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Bullfinch, Aboyne, North-east
Scotland, October 2013.

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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.

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club; Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 14 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 2700. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

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.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

Annual membership rates*

| | |
|---|----------|
| Adult (aged 18 and over) | £ 32.00 |
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* Rates valid until August 2015, subject to change thereafter

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BC Osprey and Mallard David Devonport



Plate 247. Chris McInerny, October 2013.
© C.J. McInerny

President's Foreword

This is my first foreword to *Scottish Birds* as the new SOC President and I'm delighted to start with reporting the success of the 2013 Annual Conference held in Troon over the weekend of 25–27 October. Over 160 members attended (including 12 at the special student rate) and enjoyed a wide range of excellent talks over three days. The topics ranged from bird politics to Honey-buzzards and Harpy Eagles, from ornithological fraud to the life of Tony Marr, from ornithological research at University of Glasgow to marine protected areas and wind-farms. So, something for everyone. Many old friends were met, and new friends were made, with a real atmosphere of conviviality. And to cap it all, up to seven Mediterranean Gulls were seen on the golf course around the hotel! Next year, the conference will be in Perth, and we have already invited some excellent speakers who have not presented to the SOC before. Please keep the end of October 2014 free in your diary and attend. You will be most welcome.

A considerable amount of work by SOC staff, volunteers, and the speakers ensures the success of these events, and I would like to acknowledge our deep gratitude to them, for all their efforts.

On this note, I'd also like to extend great thanks to my predecessor, Ken Shaw, who was President for the past two years. Ken did a fantastic job in leading the Club, particularly in embracing developments for its future. He has also contributed enormously to ornithology, not just in Scotland, but across the UK as a whole, and we wish him well.

I'd also like to welcome Ian Thomson as the new Vice-President and Alison Creamer as a new elected member of Council. I am sure they will both bring much to the Club and look forward to working with them.

Now that the national atlas has been completed, I'm sure many of you are aware of spin off local atlases that are being completed. If you still have the 'atlas bug', I urge you contribute to these important ventures. Your local recorder (listed at the back of *Scottish Birds*) is the best contact for this.

I would also like to mention some upcoming artist exhibitions at Waterston House: Darren Woodhead from 16 November to 15 January 2014; Pat Beveridge and The East Coast Stitchers from 18 January to 19 February 2014 and Carol Barrett from Saturday 22 February until 2 April. These popular events are well worth attending.

I'd like to finish by asking readers of *Scottish Birds* to consider contributing an article to the Club's journal. The editors are always looking for material, and would welcome contributions, particularly from new authors.

Best wishes to all over the festive period.

Chris McInerny, SOC President



Plate 248. Ptarmigan, Cairngorms, Moray & Nairn, October 2013. © Robert Ince

The status of Ptarmigan in Scotland: results of a survey questionnaire of land managers

K. Fletcher, D. Howarth & D. Baines

Ptarmigan are montane specialists, with little published information on their status and trends in Scotland. In a survey of managers of 56 Scottish upland estates within the Ptarmigan's range, 39% of respondents considered that Ptarmigan numbers had declined in the past 25 years, 13% that numbers had increased, and 48% that numbers remained unchanged. The majority of respondents (84%) considered that the range of Ptarmigan had remained unchanged during the same period.

Introduction

Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta* occur in Scotland's arctic-alpine zone (Watson 1966), with higher breeding densities recorded in the Scottish Highlands than elsewhere in their circumpolar range (Watson 1965). Estimated breeding abundance in Scotland is at least 10,000 pairs (Ratcliffe 1990, McGowan *et al.* 2003), but given their cyclical fluctuations and the paucity of surveys, the range could be 2,000 to 15,000 pairs (S. Rae in Forrester *et al.* 2007). There is also no published evidence of long-term change over recent decades (A. Watson in Francis & Cook 2011). However, Ptarmigan populations are potentially at risk from a range of direct and indirect influences including high grazing pressure, human disturbance, predation, pollution and climate change (Watson & Moss 2008). Ptarmigan are on the quarry list, so can be legally shot within the UK, but numbers shot are much lower than for Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus scotica*, and shooting is not considered to be a strong influence on population size (S. Rae in Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Surveys of Ptarmigan are limited by the harsh terrain, scarcity of volunteer surveyors and the cost of dedicated surveys. We therefore conducted a questionnaire survey of land managers in areas within the known Ptarmigan range to assess possible changes in status.

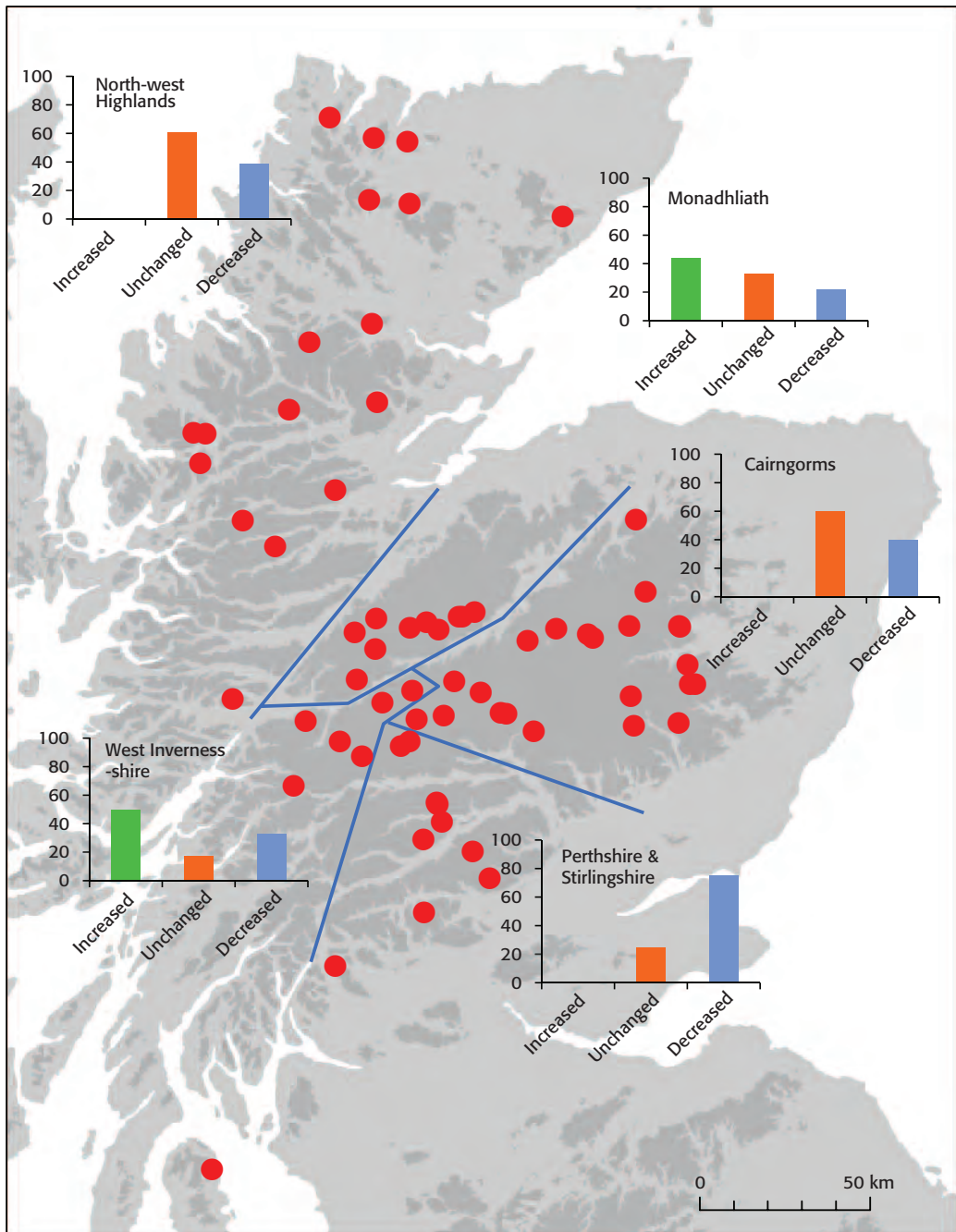


Figure 1. Location of questionnaire respondents split into five areas, with percentage of respondents recording numbers of Ptarmigan which had increased, remained unchanged or decreased in the last 25 years for each area.

Methods

In December 2010, 116 questionnaires were sent to estate workers (primarily rangers, stalkers and gamekeepers) employed within montane habitats that may host Ptarmigan. A single questionnaire was sent to each estate with the aim of covering the whole Ptarmigan range (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). These estates included both those privately owned and those managed by organisations such as RSPB, SNH, John Muir Trust and the National Trust for Scotland. We asked whether respondents considered the abundance and distribution of Ptarmigan within the estate to have changed over the past 25 years (Appendix 1). This length of period was considered appropriate as it would encompass more than one 10-year cycle of abundance (Watson *et al.* 2000). Participating estates were allocated to five areas: Cairngorms ($n = 21$), Monadhliath ($n = 10$), North-west Highlands ($n = 16$), Perthshire & Stirlingshire ($n = 10$) and West Inverness-shire ($n = 6$) to compare any potential differences in trends. Respondents were also asked to select an index of abundance; number of birds seen in a day in a good year. We specified a 'good year' so that all respondents were reporting on the peak part of any cycle.

Ptarmigan can be shot in Scotland between 12 August and 10 December, either by 'driven' shooting, where a line of beaters drive the birds towards shooters, or by 'walked-up' shooting, when shooters walk across the hill, usually with dogs, to flush the birds. To assess the importance of Ptarmigan as a quarry species, we asked about the intensity of shooting, the decision-making process of whether or not to shoot Ptarmigan and if they were shot, how many. If the responses to questions were unknown or unanswered then they were excluded from the analysis. Variation in the responses to questionnaires were analysed using G-tests on the number of estates in each category.

We also analysed shooting data submitted by 59 sporting estates to the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, to compare trends in numbers of Ptarmigan shot between 1961 and 2009 and compare numbers shot with questionnaire responses (Mann-Whitney U test). For each estate, the number of 1-km squares which included ground ≥ 750 m altitude was counted to allow numbers shot to be corrected for area of suitable habitat (A. Watson & S. Rae in Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

Results

Overall 56 (48%) questionnaires were completed and returned. These respondents are involved in the management of nearly 6,000 km² of upland Scotland. Forty-eight percent reported that Ptarmigan abundance had not changed, 39% thought numbers had declined and 13% that numbers had increased in the last 25 years. There were no regional differences in reported declines ($G_1 = 6.2$, $P = 0.2$, Figure 1).

Abundance indices varied; 14% reported no Ptarmigan (even in good years), 36% 1–10, 19% 11–20, 19% 21–50 and 14% 50+ birds seen in a day. Estates reporting different abundance indices did not differ significantly in whether that abundance had increased, remained unchanged or decreased over the last 25 years ($G_1 = 2.4$, $P = 0.3$). The higher Ptarmigan abundance indices were more common across the Cairngorms, Monadhliath and North-west Highland areas compared to West Inverness-shire and Perthshire and Stirlingshire (Figure 2).

Irrespective of reported changes in abundance, 84% of estates reported that the distribution of Ptarmigan on their ground had not changed in the last 25 years (14% decreased, 2% increased out of 51 respondents).

Twenty-six estates (45%) reported shooting Ptarmigan in the last ten years and 32 estates (55%) reported not shooting. Similar trends in abundance and distribution were found regardless of Ptarmigan shooting or no shooting practice ($P > 0.5$). However, the highest abundance indices were more often reported on estates that had shot Ptarmigan in the last ten years (75% out of 27 estates reported the highest three abundance categories) compared with estates that had not shot Ptarmigan (31% out of 32 estates, $G_1 = 14.02$, $P = <0.001$). Only one estate mentioned driven

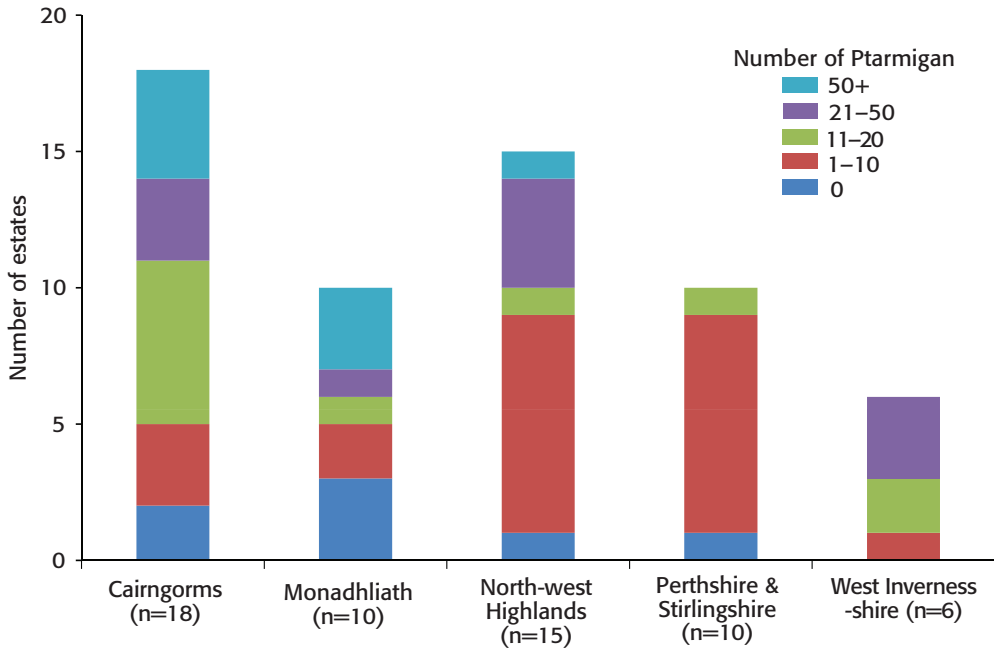


Figure 2. Responses to the question of how many Ptarmigan are seen in a day in a good year, comparing estates in different areas.

shooting (4%), with walked-up shooting specifically for Ptarmigan (73%) or combined with Red Grouse (38%) being more common. The most frequent reason for not shooting Ptarmigan in a particular year was that numbers were considered to be too low for sustainable harvesting (45% of 51 estates). Another frequent response for not shooting was that shooting game birds was not part of the estate’s management strategy (37%). Estates that did shoot Ptarmigan mainly decided how many days they would shoot considering the numbers of birds that had been seen during surveys or other tasks (52% out of 21 estates). In addition, many chose how many days to shoot based on the interest level from guests (38%).

