds were on Fair Isle between 1–24 October; on Orkney up to six were on North Ronaldsay between 5–23 October, plus singles at Deerness, Mainland on 15 October and at Windwick, South Ronaldsay on 18–20 October. At least a dozen were seen on the Outer Hebrides up to 19 October, and in Argyll one was at Balephuill, Tiree on 3–5 October, another there on 13–19 October; one at Gartantoid, Loch Gruinart, Islay on 14 October, one at Port Charlotte, Islay on 26 October and one at Erasaid, Islay on 31 October to 2 November. Elsewhere in October, at least four were seen in NE Scotland; about six in Angus & Dundee, two were at Fife Ness (Fife) on 12 October, with up to eight individuals between Crail and "the Patch" in mid-month; singles in Lothian at Skateraw and Barns Ness on 12th, at Scoughall on 23rd and at Barns Ness again on 24 October. **Hume's Warbler:** singles were at Norwick, Unst on 16–17th and 24 October; one was on Fair Isle on 17–18 October. **Dusky Warbler:** on Shetland one was at Symbister, Whalsay on 12 October, one at

Sandwick, South Mainland on 19th, and one at Sumburgh, South Mainland on 20 October. **Radde's Warbler:** two were at Kilminning, Fife Ness (Fife) on 18–19 October, with one still on 20–21st, and one was at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 18–21 October.

**Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 3 October. **Lanceolated Warbler:** an unringed bird was on Fair Isle on 2 October, with a ringed bird [t&r Fair Isle 26 September] relocated on 3–10 October, and seen again on 16–20 and 22 October. One was trapped on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17 October. **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler:** a first-winter was at Kilminning, Fife Ness (Fife) from 14 October to 20 November - a new record longest stay for this species in Britain, and only the second on the Scottish mainland. **Paddyfield Warbler:** one remained on Fair Isle from September to 1 October. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one remained at Hametoun, Foula (Shet) to 2 October; one remained on Fair Isle from September to 1 October; one was in a garden at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 2 October; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9 October; one was on Fair Isle on 11 October; one at Dale of Walls, West Mainland (Shet) on 12 October; one at Northbay, Barra (OH) on 16 October, and one near Inverness (High) on 20 October. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were at Thorntonloch (Loth) on 3 October, and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5–6 October. **Eurasian Reed Warbler:** a bird showing some features of the 'Caspian' race *fuscus* was at Kergord, Central Mainland (Shet) on 4–5 November. **Great Reed Warbler:** one was at Renwick, South Mainland (Shet) on 5 October. **Barred Warbler:** in Shetland up to 11 were seen in October, and one at Kergord, Central Mainland on 4 November. One was on Fair Isle on 5 October; while in Orkney one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11 October, one on South Ronaldsay on 16 October, and one at Tankerness, Mainland on 4 November. Up to eight were found on the Outer



Hebrides in October, including two on Barra on 7th. Elsewhere one was at Barns Ness (Loth) on 2–3 October, one at Thorntonloch (Loth) on 7th; one at Burnmouth (Bord); two were at Fife Ness in the latter half of October; one was at Portlethen (NES) on 27 October; one at Kilminning, Fife Ness (Fife) on 4–14 November; and one at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 16 November.

**Waxwing:** the earliest report of the autumn was one at Quoyangry, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 October. The first on Shetland was one at Norwick, Unst on 14 October, though the main arrival was not until late October and early November, with up to 130 in Lerwick on 30 October. The first autumn birds on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) both arrived on 19 October. The peak count on Orkney was of 150+ birds at Stromness on 3 November. A notable influx occurred on the Outer Hebrides, with the first bird at Gleann/Brevig, Barra on 17 October, a peak count of 350 birds at Stornoway, Lewis on 4 November, and the last sighting was of one at South Glendale, South Uist on 26 December. Elsewhere the first arrival in NE Scotland was one at Edzell on 24 October, in Lothian at Haddington on 25 October, and in Argyll was on Tiree on 28 October. Large counts included about 1,000 at Kyle of Lochalsh (High) on 12 November, with 780 there on 17 November, 600 at Ullapool (High) on 22–23 November, 600 in Glasgow on 22 November, and 424 in Aberdeen (NES) on 10 November. In December high counts included up to 800 at the Eastern Cemetery, Dundee (A&D); 200+ at Annan and Minigaff (both D&G); 200+ in Corstorphine, Edinburgh (Loth) and 100 at Wester Hailes, Edinburgh on 29 December. **Nuthatch:** one at Inverawe, near Tainuill (Arg) on 8 November was well outside the normal 'core' area, but one in gardens at Dollar, Clacks (UF) during November, two in Dunblane (UF) on 29 November, and one at Blairdrummond (UF) on 1

December may indicate northward range expansion in Central Scotland, rather than 'lost' individuals. **Black-bellied Dipper:** one was at Gulberwick, South Mainland (Shet) on 3–16 November.