Table 1. Regional comparison of Ptarmigan shooting intensity and trends in numbers shot from 1961 to 2009 (where sufficient data were available).

| (a) Estates with 2+ years of data between 1961 and 2009. | | | |
|--|--|--|-----------------------|
| | Mean number of estates providing data per year | Mean % change in numbers of birds shot | 95% Confidence Limits |
| All Scotland | 16 | -69% | -97% to -19% |
| Cairngorms | 6 | +25% | -71% to +117% |
| North-west Highlands | 4 | -78% | -86% to -40% |
| Perthshire and Stirlingshire | - | | |
| Monadhliath | - | | |
| West Inverness-shire | - | | |

| (b) All estates where Ptarmigan recorded shooting in at least one year between 1961 and 2009. | | |
|---|-------------------|--|
| | Number of estates | Index of shooting intensity (mean number shot per year corrected for area of suitable habitat) |
| All Scotland | 56 | 0.95 |
| Cairngorms | 22 | 0.69 |
| North-west Highlands | 14 | 0.99 |
| Perthshire and Stirlingshire | 12 | 1.33 |
| Monadhliath | 5 | 1.60 |
| West Inverness-shire | 3 | 0.52 ¹ |

¹ Four estates in North-west Highland with no 1-km squares with ground ≥ 750 m altitude were excluded.

Since 1961, there has been a significant decline of -69% in numbers of Ptarmigan shot across Scotland (Table 1). Temporal trends were also calculated for the Cairngorm area (no significant change) and North-west Highlands (significant decline of -78%), but insufficient data were available to calculate trends in other areas (Table 1). The index of shooting intensity (mean number shot per year, corrected for area of suitable habitat) was highest in the Monadhliath and lowest in the West Inverness-shire, although the number of estates supplying data for these two areas was low (Table 1). Where questionnaire responses and records of Ptarmigan shot in the last 25 years were available for the same estate, the number shot was no different on estates reporting stable abundance (mean number shot per year corrected for area = 1.0, range = 0.7–3.18, number of estates = 9) compared with estates reporting decrease in abundance (mean = 0.6, range = 0.3–1.77, number of estates = 11; $U = 47.5$, $P = 0.9$).

Discussion

The range of Ptarmigan was considered to be stable on many estates and over 60% of the respondents reporting that numbers had increased or remained stable. Although area differences were not statistically significant, in the most southerly area (Perthshire and Stirlingshire), 75% of estates reported that Ptarmigan numbers had declined compared to an average of 31% across the other four areas. This area at the southern edge of the UK range may be the most vulnerable to changing climate, which may lead to loss of Ptarmigan from some montane areas.

Similar trends in abundance and range were found across estates irrespective of whether or not they shoot. This suggests there is no evidence for over-harvesting, however more intensive studies would be needed to confirm this. Those estates that shoot Ptarmigan primarily undertook walked-up days, rather than the more intensive driven method of shooting Red Grouse. The reported numbers of Ptarmigan shot have been declining since 1961. This could be due to both changes in species abundance and shooting effort (Aebischer & Baines 2008). Shooting bag density has been found to be a good surrogate for abundance of Red Grouse (Hudson 1992, Cattadori *et al.* 2003) and harvest data have been used to infer population fluctuations in Ptarmigan elsewhere (Nielsen & Petursson 1995). Increasing the number of estates providing bag data in each year would improve the validity of the annual trend statistic reported and reduce the confidence intervals.

The trends reported here were similar to those from the comprehensive field surveys undertaken recently, which show no change in range between the 1988–91 and 2008–11 breeding bird atlases (Figure 3) (Balmer *et al.* 2013). Ptarmigan are currently not considered to be of conservation concern within the UK (Eaton *et al.* 2009) and are therefore a low priority for national bird surveys. Detecting

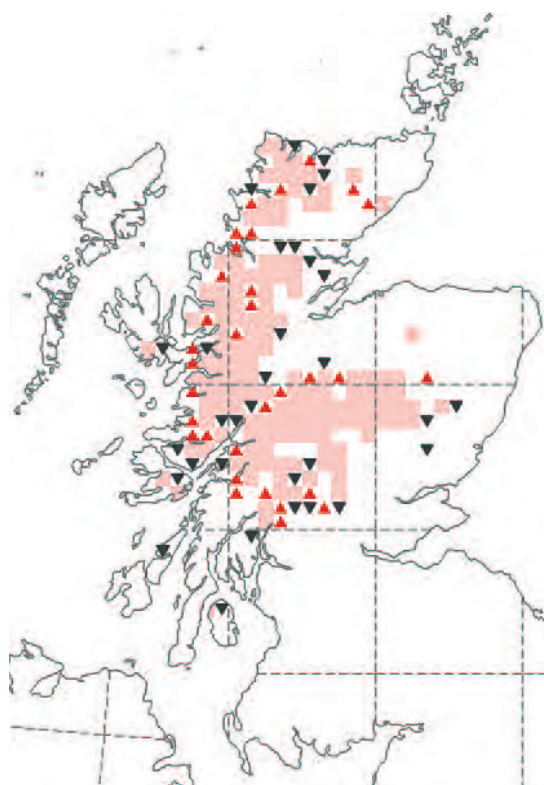


Figure 3. Comparison of range from 1988–91 and 2008–11 breeding bird atlases; showing 10-km squares where birds were present in both periods (pink), birds only present in 2008–11 (orange upward-pointing triangles) and birds only present in 1988–91 (grey downward-pointing triangles). Reproduced with kind permission from Balmer *et al.* (2013).



Plate 249. Ptarmigan, Cairngorms, Moray & Nairn, October 2013. © Robert Ince

future trends is likely to require land managers and other visitors to montane habitats to record the presence of this species, for example, by co-ordinating volunteer effort (Calladine & Wernham 2009).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those who responded to questionnaires. Julie Ewald and Nicholas Aebischer assisted with questionnaire design and data analyses and Holly Stevens with data collation. This study was part-financed by the Cairngorm National Park Authority and Scottish Natural Heritage through the Cairngorms Local Action Group.

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Revised ms accepted June 2013

Appendix 1

Questions included in survey.

1: In the last 25 years, on your estate, would you say Ptarmigan have

| | | | | |
|---------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------|
| Abundance: | Increased in numbers | Remained at similar numbers | Decreased in numbers | Unknown |
| Distribution: | Become more widespread | Remained across a similar area | Become less widespread | Unknown |

2: In a good year how many Ptarmigan would you see on a shoot day (or whilst stalking)?

0 0–10 11–20 21–50 50+

3: What method(s) are used to shoot Ptarmigan? (please indicate multiple responses if applicable)

Whilst shooting Red Grouse: Specific day for Ptarmigan:
 Driven Walked-up Driven Walked-up

4: How do you decide how many days of Ptarmigan shooting to undertake?

Number of birds seen during specific surveys / other tasks
 Same number every year
 Ptarmigan shot if poor year for Red Grouse
 Interest level from guests
 Other

5: Are Ptarmigan not shot because

Numbers are currently too low to undertake sustainable harvesting
 Numbers are currently too low to guarantee flushing birds
 Shooting gamebirds is not part of estate management strategy
 High ground is too inaccessible



Plate 250. Gulls crowd the air over Lady Isle, Ayrshire, May 2012. © D. Grant

The status of breeding gulls on Lady Isle, Ayrshire, 2012

D. Grant, D. Robertson, R. Nager & D. McCracken

Introduction

Over the last few decades there have been significant changes in the abundance of British seabirds, although population trends vary geographically (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). The larger gulls (*Larus* sp.), have declined nationally, and particularly Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* to such an extent that they were moved on to the UK's Red List (Eaton *et al.* 2009). A continued assessment of their abundance in different parts of the British Isles is therefore important. Within the Clyde area the combined breeding population of larger gulls grew from just under 250 pairs at the end of the 19th century, to over 12,500 pairs by the mid-1980s (Gibson 1985). Over the next 15 years, the number of breeding pairs in the Clyde area either remained stable (Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*), declined similarly to the national average (Herring Gull), or actually increased (Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*) (Seabird 2000 census, Mitchell *et al.* 2004). It is of particular importance to continue monitoring population changes of these species at important breeding sites.

Lady Isle off the Ayrshire coast has been of ornithological interest since at least the mid-1930s, when the Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* colony was probably first discovered by Thornton McKeith, a well-known naturalist of the time. The Roseate Tern was the flagship species, which led to the eventual, albeit informal, protection of the island. Unfortunately, this colony has long since gone, though the island still plays an important part in Ayrshire's bird life. Whilst Lady Isle may be best known ornithologically for its historic colony of Roseate Terns (Gibson 1969), it is currently of importance as a gull roost and breeding site for Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed

Gull and Great Black-backed Gulls as well as 'some' Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* and Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*. A few pairs of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls were breeding on Lady Isle in the 1940s, and by contrast to other areas of the Clyde area, this population remained small until the 1970s (Gibson 1985). Gibson suggests that the relatively low numbers of larger gulls on Lady Isle may have been due to the effort to protect the Roseate Tern colony by controlling the numbers of large gulls and that these measures were carried out unceasingly until the early 1970s. However, with the reduction in numbers of terns over all of the Clyde area, the Roseate Tern soon disappeared as a Clyde breeding species. Shortly after this period, the control of large gulls ceased and within a few years the large gull population increased enormously. This was reflected within the Clyde area as a whole, as the combined breeding population of larger gulls grew from just under 250 pairs at the end of the 19th century to over 12,500 pairs by 1985 (Gibson 1985). Despite one last failed attempt in 1990 to further reduce large gull numbers, thereby encouraging the reintroduction of breeding terns, a decision was made by the Scottish Society for the Protection of Wild Birds (SSPWB) to allow Lady Isle to develop as a reserve for gulls. The current significance of Lady Isle as a breeding location for gulls was primarily based upon anecdotal information, observations of gulls moving from the mainland to the island and *ad hoc* counts of gulls during occasional ringing trips to the island. It became apparent that in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the structure of the breeding gull colony, an in-depth survey would have been needed. As part of some wider research being undertaken by SRUC and Glasgow University, the opportunity to carry out such a survey arose during the 2012 breeding season.

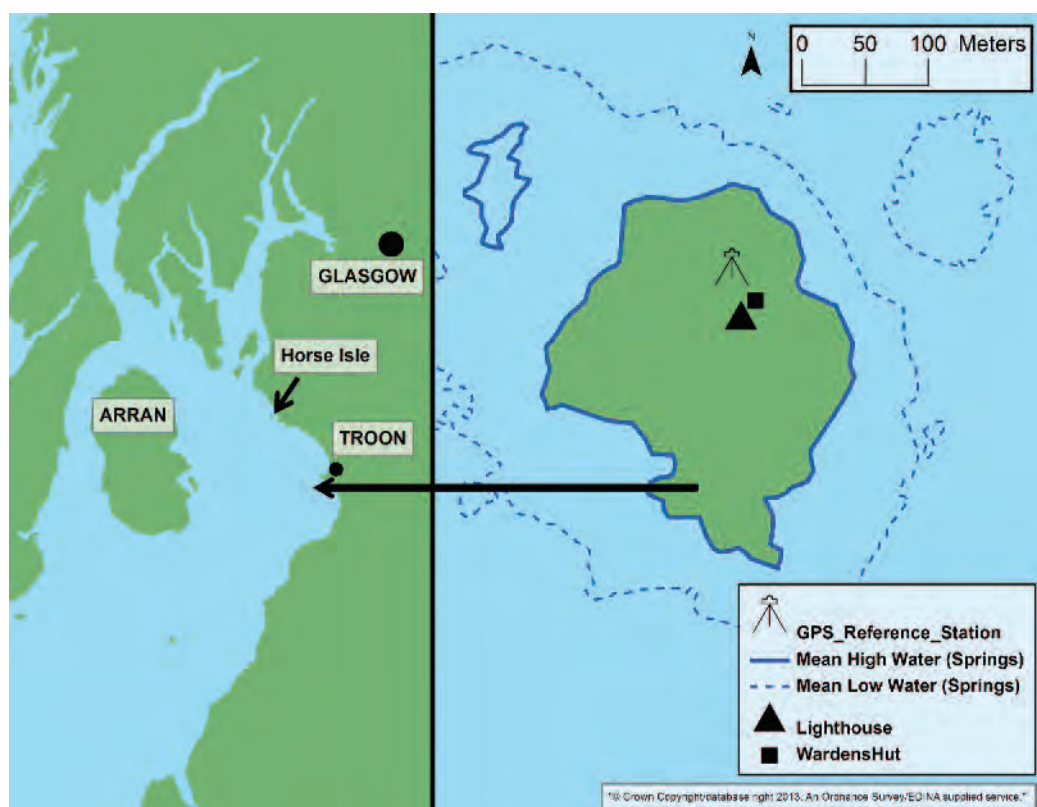


Figure 1. Location of Lady Isle off the Ayrshire coast, south-west Scotland.

Methods

Lady Isle is a small island situated 5.6 km off the coast of Troon (OS Grid Ref. NS 276 292) in Ayrshire (see Figure 1), with a high point of only 6 m above sea level and an area of approximately 4.4 ha. It has a rocky shoreline, which often makes landing difficult at certain states of the tide. The island has peaty soil and at certain times of the year has profuse vegetation, mainly: Common Nettles *Urtica dioica*, Curled Dock *Rumex crispus*, Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare* and Annual Meadow Grass *Poa annua*. There is a warden's hut on the island which was constructed in the 1950s during its heyday as a breeding colony for Roseate Tern.

The appropriate time period for the survey of breeding gulls on Lady Isle was determined by the breeding season as identified in Ferguson-Lees *et al.* (2011) and previous experience of breeding seasons on Lady Isle. Three visits to the island took place between 5th and 22 May 2012 and between the hours of 1000hrs and 1600hrs in line with recommendations from Bibby *et al.* (2000), who state that colony attendance is most stable during these hours. The weather conditions were dry, warm with at most a slight breeze. During the first visit, on 5 May, a visual count from a fixed highpoint was taken of the three species of gulls and their approximate location was noted. This gave an approximate overview of the island population. The intention of this was to provide a base of knowledge for further survey work.

During later visits, a Leica GPS500 (www.leica-geosystems.co.uk) with base station was used providing accuracy to within centimetres for nests that were apparently occupied i.e. nests which had eggs or egg shell remains in or very close to them. During two survey sessions (16 and 22 May), two different approaches were used: firstly, for the peripheral nests on the rocky platform surrounding the island a wide sweeping clockwise count was used within the constraints of high tide mark and vegetation; secondly, for the main body of the island a five-metre transect corridor running north to south was used starting from the eastern edge and culminating at the western edge. This was repeated until the whole area of the main body of the island was surveyed. At each gull nest we noted the species and number of eggs and/or hatchlings. Ferguson-Lees *et al.* (2011) state that it is hard to distinguish between the eggs of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls and our observations reinforce this as there was a noticeable variation in egg colouration, size and even shape within the same species (see plates 253 & 254). Where this complication arose we noted which species guarded the eggs.

The data gathered was comprehensive and provides an accurate estimate of the number of gulls on Lady Isle for the 2012 breeding season. As with all GPS devices, there is an element of potential positional error. However, through the use of the Leica GPS500 this error was likely to be in the



Plate 251. The old beacon, lighthouse and warden's hut on Lady Isle are the only notable high points breaking an otherwise flat landscape suitable for breeding gulls, May 2012. © D. Grant



Plate 252. The Leica GPS base station was placed on the highest point of the island in order to provide the best signal with the mobile unit, Lady Isle, May 2012. © D. Grant

order of centimetres as opposed to metres as experienced with normal handheld GPS devices. The GPS data were uploaded to Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software, ESRI Arcgis versions 10.0. The GIS data were used to calculate the mean nearest neighbour distance and geographical distribution on a colony and a species level. To determine the nearest neighbour distance on Lady Isle, the method of Savoca *et al.* (2011) was used. This involves calculating the mean distance of the three closest neighbouring nests. This was determined using GIS by taking the GPS location of each nest recorded and determining the mean distance of the three closest nests. This was calculated for all gull nests in the colony and also for nests by species.

Results

Over approximately eight hours of surveying (32 man-survey-hours) 1,353 apparently occupied nests were counted, this represented the whole colony. Table 1 shows the results by species and includes the average number of eggs present per nest by species and also the number of nests that had signs of hatching already taking place.

Table 1. Number of apparently occupied nests on Lady Isles for the three larger *Larus* species from a comprehensive survey of the entire island undertaken on 16 & 22 May 2012.

| Species | Nest count (n) | Number of nests hatching | Average number of eggs present [\pm SE] |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Great Black-backed Gull (GBBGU) | 77 | 8 | 2.5 \pm 0.086 |
| Herring Gull (HERGU) | 831 | 12 | 2.7 \pm 0.022 |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull (LBBGU) | 445 | 20 | 2.5 \pm 0.033 |
| Total | 1353 | 40 | |

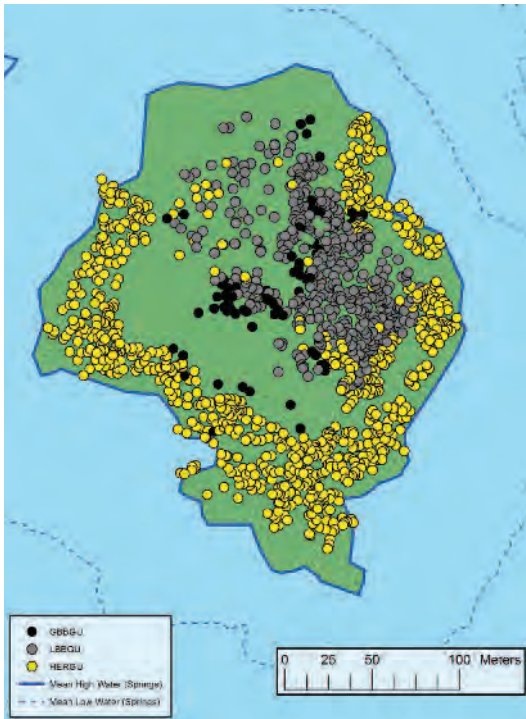


Figure 2. Location (plotted using GIS) of individual nests of the three larger *Larus* species (see Table 1 for abbreviation of species names) on Lady Isle, Ayrshire, 2012. © Crown Copyright/database right 2013. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service

The number of eggs seen per nest varied from one to four, though only four nests were recorded with four eggs and one with two eggs and two chicks. During the survey period only 3% of the island's nests showed signs of hatching, suggesting that the peak hatching date for the Lady Isle gulls occurs towards the end of May and the beginning of June. The proportion of Great Black-backed Gull nests with at least one hatchling (10.4%) appeared to be considerably larger than for the other two gull species (Table 1).

With the data plotted using GIS (Figure 2) there appears to be a clear demarcation between the two common species, with the area occupied by Herring Gulls (gold points) encircling the outer part of the island and the Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls (grey and black points, respectively) dominating the higher ground in the centre of the island.

It would appear that most, if not all, of the breeding gulls were fully adult in at least fourth-year summer plumage. This conforms with previous research by Coulson *et al.* (1982) which suggests that mature breeding colonies tend to be comprised of older birds as they tend to exhibit breeding site fidelity.



Plate 253. Lesser Black-backed Gull nest showing variation in egg colour, Lady Isle, May 2012. © D. Grant



Plate 254. Herring Gull nest showing variation in egg colour, shape and size, Lady Isle, May 2012. © D. Grant

For the island's gull colony as a whole, the mean nearest-neighbour distance was 3.4 ± 0.03 m, range 0.05–20.44 m, $n=1339$. In the Lesser Black-backed Gull sub-colony, which inhabited the higher more vegetated part of the inner isle, the mean nearest-neighbour distance was calculated as 3.75 ± 0.7 m, range 0.22–20.45 m, $n=438$. The Great Black-backed Gulls were further apart from each other, with a mean nearest-neighbour distance of 8.3 ± 0.64 m, range 0.16–49.16 m, $n=75$. The sub-colony of Herring Gull was predominantly around the periphery of the island with a mean nearest-neighbour distance of 3.64 ± 0.05 m, range 0.05–35.18 m, $n=824$.

Figure 3a shows the density of all of the gull nests surveyed on the island. The darker areas represent the densest areas of nests. There is an obvious area running north-west to south-east where there were no nests recorded. The ground here was not suitable for nests due to a rocky outcrop. The inner colony of Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls was densest on the eastern side, whilst the outer colony of Herring Gull appear to be uniform in its density from the east side around the south and appeared reduced to the west. The northern part of the island has fewer to no nests due to the rocky habitat and the presence of breeding Shags.

Figures 3b, c, & d show the density of nests surveyed on the island for Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Great Black-backed Gulls respectively. The Herring Gull colony around the periphery of the island is constrained by the mean high water mark. Those points that appear to be below the mean high water mark are nests that are located on small rocky pillars. There are four darker patches which represent areas of greater breeding density, though on the whole density is fairly uniform within the Herring Gull colony. By contrast, both the Lesser Black-backed and Great Black-backed Gulls are predominantly found within the more vegetated inner part of the island, which corresponds with a comment made by Monaghan (in Forrester *et al.* 2007). The Lesser Black-backed Gulls appear to have a focus around the two buildings on the island and radiate outwards north-west with decreasing density. The Great Black-backed Gulls have one obvious area of density in the middle south-west part of the island.

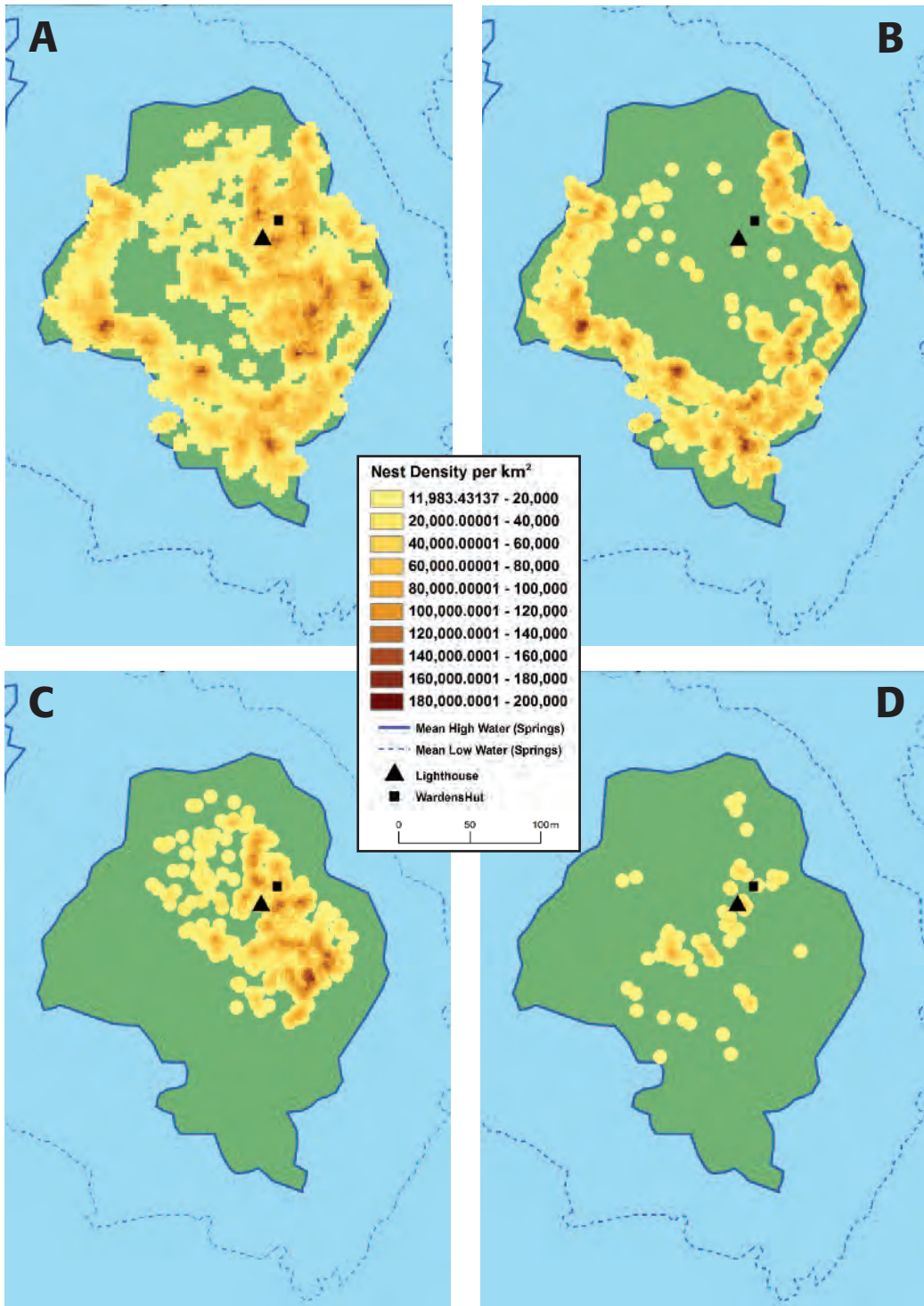


Figure 3. Comparison of density of gull nests by species on Lady Isle, Ayrshire, 2012: **A** all gull species; **B** Herring Gulls; **C** Lesser Black-backed Gulls; **D** Great Black-backed Gulls. © Crown Copyright/database right 2013. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service

Discussion

This survey is the most comprehensive review of the breeding gull population on Lady Isle since the island became a stronghold for larger gulls in the 1980s. The Lady Isle population in 2012 was approximately 61% Herring Gull, 33% Lesser Black-backed Gulls and 6% Great Black-backed Gulls. The number and proportion of Great Black-backed Gulls suggests that Lady Isle is a potentially important site for these breeding gulls. Predation could have affected some nests which would then have not been counted. However, at no point during the surveys was such predation observed nor were there any signs such as broken eggs. In addition, some birds may have built a nest but not laid any eggs. In this situation, the nest would not have been counted resulting in a potential undercount.

The use of survey-grade GPS to mark the nests has a number of pros and cons, though on reflection the pros outweigh the cons. Whilst time-consuming, it does provide a more accurate representation (to within a few cm) of the colony than any other measurement technique e.g. a visual count of birds. A visual count of the birds as an indicator of colony size for such a dense colony is problematic for a number of reasons: duplication of counted birds; counting of non-breeding birds; and identification of sub-colonies. On the negative side, the longer time taken to comprehensively survey the island does potentially produce a disturbance to the birds though our observations would indicate that this disturbance was minimal as we moved through the colony at a constant and relatively fast speed. The apparent location of nests below the mean high water (Figure 3b) would appear to represent a high risk breeding strategy. It is possible that these birds were less-experienced breeders. However, this survey did not record the ages of these birds, therefore at best we can only speculate.

Since the island does not exhibit uniform density, it would appear that there is scope for the colony to grow. However, there are indications which suggest that this is probably not the case. The non-uniform landscape would be a barrier to uniform density in that there are some areas which clearly are not as suitable for nesting, such as the north-west to south-east rock platform, shown in Figure 3 as the area with no nests. Savoca *et al.* (2011) differentiate sub-colonies into loose and dense clusters. They go further in providing a quantifiable measure for these categories. In the 'loose sub-colony' context, the mean distance of the closest three neighbouring nests was identified as 19.5 ± 1.4 m, range 7.8–45 m, whereas they defined a 'dense sub-colony' as having a mean distance of the closest three neighbouring nests as 4.2 ± 0.2 m, range 1.8–7.3 m. Comparing the results from Lady Isle against these parameters would suggest that the breeding gull colony as a whole conforms to a dense nature. When the colony is broken down by species, two of the gull species, Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull, are clearly exhibiting dense sub-colony attributes. The Great Black-backed Gulls are more loosely distributed and as they are a more dominant and aggressive species, this should be expected. This, along with the anecdotal observations of the breeding gulls being at least in their fourth-summer plumage, suggests that the Lady Isle colony is a mature, well-established colony, which is at or near the optimum size.