**White's Thrush:** one was at Creachan, Barra (OH) on 13 October. **Swainson's Thrush:** one at Morghan, Barra (OH), on 2–3 October was relocated at Creachan, Barra on 4th. **Siberian Thrush:** a male was seen briefly at West Heath, Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 14 October. **Eyebrowed Thrush:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 13 October. **Black-throated Thrush:** a first-winter male was on Fair Isle on 6 October; and one was near Loch of Benston, Central Mainland (Shet) on 1 December. **Bluethroat:** up to eight were on Shetland in October; one remained on Fair Isle from September to 1 October, with another there on 30–31 October; and two were present on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11–12 October. **Siberian Rubythroat:** a female was present around Schoolton, Fair Isle from 23 October to 3 November. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** up to nine were present on Shetland in October, plus one on Fair Isle on 11 October; on Orkney singles were on North Ronaldsay on 8th and 20 October; at least five were noted on the Outer Hebrides in the first half of October, with a high count of three on Barra on 6th. Elsewhere singles were at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 13 October and Ballinoe, Tiree on 20 October [first and second island records]; one at Balmedie CP (NES) on 13th, two at Fife Ness (Fife) from 14 October; one at Mains of Usan (A&D) on 14th, and one at Easter Muchalls (NES) on 15 October. **Siberian Stonechat:** on Shetland one remained at Sandwick/Hoswick, South Mainland from September to 8 October, another was at Mioness, Out Skerries on 1 October, and one was at Norwick, Unst, on 29 October. **Pied Wheatear:** one was at Quendale, South Mainland on 23 October and then at Virkie, South Mainland

(Shet), on 24th. **Desert Wheatear:** a female was at Rattray Head (NES) on 2–31 December.

**Citrine Wagtail:** one was on Fair Isle on 5 October. **Richard's Pipit:** on Shetland singles were noted on Fetlar on 2nd and 10 October, at Norwick, Unst on 12 October, at Quendale and Sumburgh (both South Mainland) on 13th, at Old Scatness, South Mainland on 19th, and one was on Foula on 27 October. On Fair Isle up to three different birds were noted from 1–10 October. Three were near Burwick, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14 October. One was at Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 13 October; one was at Barns Ness (Loth) on 15 November, and one was at Loch Ordais, Lewis (OH) on 25–26 December. **Olive-backed Pipit:** on Shetland singles were at Northmavine, North Mainland, at Quendale and at Brake, both South Mainland on 13 October, and at Haroldswick, Unst on 13–15 October; at Vidlin, Central Mainland, and at Levenwick and Old Scatness (both South Mainland) on 14 October. One was on Foula and one at Tresta, West Mainland on 14–15 October, one at Helendale, Lerwick on 14–16 October, and singles were at Scalloway and Kergord (both Central Mainland) on 15th; at Skaw, Unst; at Voe, Central Mainland and on Foula on 16 October. Singles were at West Voe of Sumburgh and Maywick (both South Mainland), and at Baltasound, Unst on 18 October, at Boddam, and at Fladdabister (both South Mainland) on 19 October. One was on Out Skerries on 21 October, and one flew over Virkie, South Mainland on 24 October. One was at Burrarfirth, Unst on 3 November. On Fair Isle two were seen on 11 October, with one still on 12th. Another was found there on 16 October, and a different bird (on plumage) was present on 17th. Four were present together near Schoolton (FI) on 18 October, with two seen on 19–21st, three on 22nd, two on 23–24 October and one on 25–26th. On Orkney singles were on North Ronaldsay on 12th and 22–23 October, and Skelwick, Westray on 14

October and Noup, Westray on 17 October. One was at Ardveenish, Barra (OH) on 16 October. **Water Pipit:** one was at Barns Ness (Loth) throughout November and December to 2013. **Buff-bellied Pipit:** on Shetland at least one was present at Renwick/Scousburgh, South Mainland from September to 4 October, and one was on Foula on 28 October. One remained at Smerdate, South Uist (OH) from September to 2 October. **Pechora Pipit:** one remained at Norwick, Unst (Shet) from September to 2 October; one was at Shirva, Fair Isle on 1–2 October, and one was seen on the Isle of May on 13 October - a first for the island.

**Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll:** on Shetland one remained at Norwick, Unst from September to 11 October. One was on Out Skerries on 5 October, one on Foula on 16 October, one at Vatshoull, Whalsay on 18–22 October, one at Maywick, South Mainland on 27 October, one at Baltasound, Unst, on 30 October to 2 November, and two at North Roe, North Mainland on 4 November. Five were at Baltasound, Unst on 4 November, with four there on 5th, two on 7th, and four on 8th, then five again on 9th, four on 12–27th November, then three on 1 December; two were at Halligarth, Unst on 6 November, with one still there on 7th, and two were at Uyeasound, Unst on 11–13 November, and three on 18th. One was at Norwick, Unst on 29–30 November. There were two at Uyeasound, at least one at Baltasound and one at Norwick on 2 December, and finally one at Baltasound on 17 December. On Fair Isle one was noted on 18 October, and another on 25 October. On Orkney a first-winter male was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17–22 October, with two on 19th, and a third individual on 22nd. Singles were on Westray on 6th and 19th, and one on South Ronaldsay on 8 October. On the Outer Hebrides there was one was at Port of Ness, Lewis on 14 October, two at Eoropie, Lewis on 16 October, one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis

on 20 October, two at Port of Ness on 29 October, and two there again on 3 November. **Coue's Arctic Redpoll:** one was at Baltasound, Unst on 13 October, one on Fair Isle on 2 November, and one found dead at Harray, near Dounby (Ork) on 15 October was probably of this form.

**Common Rosefinch:** up to eight were on Shetland in October, and one was on Fair Isle on 21 October. Elsewhere a female was at Aird Mhor, Barra (OH) on 1 October, and an immature at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 19 October. **Hawfinch:** sightings away from the Scone (P&K) site included several on Shetland: one at Sandwick, South Mainland on 1 October, one on Out Skerries on 2 October, and three at Norwick, Unst on 24 October, with one still on 25th. On Orkney one lingered on North Ronaldsay from September to 10 October, one was seen at Stromness on 20 October, one on Burray on 2 November, and a female at Finstown, Mainland from 15–24 December at least. Elsewhere there was one at Cotehill Farm, Sands of Forvie (NES) on 12–17 October, one at Auchenblae (NES) on 13–15 October at least, a male near Port Ellen, Islay (Arg) on 24 October, with a female there on 26 October. One was in Kingston (M&N) on 11 December.

**Lapland Bunting:** earliest reports were of one North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 August, at Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 2 September, one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 3rd, one at Scatness, South Mainland (Shet) on 4th, and two on Fair Isle on 5th. Moderate numbers were reported from then on. **Chestnut-eared Bunting:** one was at Eastshore, Virkie, South Mainland on 23–25 October - the second Scottish and British record. **Rustic Bunting:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5 October. **Little Bunting:** on Shetland singles were at Harrier, Foula and Kergord, Central Mainland on 2 October, one on Whalsay on 5 October; one at Scatness, South Mainland on 12 October; singles at Sumburgh, Geosetter and Scousburgh, all South Mainland, on 13 October; singles at Burray, Yell and Sumburgh, South Mainland on 14 October; one at Haroldswick, Unst on 27 October, and one at East Burrayfirth, West Mainland on 7–17 December. Two were on Fair Isle on 3 October, one on 23–24 October, another on 25th, one on 28 October. One was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14–18 October, and one was at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 16 October. **Bobolink:** one was at Brake, near Hillwell, South Mainland (Shet) on 28 October.



Plate 79. Bobolink, Brake, Shetland, October 2012. © Hugh Harrop

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# PhotoSPOT

**Plate 80.** Usually 'Blue' Fulmars in Scotland are only seen flying out at sea, so when this arctic morph flew along the cliff edge just in front of me on Fair Isle, it was worth a second look. Indeed, it was a smart-looking bird which not only gave some nice close fly-bys, but repeatedly landed on various ledges of one particular cliff-face at Dutfield. After the initial 'record shots', I began to take a bit more care with the pictures that I was taking and spent some time trying to frame a white morph bird alongside the blue. First seen on 9 October and present until at least the 14th, it wasn't until the second day that I managed to achieve this. First, I had to wait a while for a white bird to land close enough to its rarer cousin, and then I needed both birds to keep a good head pose at the same time and long enough for me to activate the shutter. The shutter speed had to be fast enough to freeze any head movements but I also had to be mindful of having enough depth of field for both birds (and had to be careful with exposure to avoid burning out the whites).

**Equipment used:** Canon 7D with Canon 400mm f5.6 lens on tripod, ISO 800, shutter speed 1/500th, aperture f8.

*Dave Pullan*



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