Using combined data from annual surveys, conducted by the SSPWB and subsequent ringing activity, Figure 4 shows the different trends in breeding terns and gulls since the 1940s. Whilst Figure 4 appears to show a correlation between larger gulls and the decline in terns, this should not be taken as a causal relationship, as there were no doubt many other factors at play within the wider Clyde Basin which could have affected the tern population.

To further reinforce this trend in larger gull island colonies off the Ayrshire coast, one needs look no further than Horse Isle, off Ardrossan, approximately 15 km NNW from Lady Isle. This isle is approximately twice the size of Lady Isle and is managed by RSPB. Its history of gull colonisation is similar to Lady Isle (Figure 4) and just as on Lady Isle, it is now predominantly

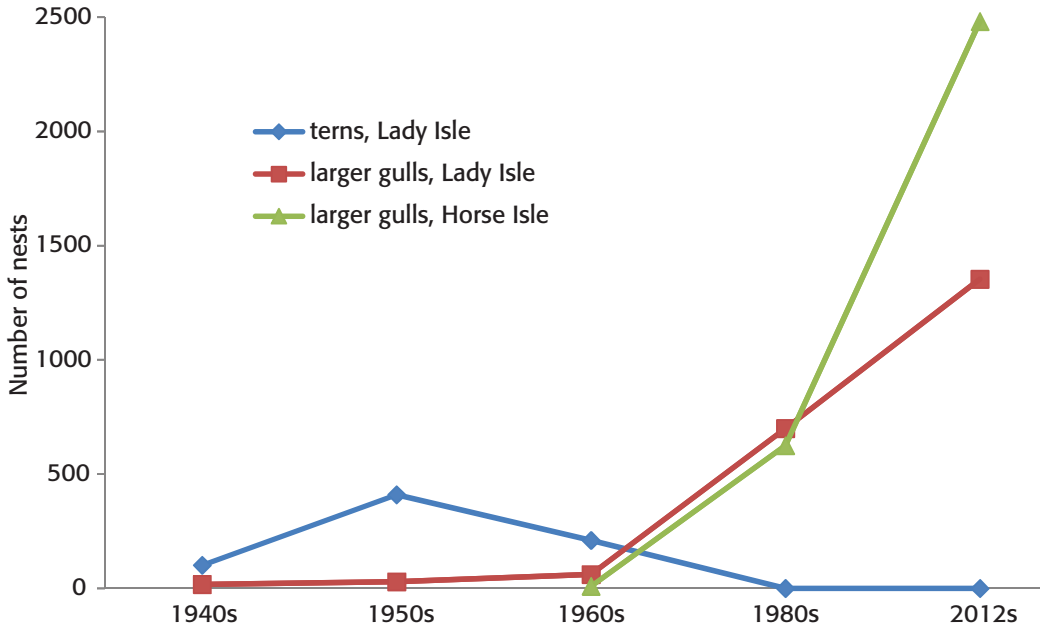


Figure 4. The changing structure of breeding gulls on Lady Isle (1940–2012) and Horse Isle (1960–2012). Source of historical data: SSPWB & RSPB Lochwinnoch.

a breeding colony for larger gulls. As with Lady Isle Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gull make up the majority of the gulls on Horse Isle with Great Black-backed Gulls present in much smaller numbers. Data gathered (Figure 4) by RSPB Lochwinnoch (pers. comm.) show that on Horse Isle in the 1960s there were no more than ten pairs of Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gulls combined. This number rapidly increased by 1970 to over 400 pairs. It appears that numbers peaked on Horse Isle in 2000, with over 2,600 breeding pairs of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls combined. There does appear to have been a decrease in numbers of nesting pairs from 2000 to 2012. Unfortunately, due to an incomplete data set, it is unknown whether such a decrease in numbers also occurred on Lady Isle.

Seabird 2000 estimated the Scottish coastal breeding population of Herring Gull as 71,650 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Since then, the abundance for Herring Gulls has declined further with it reported that in 2011 they were at their lowest level since 1986 (JNCC 2013). Today's population of Herring Gull on Lady Isle would represent approximately 2% of the Scottish population as identified in *Seabird 2000*. Given that the overall Scottish population has decreased it is highly likely that Lady Isle's Herring Gull population now probably represents closer to 4–5% of the Scottish population. The combined Lady Isle and Horse Isle population would be close to 10% of the overall Scottish Herring Gull population, clearly demonstrating that the Ayrshire islands have an important role to play in the future conservation of Herring Gulls in Scotland.

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Plate 255. Stac Li summit from Boreray, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 18 July 2010. © S. Murray

Timing of breeding and estimated fledging dates of Gannets at St Kilda in 2012

S. Murray, S. Wanless & M.P. Harris

Information on the timing of breeding, and hence the period when chicks are present in the colony, has rarely been collected for Gannets at St Kilda. However, given the growing pressure for greater access to islands and stacks in the St Kilda group, the National Trust for Scotland, the owners and managers of the archipelago, have identified the collection of phenological data on Gannet breeding as being of high priority. In July 2012, NTS commissioned a photographic survey of Boreray, Stac Li and Stac an Armin from the sea, and a land survey of Boreray only, in order to obtain comprehensive data on the age distribution of chicks and thus the likely schedule of fledging dates. Projections based on a fledging period of 90 days indicated that the peak of fledging on St Kilda in 2012 was 16–22 September. Twelve, 11 and 20% of nests on Boreray, Stac Li and Stac an Armin respectively were classified as still having eggs at the time of the check. About one half of these eggs were likely to be infertile and, assuming that the remainder hatched immediately after the check, 4, 5 and 12% of breeding sites in the three colonies would still have chicks present on 17 October.

Introduction

Across its Atlantic range the Gannet *Morus bassanus* has increased as a result of protection from human predation and disturbance, and the slow increase of the St Kildan gannetries since 1931 suggest that here also the Gannet has benefited from the ending of hunting; in this case following the abandonment of the islands by the native people in 1930.

The NTS has therefore taken a precautionary approach to risks associated with human disturbance and advise against access onto the great stacks, Stac Li and Stac an Armin, or the cliffs of Boreray, from the start until after the end of the annual Gannet breeding season.

However, information on the timing of breeding of Gannets in the St Kilda colonies, needed to define the duration of the breeding season, has not been routinely collected. Accordingly NTS has identified collection of such data as having high priority and commissioned a comprehensive assessment of the age distribution of chicks present on Boreray, Stac Li and Stac an Armin in July 2012. Results of this survey were used to determine expected fledging dates and thus provide an indication of the end of the breeding season.



Plate 256. Stac an Armin summit from Boreray, St Kilda, 25 July 2012. © S. Murray

Gannets on the great stacks are particularly vulnerable to disturbance because nests are at high density, both on narrow access ledges leading to the summits and on the summits themselves (Plates 255 & 256). Large scale losses of panicked chicks, particularly in August and September when they are large and mobile, would therefore be inevitable. For example, "Try to imagine the scene [on Stac Li summit]. Five thousand great white birds, with long necks raised, giving out a loud harsh cry of alarm, and then a confused mass of shrieking, frightened creatures falling over one another. There they went, simply rolling head over tail down the sides, bouncing from rock to boulder, all adding to the confusion below, while thousands of young birds were giving out lesser sounds, and trying to follow their mothers. It was a wild pandemonium - like a panic amongst a crowd - a screaming, terrified panic, with beautiful birds for the actors, and the helpless fluffy youngsters as spectators. It was a great avalanche of living birds, rolling down to the edge of the cliff and I stood transfixed with the novelty of the scene." Pike (1910).

Methods

Sections of the Gannet colonies on Boreray, Stac Li and Stac an Armin were photographed from the sea on 20 July 2012, using a Canon EOS 1000D with a 70 to 300 mm lens. All the photographs were taken between 12:00 and 14:00 BST, in calm conditions and bright sunshine. Both stacks were circled in the boat at varying distances from 50 to 200 m depending on nest height above the water. Boreray nests were photographed on the south, west and east cliffs. Nests at 40 to 50 m vertical height were considered to be the upper limit for usable photographs, since small chicks are difficult to see in nests higher than this. Digital images were examined on a computer screen with the zoom optimized to provide clear views of nest contents. Chicks were classified into weekly age classes on the basis of size relative to the parent and plumage development according to guidelines in Nelson (1978) and Appendix 1.

In some cases although the adult's posture indicated that it was breeding, it was not possible to see the nest contents clearly. Thus it was impossible to determine if a bird was incubating an egg or brooding a small chick less than three weeks old. Since information about such nests was critical for estimating fledging dates of the latest breeding birds, a land visit to Boreray was made on 25–26 July, in order to make a careful check of a large sample of nests where the nest contents could be clearly seen. Good vantage points close to breeding groups were found and the observer waited until the movements of adults on the nest allowed eggs or chicks to become visible. No further disturbance was caused and adults did not leave the nest sites (Plates 257 & 258).



Plates 257–258. (left) Adult Gannets with eggs, Boreray, St Kilda, 25 July 2012. © S. Murray (right) Adult Gannet with two-week-old chick, Boreray, St Kilda, 25 July 2012. © S. Murray

Ageing of chicks at the three colonies was initially done from the photographs taken from the sea. This allowed chicks four weeks and older to be aged directly. However, because of the difficulty of obtaining a clear view of eggs or small chicks (see above), nests where birds were obviously breeding but the contents could not be seen, were initially classified as incubating/brooding. We then applied the frequency distribution of eggs, one-, two- and three-week-old chicks from the land check of Boreray to this category to obtain a complete age distribution for each colony.

Approximate hatch dates were estimated by back calculating from chick age at the time of the check, using the mid-point of each age category (e.g. for week three, 15–21 days = 18 days). Expected fledging dates were estimated assuming a fledging period of 90 days (Nelson 2002). To estimate the number of chicks likely to hatch from the eggs present at the time of the check, we assumed that 6.5% of the total eggs laid during the season were infertile and were present past their expected hatch date (mean infertility rate from studies on Bass Rock and Ailsa Craig (Nelson 1978, Wanless 1978)) and a mean hatching success of 85% (Nelson 1978).

Results

Combining data for Boreray, Stac Li and Stac an Armin, a total of 997 nests were checked from photographs taken from the sea (Table 1). The median age of Boreray chicks was estimated at 32 days on 20 July, with a median hatch date around 17 June. Projecting forward from this, the median fledging date was estimated to be in the week beginning 16 September. On Stac Li, the median age of chicks was 29 days, median hatch date was estimated to be 20 June and peak fledging was predicted to be around 19 September, a few days later than Boreray. In contrast, on Stac an Armin, the median age of chicks was considerably younger, at 17 days, estimated hatch date was 2 July, two weeks after Boreray, and 12 days later than Stac Li. Median fledging date was thus also later, at around 30 September. The reason for this significantly later breeding than on either Stac Li or Boreray is unknown at present and highlights the limitations of a single visit to such a large and diverse colony as St Kilda. For the median age to be so different between the islands suggests environmental or other factors in play that affect only Stac an Armin.

What these factors are is currently unknown; but it is of interest to note that on 1 March 2013, Boreray and Stac Li were found to be fully occupied by Gannets, but there were next to none on Stac an Armin (pers. obs.). Arrival dates at the three colonies are not known in detail, although it is assumed that all are fully occupied by early April and that occupancy is synchronised. Whether this early season difference noted in 2013 also occurred in 2012 is not known; neither is it clear, if it did occur, what influence this may have had on the later median laying date found on Stac an Armin in 2012.

Estimating dates for the end of the breeding season is more problematic because of uncertainties associated with the hatching dates and hatching success of eggs still present on 20 July when the checks were made. Based on data available from other studies, we assumed that 1) about 50% of eggs still present on 20 July were infertile, and 2) all viable eggs hatched immediately after the check. Our estimated values should therefore be viewed as conservative in terms of identifying the end of the season. The results presented in Table 1 suggest that between 4% (Boreray) and 12% (Stac an Armin) of chicks would still be present in mid-October and if some eggs did not hatch until early August (which is quite possible, though unlikely), a few chicks could be present until November, particularly on Stac an Armin.

Discussion

The timings of Gannet breeding on St Kilda estimated in 2012 accord well with those obtained in 2007, 2010 and 2011 (Wanless *et al.* 2008, Murray & Wanless 2011 unpublished). However, all these data sets are strongest in terms of providing information about chicks from the early and

Table 1. Numbers of chicks recorded in weekly age categories in samples of nests photographed on Boreray, Stac Li and Stac an Armin on 20 July 2012. The median age of chicks and estimated median hatching and fledging dates and the percentage of chicks estimated to still be present in each colony on 17 October are also shown. Details of the methods and assumptions are given in the text.

| Island | Nests | Eggs | Chick age in weeks | | | | | | | | Hatch date | Median dates | | Predicted % of chicks present on 17 October |
|---------------|-------|------|--------------------|----|----|----|-----|----|---|---|------------|------------------------|--------------|---|
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | | Age in days on 20 July | Fledge date | |
| Boreray | 622 | 75 | 59 | 31 | 49 | 97 | 279 | 27 | 3 | 2 | 17 June | 32 | 16 September | 4.0 |
| Stac Li | 150 | 17 | 14 | 7 | 11 | 23 | 63 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 20 June | 29 | 19 September | 5.0 |
| Stac an Armin | 225 | 44 | 35 | 18 | 29 | 31 | 52 | 9 | 7 | | 2 July | 17 | 30 September | 12.0 |

middle parts of the season and are less informative about those from the end. This is because checks were made in the second and third weeks of July, before all eggs laid had hatched. Confidence in predicting the end of the breeding season could be increased if checks were also made in mid- to late August (or delayed until then) when the age distribution of the last hatching chicks would be clearer. Having information from late checks would reduce the need for assumptions about infertility rates and hatching success. However, projections would still need to be based on the assumption that the fledging period of late chicks was 90 days. Evidence from detailed studies on Bass Rock and Ailsa Craig indicate that late chicks can show either reduced or extended fledging periods making it difficult to predict final departure dates with any certainty. Converting percentages of chicks into numbers still present in the colony by a given date requires the numbers of pairs breeding to be known. Boreray and the stacks were last counted in 2004 (Wanless *et al.* 2005). Assuming that the current population is similar to, or slightly higher than the 2004 total, there could be somewhere in the region of 500–2,000 well-grown chicks still present in mid-October, with the largest proportion likely on Stac an Armin. We stress that uncertainty around these figures is high. However, such chicks are very vulnerable to disturbance and if approached closely may leave the cliffs prematurely with potentially fatal consequences.

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Appendix 1

Photographic guide to aging Gannet chicks between one and 12 weeks old.

Plates 259–260 (top). Week one: fairly black, with sparse, hair-like down; very wobbly (normally brooded constantly by adult). **Plates 261–262 (middle).** Week two: partly covered with down; larger than parent's feet; head and neck bare; movements well co-ordinated. **Plates 263–264 (bottom).** Week three: body and wings covered in white down, but lacks luxuriantly fluffy look of four-week-old; cannot be covered by parent. © *all S. Murray*





Plates 265 –266 (top). Week four: down long and fluffy; two-thirds adult size, taking up most of the nest. Plates 267 –268 (middle). Week five: still fluffy; approaches adult size; pin primary and tail feathers show black through the down. Plates 269 –270 (bottom). Week six: fluffy, but scapulars, wings and tail feathers clear of down; looks bigger than the parent. © *all S. Murray*



Plates 271 –272 (top). Week seven: mantle and back a mixture of white down and black feathers; breast, under parts, head and neck covered in long white down. **Plates 273 –274 (middle).** Week eight: mainly black above; down disappearing from forehead; mantle/back and tail. **Plates 275 –276 (bottom).** Week nine: down starts to go from ventral surface, but still thick on flanks, belly and parts of neck; looks scruffy. © *all S. Murray*



Plates 277–278 (top). Week ten: some down on nape, flanks and back. © *S. Murray*. Week 11 (not illustrated): only wisps of down remain on nape and flanks. Plates 279–280 (bottom). Week 12: complete juvenile plumage; no down remains. © *S. Wanless*



Plate 281. Fulmar, Isle of May, May 2013. © Ian Halliday

The inland breeding colonies of Fulmars in Lothian

H.E.M. Dott

In Lothian, Fulmars colonised inland cliffs mainly in the 1960s–70s. Four sites between 3 and 9.5 km from the sea became established small colonies, each with under 50 apparently occupied sites at their maximum. Numbers have declined since the late 1990s. Predation by mammals probably limits the breeding ledges available to inland Fulmars, while fledglings from inland cliffs may suffer higher mortality than coastal birds due to the need to make hazardous first flights overland.

Introduction

The tiny minority of Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* in Britain which breed inland at some distance from the sea have not been well documented. Lothian in south-east Scotland is unusual in having four inland Fulmar colonies. This paper summarises information about these colonies and compares this with coastal Fulmars.

The Lothian inland colonies

The four extant Lothian inland Fulmar colonies are, from west to east:

- **Torphin Quarry:** an igneous rock quarry at the south-west edge of Edinburgh city, OS grid ref. NT1967–2067, 9.5 km distance from the sea.
- **Salisbury Crag:** a line of natural igneous rock cliffs in Holyrood Park in Edinburgh city, NT2673, 3 km from the sea.
- **Gutted Haddie:** a natural igneous cliff in Edinburgh city near to Salisbury Crag, NT2772, 3.5 km from the sea.
- **Traprain Law Quarry:** an igneous rock quarry in central East Lothian, NT5874, 8 km from the sea (5.5 km from the tidal Tyne estuary).

Other inland sites were explored by Fulmars in south-east Scotland, and though young were reared at two of them none became permanent colonies. At **Garleton Quarry** in East Lothian (OS grid ref. NT507763), 5.5 km from the sea, two pairs were on ledges in 1954 and may have laid eggs in 1955–57 (*Edinburgh Bird Bulletin*, Fisher 1966); a pair reared a chick there in 1980 and up to 10 ledges were apparently occupied from 1981 to 1984. Garleton Quarry was checked in 1986, 1993 and some later years and no Fulmars were present (da Prato & da Prato 1987, pers. obs., S. Welch pers. comm.). On a scree slope south-east of **Cockburnspath** 2.2 km from the coast (OS grid ref NT786687) two Fulmars occupied a site in 1954, and a chick was hatched in 1955, but both chick and adults had disappeared by 7 August (*Edinburgh Bird Bulletins*). At **North Berwick Law**, 1 km from the shore, occasional Fulmars have been reported “prospecting” as early as 1939 and 1948–50 (Fisher 1952, 1966), and six birds were seen in 1981 and 1983 (*Lothian Bird Reports*), but there have been no known breeding attempts. At **Blackford Hill Quarry** in Edinburgh, 6 km from the sea, 2–3 Fulmars were seen from 1979 (Brown 1983), 1–2 most years through the 1980s, and one in 1995 (*Lothian Bird Bulletins*) when the main quarry was being infilled. On crags of **Arthur’s Seat** at Samson’s Ribs near Guttled Haddie, Fulmars sometimes alighted, but never held sites (*Lothian Bird Reports*, I.J. Andrews pers. comm.). Occasionally 1–2 Fulmars showed brief interest in **Edinburgh Castle Rock** in 1955, 1998 and 1999 (*Edinburgh Bird Bulletin*, pers. obs. *Lothian Bird Reports*), **Craigiehall Quarry** in 1987, and **Caerketton Hill** in 1984 and 1994 (*Lothian Bird Reports*).

The counts of Fulmars at the Lothian inland colonies

Factors affecting the counts: The numbers of Fulmars countable at colonies are affected by Fulmar behaviour, season and weather. Sub-adult or other non-breeding Fulmars visit colonies from spring through to early September in variable numbers. The proportion of these visiting non-breeders can be large - between two and five times as many as may breed there, and at which times of year their numbers are greatest is poorly known (Dott 1973, Dunnet 1991). Young Fulmars usually remain at sea for some years; many first returning to land when about four years old with some earlier and later (Macdonald 1977). Breeding Fulmars commence their annual return to colonies from November or December. Counts are affected by time of day and weather; in winter to spring numbers rise towards noon and reduce to none after dusk, and increasing wind strength reduces or prevents appearance at land (Coulson & Horobin 1972, Dott 1975). Numbers increase up to egg-laying in May, reduce through incubation and brooding when one or other parent is usually at sea, and from mid-July the single chick is left alone for long spells between brief feeding visits. Chicks fledge in late August or early September, and by mid-September colonies are normally deserted by all categories of Fulmars (Fisher 1952, Dunnet 1991). June is prescribed as the best time to census the number of breeding pairs, when most birds are incubating (Walsh *et al.* 1995), although the time of highest numbers including breeders and non-breeders is usually in April (M. Tasker in Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The counts: For Lothian’s inland colonies, Table 1 shows the highest known counts in each year of (a) individual Fulmars, (b) “apparently occupied sites” (AOS), and (c) chicks seen including evidence such as obvious down around the ledge.

The counts presented in Table 1 were not systematic. They were made by various bird-watchers, mostly submitted to the Local Recorders, and were made in different months of the year as people happened to visit. In the recommended censusing method, an “apparently occupied site” (AOS) is a position occupied by one or two Fulmars apparently sitting tightly, judged to be reasonably horizontal, and capable of holding an egg (Walsh *et al.* 1995). Not all of the observers at Lothian’s inland colonies are likely to have been familiar with this definition, and so the counts of AOS in Table 1 probably include some unsuitable places where Fulmars had landed at the time of counting as well as genuine nesting sites. They are sometimes the only

counts made in a year, particularly at Torphin and Traprain, though at Salisbury Crags and Guttled Haddie there were sometimes two or more counts in a year. In some years, the highest count was obtained in June or July, while in others it was in February, March or April.

Table 1. Counts of Fulmars at inland breeding colonies in Lothian, south-east Scotland. Counts are from any month, and are the highest counts per year where two or more counts are known. For definition of “apparently occupied sites” (AOS) see text. The sources of these counts are: *Scottish Bird Reports* to 1978, *Lothian Bird Reports* 1979–2011, unpublished reports held by Lothian Recorders prior to 1979, *Edinburgh Bird Bulletins* 1950–58, diaries of the late G.L. Sandeman from 1931, unpublished counts of the present author, I.J. Andrews, and D.J. Bates, Fisher 1952, 1966, Brown 1983, da Prato & da Prato 1987, Munro 1988 and Checkley 2012.

| Year | Torphin Quarry (9.5 km from sea) | | | Salisbury Crags (3 km from sea) | | | Guttled Haddie (3.5 km from sea) | | | Traprain Law Quarry (8 km from sea) | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------------|-----|----------------|---|-----|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----|----------------|--|-----|----------------|---|
| | All adults & sub-adults | AOS | Chicks seen | All adults & sub-adults | AOS | Chicks seen | All adults & sub-adults | AOS | Chicks seen | All adults & sub-adults | AOS | Chicks seen | |
| 1949 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1960s | occasional birds flying | | | 2 flying near occasional birds flying | | | occasional birds flying | | | | | | |
| 1970 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1971 | 3 | | | 3 | | | | | | 7 | | | |
| 1972 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1973 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1974 | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 1975 | | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 1976 | 4 | | | 4 | 2 | | | | | | | | |
| 1978 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 22 | | | | | | | | | |
| 1979 | | | | 34 | | | | | | | | | |
| 1980 | 20 | 14 | | 38 | | | 7 | | | present | | | |
| 1981 | 21 | 14 | | 37 | | 1 | 2 | | | 12 | 8 | | |
| 1982 | 24 | 16 | 1 | 37 | 10 | | | 2 | | | | 10 | |
| 1983 | | 21 | | 31 | 27 | 5 | 2 | | | | | 16 | |
| 1984 | 25 | 20 | 2 | | 36 | 4 | 8 | 2 | | 34 | | 17 | |
| 1985 | 24 | 16 | 1 | | 40 | 5 | | 5 | | | | 18 | |
| 1986 | 31 | 20 | 3 | | 21 | 6 | | 5 | 1 | | | 30 | 1 |
| 1987 | 32 | 27 | 3 | 40 | 31 | 2 | 8 | 6 | | | | 17 | |
| 1988 | 36 | 24 | 2 | 44 | 31 | | | | | | | | |
| 1989 | 30 | 13 | 1 | 38 | 26 | 1 | 8 | 4 | | | | 13 | |
| 1990 | 30 | 14 | | 33 | 29 | | | 3 | | | | | |
| 1991 | | | | 38 | | | 8 | 4 | 2 | | | | |
| 1992 | 28 | | | 50 | | 1 | 4 | 4 | | | | | |
| 1993 | 24 | 23 | 1 | | 44 | | 7 | 4 | 1 | 15 | 14 | 6 | |
| 1994 | 35 | 28 | 1 | 36 | 20 | 3 | | 5 | 1 | | | 20 | |
| 1995 | 27 | 16 | 3 | | 17 | 2 | | 5 | 2 | | | 10 | |
| 1996 | 23 | 15 | 6 | 30 | 15 | 8 | 8 | 4 | | 16 | | 10 | |
| 1997 | 11 | 8 | | 25 | 17 | | 8 | 3 | | | | | |
| 1998 | | | | 26 | 13 | 1 | | | | | | 6 | |
| 1999 | 24 | | | 19 | 10 | | 10 | 4 | | | | | |
| 2000 | | | | | | | | | | | | 8 | |
| 2001 | | 3 | | | 9 | | | 1 | | | | | |
| 2002 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2003 | 2 | | | | 6 | | | | 1 | | | | |
| 2004 | | | | 24 | 11 | | | | | | | | |
| 2005 | 2 | 1 | | 13 | 10 | | 7 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 5 | | |
| 2006 | 1 | 1 | | | 4 | | | 1 | | | | 2 | |
| 2007 | 2 | 1 | | 20 | 17 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | | |
| 2008 | 1 | | | 11 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 3 | | 2 | 2 | | 1 |
| 2009 | 1 | | | 17 | 13 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 1 | | | | |
| 2010 | 3 | 1 | | 24 | 13 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 2 | | |
| 2011 | 4 | 2 | | | 10 | | | | | 4 | 2 | | 2 |
| 2012 | 1 | | | | 10 | | | 3 | | | | | |

In spite of their unsystematic nature, the counts in Table 1 show distinct trends. The 1960s and early 1970s was the period of first prospecting, when singles or a few Fulmars flew around and occasionally landed at the future breeding colonies. In the later 1970s and early 1980s the numbers of birds clearly began to rise, and breeding was first confirmed by a chick seen at Torphin Quarry in 1978. At Salisbury Crags and Traprain Law, the numbers of birds suggest that breeding probably occurred in years before chicks were first seen; eggs and small chicks are normally concealed by adults and at Salisbury Crags many ledges are impossible to view well.

Through the 1980s and most of the 1990s, high numbers and some successful breeding were maintained in all four colonies. At Torphin, AOS numbers were c.20 up to 28, and birds seen c.30 to 36. At Salisbury Crags, AOS were c.25 to 44, and birds c.35 up to 50. Guttled Haddie had 2–6 AOS and 7–10 birds. At Traprain Law, AOS were 10–20 up to 30, and birds ranged from 15 to 34.

From the later 1990s onwards, Table 1 shows a downward turn in all four colonies. At Salisbury Crags and Guttled Haddie, this decline is clear, but some successful breeding has continued. The Traprain Law colony has dwindled to only one or two breeding pairs, and these have not managed to fledge young in every year recently (pers. obs.). At Torphin Quarry, Fulmars have almost disappeared, apart from brief visits by one to four birds. At this colony it is possible to see onto ledges fairly well, and it is certain that no chicks were hatched, and probably no eggs were laid, from 2006 to the present (pers. obs.).

Discussion

Before 1878, Fulmars nested nowhere in UK except St Kilda, and then spectacularly spread around Scotland and to all UK coasts in the 19th and 20th centuries (Fisher 1952, Mitchell *et al.* 2004). By the 1920s they had commenced breeding in the Firth of Forth and were breeding on all the Forth islands but one by the 1960s (Murray *et al.* 1998). The establishment of the inland Lothian colonies followed this in the 1970s. The UK expansion finally stabilised, and the population levelled and slightly decreased overall, sometime after 1990 (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, M. Tasker in Forrester *et al.* 2007), and breeding success declined during this time (Foster & Marrs 2012). The timing of the establishment, rise, and recent decline of the Lothian inland colonies are therefore consistent with being part of wider UK Fulmar trends. Probable causes of the great spread and recent downturn in Fulmars, including changes in fisheries, climate, marine food chains, pollution and debris, are discussed in Mitchell *et al.* (2004) and M. Tasker in Forrester *et al.* (2007).

A young Fulmar fledging from an inland cliff may find it more difficult to reach the sea than from a coastal one, due to the need to remain airborne over a greater distance, and as the required direction may be less immediately obvious. There have been anecdotal reports of Fulmars in Lothian becoming grounded, some with injuries, mostly in streets or land around Salisbury Crags (Brown 1983, local newspapers). The first flights of young Fulmars have had little attention in the literature. Fisher (1952) concluded from St Kildan, Faroese and Icelandic fowling and others, that most fledglings fly down onto the sea, a few scramble and fall, and a few master flight quickly and tour along cliffs. Williamson (1954) on Fair Isle found that most young flew of their own accord; most flew between 10:00–13:00 with some earlier and later; all flew towards the sea; most lost height steeply and some flew more steadily; most landed on the sea from 500 yards to 0.5 miles offshore, and one was stranded on the moor. These observations suggest that for inland fledglings mortality before reaching the sea may be considerably greater than for coastal young, and, as Fulmars have a tendency to be faithful to their natal or nearby colonies (M. Tasker in Forrester *et al.* 2007), there would be a consequent reduction in recruitment to inland colonies as compared with coastal ones.

Fulmar density tends to be higher in colonies free from mammalian predators (M. Tasker in Forrester *et al.* 2007). As with coastal mainland colonies, inland colonies will attract predators

such as Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* or Stoats *Mustela ermine*. The remains of a large Fulmar chick with feathers bitten in the manner of a Fox kill were found on grass just above the Fulmar crag at Guttled Haddie in 1995 (pers. obs.). Foxes are frequently seen at Torphin Quarry, and a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* took a flying Fulmar there in 2012. At Traprain Law in 2010 Ravens *Corvus corax* reared young close to occupied Fulmar ledges in April, and no adult or young Fulmars were present later in that summer.

Lothian has a relatively large coastal Fulmar colony at Tantallon, which had 500–660 AOS in 1982–1996 (Murray *et al.* 1998). Later counts are not available, though in sample plots their productivity declined severely in 2002–13 (*Lothian Bird Reports 2002, 2008–11*, S. da Prato pers. comm.). Like the inland colonies, the Tantallon colony is considered to be vulnerable to mammalian predators, and many ledges where birds appear to sit tightly as though on eggs in June never produce young (*Lothian Bird Report 2002*, S. da Prato pers. comm.). Fulmars breed on nine islands in the Firth of Forth; largest numbers being on Inchkeith with over 500 AOS most years in 1979–97. Total numbers on all nine islands rose to a peak of 2,045 AOS in 1997 followed by an overall decline thereafter, though on individual islands trends were not all similar, and numbers remained steadier on Isle of May and Inchgarvie (Forth Seabird Group counts in annual *Edinburgh Natural History Society Journals*, Murray *et al.* 1998, *Isle of May Bird Observatory Annual Reports, Isle of May NNR Studies of breeding Birds and Other Biological Recordings*, Eggeling 1974). Thus, the declines at the Lothian inland and coast colonies, on most Forth Islands, and in Scotland generally, all began about the late 1990s or early 2000s.

The prospects of the four Lothian inland colonies vary from poor to critical. At Salisbury Crags and Guttled Haddie, breeding continues, and the numbers of birds seen suggest that pre-breeders are still visiting. At Traprain Law, the future looks tenuous, and at Torphin, the colony may already be effectively extinct.

Elsewhere in Scotland, a Fulmar colony existed at 13.5 km from the sea on the west-most crags of Benarty Hill, Kinross. A chick was reared there in 1972 and up to 12 birds were seen during the 1980s, after which breeding attempts became intermittent and the colony was deserted from about 2001 (D. Fairlamb pers. comm., *Scottish Bird Reports*). At c.14 km inland, at Ternemny Quarry in North-east Scotland, a few pairs nested in the 1980s, but disappeared in the 1990s when the quarry was overgrown (M. Cook pers. comm.), and a few pairs nested at other sites less far inland in North-east Scotland some of which have disappeared (Francis & Cook 2011). Scotland also has larger colonies on natural crags 7 km inland in east Sutherland (Pennie 1962, Sharrock 1976, Vittery 1997), and in two quarries in Fife 3.5–4 km inland (*Fife Bird Reports*, Elkins *et al.* 2003).

In England, there are some small inland colonies near the east coast, the furthest inland being in north Northumberland up to 14.5 km from the sea, though some no longer have confirmed breeding (Fisher 1952, Thomas 1988, Day *et al.* 1995, Brown & Grice 2005), and in north Yorkshire some small colonies up to 12 km inland (Fisher 1966, Gibbons *et al.* 1993). In Ireland and the Isle of Man there are some not more than 10 km inland (Lloyd *et al.* 1991). In the Arctic, Fulmars can nest on high cliffs many kilometres inland from the sea, especially in Iceland and Svalbard (Fisher 1952, Cramp *et al.* 1974, Lloyd *et al.* 1991).

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Brian Orr (1961–2012)

In the Scottish birding scene from the late 1980s onwards, it would have been impossible to have missed the imposing character that was Brian Orr. Brian was one of those people who moved through life by having a bit of fun, much of it at his own expense; he would always greet you with his cheerful smile and some customary banter at various twitches around the country. So, it was with great sadness that we heard of his untimely death in late November 2012.

Brian was born in Glasgow on 8 March 1961 into a large family where he was one of five brothers (including a twin brother) along with a sister. These early years were not happy ones as he was fostered out to various carers throughout Ayrshire. He eventually became really close with one of these families and regarded Joe and Doreen Stoker as his true family. They were very fond of Brian and helped him set up his first home in Ayrshire. He attended various schools before studying horticulture at Langside College in Glasgow before heading off south to work in England. The desire to move back home took him to North Ayrshire Council Parks Department, where he worked until his retirement.

Brian was a keen local birder in Ayrshire with Bogside Flats one of his regular haunts. However, he was always keen on finding out of the way lochs and farm pools. Some of these places yielded excellent finds such as Lesser Yellowlegs, Green-winged Teal and Lesser Scaup. Brian was very keen on visiting the under-watched region of Dumfries & Galloway, from where he returned full of tales of good birding with not another birder to be seen! Both King Eider and Lesser Scaup were amongst his finds there, but the icing on the cake was Scotland's first mainland record of Semipalmated Sandpiper at Port Logan in September 1999.

Although a very keen local birder, Brian was also a twitcher who travelled the length of Britain, often in the company of his good friend the late Bruce Forrester. With his good humour and immediate likeability, Brian soon made friends amongst the great and good of British

birding. News of his untimely death was greeted with much sadness amongst these luminaries.

Brian loved to travel to the Isles of Scilly each autumn; indeed he managed to visit the islands for the last time with Gordon after a few years' absence in autumn 2012. In recent years, he spent some time on Fair Isle, as well as a spring week with friends for the past ten years on the Isle of May. Fittingly, spring 2012 was the May's best spring for rare migrants in a long time, with Brian finding one, a Thrush Nightingale. Brian left the island early that year to attend a social gathering. For his friends present there at that time the poignant sight of him waving his goodbyes to those on the pier as he rounded the headland was to be the last time they would ever see him.

As well as a keen birder Brian was also a very good artist, particularly of cartoon characters where his humour shone through. One such cartoon that appeared in *Birding World* was the



Plate 282. Brian Orr, Isle of May, June 2012. © Calum Scott

infamous Isles of Scilly Spotless Starling episode; a bird that turned out to be a normal Starling. His drawing depicted a Starling handing another Starling a bottle of stain remover, with the words “guaranteed to remove spots” on it. This was Brian in a nutshell, keen to have a laugh with others, but also keen to poke some fun in his direction, as he had travelled to see the bird himself!

His other enjoyments in life were golf and watching Scotland play at Murrayfield along with his wife Diane. They had met and married whilst living in Ayrshire. Sadly, however, Diane died at a relatively early age. After this setback, Brian picked himself up, took early redundancy from the North Ayrshire Parks Department and built a new life for himself by moving to East Lothian. He stated that he was keen for some new action with “some bush bashing rather than more dodgy ducks”. The “dodgy ducks” was a reference to the playful ribbing that went with each of his waterfowl finds. He chose to stay in Tynninghame village, a place he knew very well thanks to some

close friends whom he had known for a number of years. In his new life in East Lothian he had found a new partner in Amanda. However, the last many of his friends was to hear from him was a text in November 2012 stating that he was off on holiday to Queensland, Australia, to visit friends. It was therefore with great shock that we all heard of his sudden death from a heart attack on 30 November. Amanda flew out to Australia where a small ceremony took place before he was cremated. His ashes were returned to Scotland and scattered in a private ceremony attended by close family and friends at Portencross Beach in Ayrshire on his birthday - an area much loved by Brian.

Brian Orr was a larger than life character, always with a smile and a kind word to others. His passing has left a huge hole in the fabric of Scottish birding but many have been left with fond memories of a true friend.

Iain English, Gordon Macdonald, Angus Murray & Calum Scott



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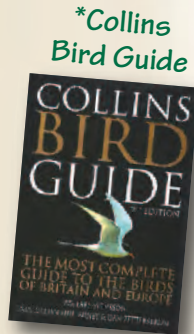
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SOC Conference 2013 - Marine Hotel, Troon



Plates 283–284. The Marine Hotel, (inset) one of the local Mediterranean Gulls. © Jimmy Maxwell/Eric McCabe

A balmy south-westerly breeze blew across the nearby Royal Troon golf course fairways as delegates for the conference arrived at this grand sandstone hotel.

Even as they arrived, the more observant birders had sighted more than one Mediterranean Gull flying near the hotel! After registration and settling in, the evening's events kicked off with Ken Shaw, SOC President welcoming everyone, detailing arrangements, listing all the contributing organisations, displays etc. and giving a warm introduction to Tony Marr our opening speaker.

An Evening with Tony Marr

Tony Marr achieved the notable distinction of retaining his youthful enthusiasm for birdwatching, while making a respectable supplementary income from it. As in most cases there were some elements of good fortune, but these only complemented an imaginative determination and a lot of hard work.

Birdwatching 50 or 60 years ago was peopled with some gifted, distinguished, eccentric and autocratic individuals and Scotland certainly had its share.

Tony met an allied breed in Sussex where he was brought up. Far from being deterred by these characters, he joined them in setting up the Sussex Ornithological Society, contributing to their journal and becoming a prime mover in establishing nature reserves at Pagham Harbour and Rye Harbour.

His penetrating knowledge and wide experience made him a welcome and effective member of the RSPB Council and the BOU Records Committee.



Plate 285. Tony Marr. © Jimmy Maxwell

He had a distinguished career in the civil service, learning valuable lessons in man management. He then began to lead bird watching trips around the world using his ornithological knowledge and the skills he had learnt while working for the government. Being blessed with a vivid memory, these experiences provided a fund of stories. As the ornithological specialist on polar cruises he was not only able to extend his birding experiences but also his stock of stories about some of the less knowledgeable participants.

Not least were his reflections on developments in communication; TV videos, smart phones and satellite technology in general. Similarly, the quality of optical equipment had advanced by leaps and bounds so that the shotgun was no longer needed for identification. Tony described his talk as a magic carpet ride and happily so it continues providing him with enjoyment and further stories.

In fact, the magic carpet ride was extended in his after-dinner speech on Saturday night. This was a model of gentle observations of human peculiarities.

I'm sure that he would be a most agreeable companion guide on future flights of the magic carpet.

Ivan T. Draper

The now traditional quiz followed, with each table debating or more accurately struggling with Ian Thomson's varied and devious clues. Bird recognition was a prominent feature as usual and migration, observatories and varied ornithological facts were included, all handled in Ian's usual humorous and knowledgeable way.

He does this so well that I fear (and hope) that the task will remain with him for each conference now. A most enjoyable evening.

Saturday

For the morning Ayrshire Branch had kindly arranged some local guided walks. The weather was fair and Angus Hogg's group started at Troon harbour viewing across to a sunny Arran, enjoying the Eider flock in the inner basin and

then wader watching at the north beach. Angus then hurried back to do a splendid *Ayrshire Birds* talk at the hotel. Tony Scott took us further to Irvine harbour where among other birds a pair of Stonechats appeared across the river mouth - an encouraging sight for that resident species. Doonfoot and Rozelle Park were other venues, led by David Rackham with later help from Duncan Watt.

After lunch the afternoon lectures began.



Plate 286. Chris McInerney chats to Steve Roberts. © Jimmy Maxwell

Shedding light on the Honey-buzzard - Steve Roberts

Steve began his presentation with his trademark picture of a Welsh rugby try against England, followed by a story of his meeting with Seton Gordon for the Scots. He then gave some background on the elusive Honey-buzzard, a trans-Saharan migrant, and explained the physical adaptations for its unique life style. This included short tarsi for digging out wasps' nests, and slit nostrils. Issues of identification were illustrated and summed up as being 'a not-quite-right Buzzard'!

He then covered field work techniques and described the bird as tolerant to monitoring, secretive but confiding. The secrecy also extended to the politics surrounding this species and he lamented the lack of openness in some quarters in revealing breeding records. This does not help the conservation of the species which is also hampered by a lot of negative attitudes regarding disturbance during fieldwork.

The use of nest cameras as a means of both adding to our knowledge of the bird and dismissing some of the myths concerning disturbance was a strong element in the presentation. The ability to check colour rings to identify individuals at the nest, view behavioural patterns and record prey items was well illustrated. Who will forget images of an adult Honey-buzzard being catapulted off the nest platform by a severe gust of wind, the Houdini frog leaping fearlessly from the nest to an uncertain fate below, and the sight of Goshawk predation on young Honey-buzzards.

Finally, he discussed the general conservation measures which would be adopted to assist the species in the face of pressures from, for example, windfarm expansion which will affect foraging Honey-buzzards. In addition, the provision of ponds in forestry plantations to encourage frogs, an important prey item, would be a positive management approach. Superbly illustrated and delivered with a sharp Welsh wit, Steve entertained us with his usual high standard of presentation which was extremely well received by conference members.

Gordon Riddle

From Merlin to Harpy Eagle - Dario Fernández-Bellon

Dario gave a very informative talk with brilliant visuals covering four raptor species starting with the Harpy Eagle, the national bird of Panama which features on their Coat of Arms, having replaced the Bald Eagle. This clever move has caught the mood of the country generating financial and legislative as well as popular support for this huge powerful top predator. Imagine, it takes Howler Monkeys, Sloths and numerous arboreal mammals! Thus, the prognosis for this awesome bird, at least in Panama, is hopeful.

In contrast, Ridgway's Hawk has been driven into a small corner of the Dominican Republic; now only some 200 remain in the National Park at Haitises and the farmers who clear what forest they can, wrongly believe the bird to be a chicken thief, when as a *Buteo* it is more dependent on small mammals. The outlook is grim, except for the 200 Red-listed birds in the



Plate 287. Dario Fernández-Bellon relaxing after his talk. © Jimmy Maxwell

poorly protected park. As his choice for the intermediate situation Dario chose Guiana Crested Eagle, a smaller version of the Harpy though a different genus. It inhabits similar jungle to the Harpy, but exists at much lower density and does not compete. It eats Skunks, Armadillos, many birds and small arboreal mammals. Dario took his data from Misiones Province in Argentina. Again, threatened by forest clearance and active hunting, it appears more resistant and flexible because of low density distribution.

Finally, we come home to Ireland and Merlins living in forest-edge situations, nesting mainly in crow nests. Detailed knowledge of Merlin ecology in this habitat would perhaps cause forest management to be more friendly to the bird. However, collection of detailed data required is too labour intensive for the resources available.

In future, with the too rapid increase in world population, reserve areas will not be available, so some accommodation in life styles of cultures will be necessary.

Campbell McLellan

Then coffee time and a moment to visit some of the many displays and stalls. All the usual book stands were there - SOC of course along with BTO, Ayrshire SWT, Hessilhead and SOC Ayrshire, RSPB South Ayrshire, Arran Natural History Society and Viking Optical Ltd. On the artistic side, we had Fran Knowles (wildlife artist) and David Palmar and Eric McCabe (wildlife photographers) with their displays.

The Political Birder - Mark Avery

Mark wants us to try to influence politicians using the methods that modern communications now provide. He suggested we should be dissatisfied with the present state of nature (biodiversity) in the world and in the UK and be trying to do something about it. He had recently joined a large crowd to witness the spectacle of three-quarters of a million Mexican Free-tailed Bats emerging from their roost in a man-made structure (a metal-girder bridge) in downtown Austin Texas, but he contrasted this with man's extinction of the Passenger Pigeon, once the world's most numerous bird, on the same continent in a period of only 100 years. Do we realise that all diesel fuel now contains 5% of biofuel? To grow crops for the production of biofuel ultimately means either that rainforest is destroyed or that less land is available for food production. Within the UK farmland birds have



Plate 289. Ian Hopkins does some browsing. © Jimmy Maxwell

decreased by 50% within a mere 30 years. By any standards, this is a disastrous state of affairs, yet politicians tend not to get too worked up about such environmental changes. Mark suggests we should consider writing to our MSP/MP/MEP, writing a blog, signing an e-petition or tweeting on Twitter. Of these suggestions the e-petition was found to be currently the most popular with his audience. Mark encouraged us to look at the e-petition on grouse moor licensing even though this is currently only applicable to England. But he would like us also to join him in blogging!

Graham Pyatt



Plate 288. Mark Avery inviting you to 'tweet'. © Jimmy Maxwell

The 77th SOC AGM

This turned out to be an unusually brief affair. The 76th AGM minutes were proposed and seconded without comment. With reference to the Annual Report, Ken discussed various points regarding the membership development project including assisting members all over Scotland, the great benefit of the improved SOC Website and a significant increase in membership.

He emphasised the enormous importance of our growing commitment within the Scottish Environment LINK where team efforts are being made to convince Scottish MPs of the importance of our seabirds and their declines. This involves the establishment of marine protected areas and a concerted effort against marine crime, a matter which Ian Thomson is taking up with ministers.

Ken introduced Alan Fox (Treasurer), thanking him for all his work. Alan in turn expressed his thanks to our Independent Financial Adviser, Sandy Scotland, for all his help. He went on to discuss the Annual Accounts showing that the Club was in a secure financial position largely due to legacies and also increased membership and Waterston House sales, where Dave Allan received great praise for all his efforts. There was an expected Club deficit this year due to various activities and support given to certain other bodies. Council were currently considering the best ways of investing the Club's funds.

Ken Shaw, retiring as President at this meeting, stressed how well his Vice President Chris McInerny had worked with him: an excellent team player and a valuable contributor to Council. He then handed over office to Chris and wished him every success. Ian Thomson's was proposed as our new Vice President - this was accepted unanimously both at the table and from the floor. Other office bearers agreed to continue in office. There had been a nomination for a vacant position on Council for Alison Creamer from Fife Branch - this was duly approved by all those present.

Under AOB, a question regarding the length of tenure of the Financial Adviser position was raised. The point would be reviewed in the absence of any strict rules.

Chris McInerny, President, then brought the meeting to a close with a few words regarding working as a team to take the Club forward in the future and presented Ken with a bottle of rum in appreciation for all his effort while in office.

As delegates prepared for the Conference Dinner, shafts of sunlight were reflecting through the clouds off the Heads of Ayr and the odd Mediterranean Gull was still floating across the golf course. The meal was efficiently served by a very pleasant staff and the after-dinner address was given by Tony Marr. Having spent many years in the Arctic and Antarctic as a tour leader on expedition ships, Tony was in a perfect position to gather humorous stories about odd passengers and crazy situations. He recounted many of these to great effect - we were a very appreciative audience!

The dance later was ably led by the Oran Mor ceilidh band - their excellent sound and rapport ensured that the tiny floor was always full of dancers, many of whom were young! How nice to see such youthful exuberance from these conference delegates - long may it continue.

Sunday

The morning got underway with two PhD students from Glasgow University.



Plate 290. The evening dance. © Wendy Hicks

Foraging behaviour and prey selection in surface-feeding seabirds - *Gail Robertson*

Gail gave us an entertaining account of her fieldwork on tiny Coquet Island off the Northumberland coast, including how to protect yourself from terns by thickening your hat! Along with two RSPB wardens, she lived for three months in the lighthouse buildings. Although the island is low-lying and without high cliffs, it is the home of 35,000 seabirds including Kittiwake and four species of tern, the nests of which are unusually accessible to the researcher. There is no public disturbance to the island throughout the year. The general decline in Britain's seabirds has been attributed to a combination of predation, over-fishing, climate change and human disturbance. Small bird species such as Arctic, Common and Roseate Terns which feed near the surface of the sea are particularly vulnerable as they usually bring only one item of prey back to the nest and therefore foraging trips must be short. Gail monitored the prey of the three terns during 2011 and 2012. She found that the species had distinctly different foraging strategies, taking different proportions and sizes of sandeels, sprats, juvenile fish and other items (e.g. crustaceans). With the help of other researchers in a boat, she was also able to locate their different foraging areas. At the same time Gail compared foraging by Kittiwakes during incubation and chick-rearing stages. This involved fitting birds with GPS tags. During the incubation stage, birds tended to catch larger prey items from a greater distance than when chick-rearing. Foraging areas also differed between years, leading Gail to conclude that Marine Protection Areas either need to be flexible or very large.

Graham Pyatt

Monitoring Puffins using photography - *Adam Cross*

Time-lapse photography from fixed cameras on various Scottish islands between May and July gave useful data to complement the usual counts of nest burrows and individual birds. The snag was that there were vast numbers of photos requiring subsequent analysis! The regular photography showed up 4–5 day cycles of returning birds, with largest numbers in late evening or early morning. Adam also studied



Plate 291. Adam Cross & Gail Robertson before their talks. © Jimmy Maxwell

the concomitant effects of Puffins on the island ecosystem. Puffin burrowing led to soil erosion and the birds' input of guano was considerable. The annual amount of nitrogen imported varied mainly with the size of the population from 40 kg/ha on Fair Isle, to 90 kg/ha on Mingulay and 140 kg/ha at St Kilda. Experimental plots on each island with or without Puffins and with or without Rabbits revealed that Rabbits preferred to graze in vegetation that had been enriched by Puffin guano. The flow of nutrients from fish via the Puffins to Rabbits was revealed by study of the isotope ratio of nitrogen. The rabbits gained the same distinctive 15N/14N isotope ratio in their tissues that the Puffins had acquired from their prey. The flow of nutrients does not stop there; the sea around the island is also enriched from water draining from the islands.

Graham Pyatt

Now tea and coffee, and a last chance to select a suitable book for that Christmas present and buy some raffle tickets!

Ornithological fraud - *Martin Collinson*

To all (most?) of us deliberate fraud involving bird recording would never enter our heads. Although Martin may have struck a cord when he talked about 'wishful thinking' or filling in the gaps of a description when, for example, we didn't actually see that yellow rump on that glimpsed Pallas's Warbler. But this talk was about the other end of the spectrum - outright deliberate fraud. Would he spill the beans? - no, Martin had to be disappointingly careful with what he said and keep to published cases!



Plate 292. Martin Collinson. © Jimmy Maxwell

The infamous Hastings Rarities and George Bristow of St Leonards were covered in some detail. At the time (1962), this caused a major rift between leading figures, but it is clear that Martin agreed that a fraud had been committed. It was suggested that at this time fraud was rife. Similar published cases involve taxidermists near York (Tadcaster Rarities) and near Margate, but there could be more. The Meinertzhagen fraud was of a different type - stealing and relabeling specimens to deceive his peers. In Martin's words 'an arrogant emperor dominating his empire'.

Today, fraud is potentially of a more technical nature - changing the embedded details of a photographic file or claiming a photograph was taken somewhere it was not. Other recent incidents have been no more than pranks - such as the stuffed Night Heron in a tree near Newcastle - but 'pranks' can so easily get out of control with modern instant and global messaging. Permanent damage can result from 'youthful indiscretion'.

As a conclusion, Martin posed the question as to how future generations might view many of our records, based as they were on field descriptions and trust.

Ian Andrews

Should we be concerned about the impacts of offshore windfarms and wave and tidal devices on Scottish seabird populations? - Bob Furness

Bob started by pointing out that the recent declines in numbers of seabirds breeding in Scotland are even worse than declines in English farmland birds, and questioned whether conservation money could be allocated differently. In many cases our seabirds are an important part of the world population (from 60% for Bonxies down to 20% for Shags and Razorbills and 7% for Fulmars. In contrast to the large sums spent on birds like Corncrake and Capercaillie where we have only a tiny part of the world population, little is being allocated to seabird conservation.

The Scottish Government has stated its wish for the country to be a leader in the development of renewable energy, including wind, tidal and wave power. Offshore windfarms present fewer political problems and experience more constant winds than land-based ones, but may be a greater threat because seabirds are long-lived and breed slowly. They are also harder to monitor, though radar systems and collision monitors on the rotor blades could be deployed in the near future. Sufficiently fast-flowing tidal streams for power generation are rather restricted, the Pentland Firth being the best. Such sites are generally avoided by seabirds (except Black Guillemots) during periods of fast flow, so may be less of a threat than wind turbines. Wave energy devices seem to pose little threat to seabirds.

The main threats from windfarms are that they are acting as barriers to bird movements, collision risks and disturbance/displacement from normal behaviour. On land, species vary in their ability to avoid windfarms. With less evidence, it seems that at sea, auks, divers, gannets and eiders generally avoid turbine blades, or fly below them. Skuas and gulls may be most at risk of collision. Among the ways of mitigating for the harmful effects of off-shore windfarms and aiding dwindling seabird numbers, we could be using supplementary feeding for breeding skuas, and removing ground predators such as rats, feral cats and ferrets from more islands where seabirds breed.

Roger Hissett



Plate 293. Stephen Hunter discusses visuals with Bob Furness. © Jimmy Maxwell

200 Club winners were then drawn by Vicky McLellan on behalf of organiser Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, whose efforts have brought so many financial benefits to the Club. Then the Raffle was drawn by Wendy and Kathryn with grateful thanks to all the companies and individuals who contributed prizes - the total amount raised was £458.

Chris McInerney then brought the weekend's conference to a close with many thanks to the whole SOC team for their organisational work and also to the hotel for the noted courtesy and efficiency of their staff. Next year's conference would be in October 2014 at Perth.

He wished everyone safe home as the wind increased outside driving the rain past the hotel entrance - but a very successful event.

Those who were at Troon couldn't fail to notice the 12 students at this year's conference (including the two student speakers). The number of attending students has increased over the past few years and the Club certainly plans to continue offering a subsidised attendance fee to encourage their participation, as well as providing a slot in the talks programme for PhD students.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 294. Hotel view across to the Heads of Ayr. © Jimmy Maxwell

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC members

Ayrshire: Ms L. Ralph, Mr R. Wiggins, **Borders:** Mr & Mrs H. Bakkes, Mr T. Chamberlain, Mr P.H. Hanmer, Mr & Mrs R. Higgins, Mrs W. Paterson, **Central Scotland:** Mr A. Barr, Mr D. Cramb, Mr & Mrs A. Parraco, Mr S. Ridsdale, **Clyde:** Mr A. Ash, Mr S. Ball, Mr E. Cole, Ms P. Dunbar, Mr J. McAree, Ms F.J. Morton, Mr A. Smith & Ms E. Purvis, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr & Mrs D. Derrick, Mr M. Jeeves, Mr S. Lowe, Mr & Mrs R. Paxton, **Fife:** Ms N. Carlson, **Highland:** Mr & Mrs J. Manson, Ms J. Tyrer, **Lothian:** Mr N. Aitken, Mr J. Allison, Mr & Mrs M. Camburn, Ms R.M. Collins, Mrs S. Dick, Mr P. Doris, Mr J. Easton, Mr J. Finch, Mr & Mrs M. Ford, Mr J. Gibson, Ms S. Gossip, Mrs S. Home, Ms S. Jackson, Ms N. Jeffery, Mr P.J. Kane, Dr P. McBride, Mr J. McTague, Mr A. Mellor, Ms E. Morrison & Dr A. Crerar, Mrs K. Rae, Mr M. Roe, Mr M. Scott, Ms A. Sinclair, Mrs G. Spoor, Mr & Mrs R. Taylor, Ms J. Waldie, Miss M. Watson, Mr G. Watson & Ms R. Marshall, Ms E.E. Whewell, Mr N. Wilkinson, Ms L. Wylie, Miss S. Yardy, **Moray:** Mr D. Main, Mr S. Massie, **North-east Scotland:** Mr P. Howey, Mr R. Ince, Ms V. Saint, **Orkney:** Mr S. Groundwater, **Overseas:** Mr D. Bundy, **Stewartry:** Mr & Mrs M.J. Appleford, Mr P. Jordan, Mr & Mrs R. Smith, **Tayside:** Ms C. McGuffie, **West Galloway:** Mr T. Marshall.

Plate 295. Long-tailed Tits among Hawthorns.
© Darren Woodhead



SOC 200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **August:** 1st £30 B. Etheridge, 2nd £20 G. Wren, 3rd £10 J. Fairbrass. **September:** 1st £30 D. Boomer, 2nd £20 B. Pirie, 3rd £10 Mrs A. Inglis. **October:** 1st £30 Dr Napier, 2nd £20 G. A. Ball, 3rd £10 S. Howe.

The 2014 Scottish Birdfair

The Birdfair will be held on 10 & 11 May 2014 at Hopetoun House, West Lothian. www.scottishbirdfair.org.uk

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

Saturday 22 March 2014, Aberdeen (programme and booking information enclosed).

SOC Annual Conference 2014

31 October–2 November, The Station Hotel, Perth.

Art Exhibitions, Waterston House

- Darren Woodhead, showing until 15 January.
- Pat Beveridge & East Coast Stitchers, 18 January–19 February.
- Carol Barrett, 22 February–2 April.

Request

If anyone has a copy of the 1983 *Scottish Bird Report* that they no longer need, could they please contact Waterston House. A member is looking for a copy to complete their set.



Plate 296. Tender giants. © Carol Barrett

Branch updates

A new branch of the SOC. We're delighted to tell you that a branch of the SOC has now formed in Moray! The first meeting of 'Moray Bird Club - the Moray branch of the SOC' took place in Elgin in early October. We hope that the new branch will provide an opportunity for those who share a common interest in birds to meet for a regular social occasion. Please visit the Moray branch page on the website for full details of the branch committee, evening meetings programme and branch contact details.

New Clyde branch secretary: Ian Fulton, 8 Barrachnie Avenue, Baillieston, Glasgow G69 6SR. Tel: 0141 773 4329, Email: soc.clyde@btinternet.com. Ian takes up the reins from Hayley Douglas who the Club thanks for her time given to the role.

New Argyll recorder: Jim Dickson, 11 Pipers Road, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8UF. Tel. 01546 603967, Email: meg@jackson5.plus.com. Assistant Argyll recorder: Malcolm Chattwood, 1 The Stances, Kilmichael Glassary, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8QA. Tel: 01546 603389, Email:

abrecorder@outlook.com. Rare birds (i.e. all BBRC, SBRC and ABRC species requiring a description) should be sent to Jim Dickson; all other records of birds in Argyll should be sent to Malcolm Chattwood. Advice on what to record is available on the Argyll Bird Club website (argyll-birdclub.org) under 'Bird Recording'. The Club thanks outgoing recorder, Paul Daw, for his many years of service.

Correction

Pete Gordon's phone number is incorrect on the Highland Branch excursions list (Burghead area on 9 February 2014) sent with the last mailing. It should be 01479 821339.

Scottish Birds online

As well as being available through the SOC website, back issues of *Scottish Birds* (other than the most recent 2 years) are now available freely through the Biodiversity Heritage Library tinyurl.com/bhl-soc-sb. Scanning for the BHL should be completed shortly. BHL www.biodiversitylibrary.org is the largest free library of online natural history books and journals. This will make *Scottish Birds* available to a much wider audience.

Mark Wilkinson - a new member of SBRC

SBRC welcomes Mark Wilkinson as new member of SBRC, replacing Alan Lauder for the south-east Scotland region. Mark brings much experience to the committee. Based in Edinburgh, he has birded for c.30 years, mostly in Lothian and Fife, but also travelling widely throughout Scotland, with annual trips to Shetland. His work frequently takes him abroad, resulting in him living for periods in China, Mexico and The Netherlands, as well as numerous trips to the Middle East, North America, South America and Africa. The downside of this travel is that it has taken its toll on his Scottish List, which has stalled at approximately 360 species, and currently shows no sign of increasing! He has experience of record assessment, having served on the Lothian Birds Records Committee since 2006.

SBRC would like to acknowledge its gratitude to Alan for his work over the period of his tenure. Alan, in his role as Chairman, has contributed enormously to the running of SBRC.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC



Plate 297. Tayside branch celebration, Dundee, August 2013 (from left to right: Jon Cook, Bob McCurley, Arthur Bastable, Ron Downing, Brian Boag; Brian Brocklehurst, John Campbell, Rosemary Boag). © Bob McCurley

Recognition for Brian and Rosemary Boag and Arthur Bastable

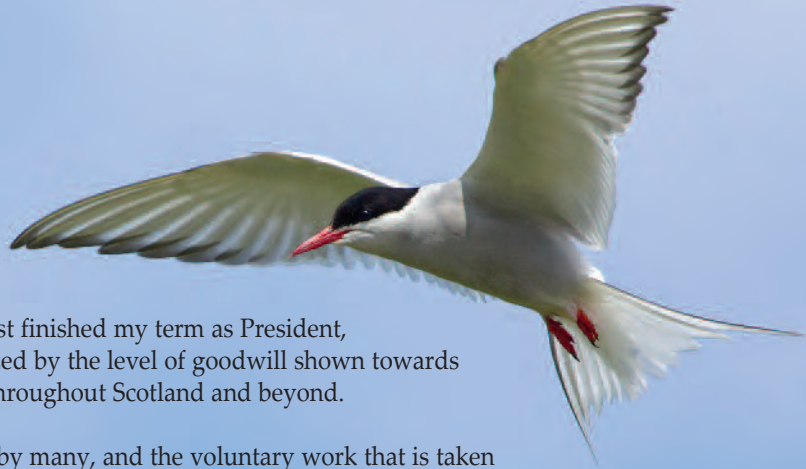
The Tayside Branch gave a 'long service recognition dinner' to Brian Boag (for being our secretary for 27 years), his wife Rosemary (who has so efficiently served the branch with refreshments at our indoor meetings for many years) and Arthur Bastable (member since

1953). Also present were Ron Downing, John Campbell (Chairman), Jon Cook (bird report editor), Brian Brocklehurst (current secretary) and myself, Bob McCurley (treasurer). It took place at the Invercarse Hotel Perth Road, Dundee on 16 August 2013.

Bob McCurley



Having just finished my term as President, I am amazed by the level of goodwill shown towards the SOC throughout Scotland and beyond.



The Club is held in high esteem by many, and the voluntary work that is taken on as a matter of course is just breathtaking.

The Club's future is assured for the next few years, partly due to the kindness and generosity of the individuals who have remembered us in their wills.

Let's look beyond that... If you love Scottish birds and like me have had a lifetime of happiness watching them, please think about the SOC even in a small way in your will. For information on how you might further support the Club, please see the leaflet enclosed with this issue.

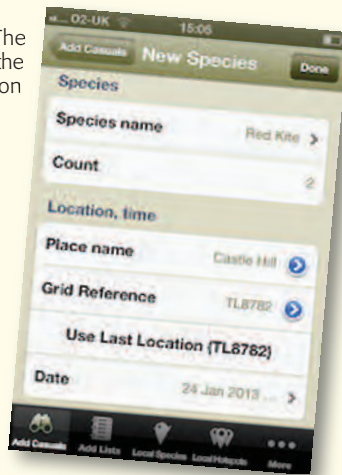
Help make our Club's future secure. Thank you.

Get Mobile for BirdTrack - record your bird sightings on your phone

Love them or hate them (or just plain scared stiff of them), smartphones are becoming ubiquitous. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) realised this and a couple of years ago started developing a suite of useful 'apps'. One of these allows us to take the popular BirdTrack online bird-recording system out into the field and record birds as we encounter them. The BirdTrack App was launched for Android in May 2012 and for iPhone in February 2013. I find it an extremely useful tool in the field and use it regularly on my Android smartphone.

You need to be registered for BirdTrack through the online system: www.birdtrack.net. Once you have downloaded the app to your phone, go to management options, click 'Account prefs' and enter your username and password to get started.

Figure 1. The home page on the Android version looks like this.



Going to Management options will also allow you to synchronise your locations from your own account and to populate the species list. Once that is done you are ready to go. Records can be entered as Casuals (late Swallows on 20 October) or else a species list (a visit to Ruddon's Point at Elie on the same day including such stars as Long-tailed Duck and Red-throated Diver). Location data is map-based so remember to switch on your phone's GPS to get the exact spot (however, remember

to switch GPS off once you have done this to save battery). An alternative, if you have already entered sightings from that area – is to pick the spot from a drop-down list of locations within 5 miles of where you are. For a new site use the map and I find it pays to move the pointer to where you are and set the pointer location.

Creating lists is easy as you 'add and repeat' after you make your first entry. Species entry is simple with a drop-down species list after the first couple of letters you type. You can enter a count of the birds seen although this is optional. You can add birds as you see them and if you have seen more of a species you saw earlier, just enter again and the programme 'does the maths'. As with the PC-based BirdTrack complete lists are preferable from the analysis angle but not mandatory. Once you are at home where you can access your wi-fi or somewhere with a stable data connection (ideally 3G or higher) you can then verify and upload your records through the Management Options. Your phone can store lots of lists and casual sightings so those trips to Fair Isle or the Outer Hebrides can be safely stored on the phone until you get home.

I love it as an extension of BirdTrack as a whole which is becoming a more and more valuable tool in monitoring Britain's (and Ireland's) bird populations. With the phone apps the records go in straight away and your records are lost forever (no computer crashes, no lost notebooks or faulty memory) and they will add to the bigger picture.

Go on - get mobile!

Further information on the apps can be found on the BTO website at <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/taking-part/birdtrack-apps>

BirdTrack is run by the BTO in partnership with the RSPB, BirdWatch Ireland, the SOC and the Welsh Ornithological Society



Breeding Water Rails at Bathgate, West Lothian in 2013

J. EASTON

Plate 298. Adult Water Rail, Bathgate, July 2013. © *Jim Easton*

Little Boghead Village Nature Park is a small site in Bathgate, it consists of a small wooded area and several small ponds. The ponds were once part of a small gravel pit that in-filled with water; this was later developed and divided up into smaller ponds.

Water Rails were first observed breeding at this site in 2012, with many people visiting to see them.

What makes these Water Rails so popular is their behaviour. For a few weeks they seem to abandon their skulking secretive habits. The adults can be seen around the large pond feeding and when the chicks are about they can be easily located by their calls.

In 2013, the first chicks were seen on 5 July and were photographed over the following weeks documenting their growth (Plates 299a–i). The birds gave opportunities to observe otherwise unseen activities and behaviour.

Birds were seen to feed the chicks small pieces of vegetation, aquatic larvae and large slugs that would be broken up by the adults. I also observed a number of aggressive attacks on chicks by the adult birds, on one occasion the adult caught a

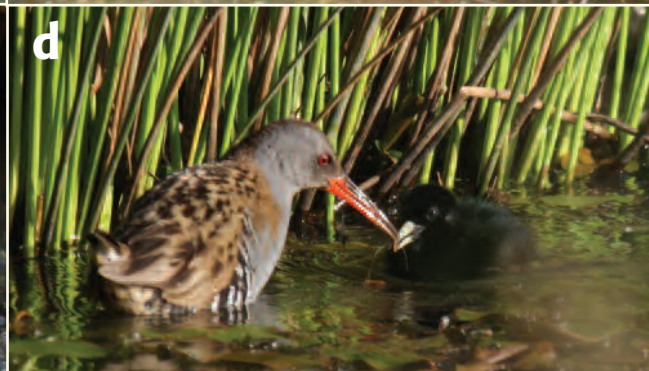
moth and called for the chick to come and get it. When the chick took the moth from the adult it was then attacked and grabbed by the neck and dunked in the water.

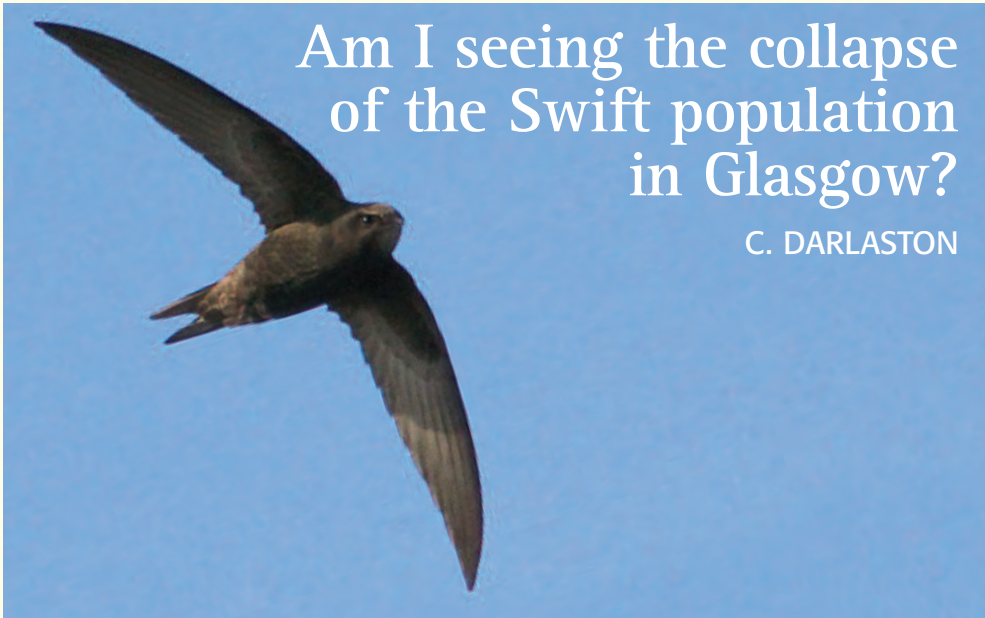
Bonus sightings of other wildlife while watching the birds were: Great Crested Newts that were picked off the surface of the pond by a Black-headed Gull (see Plate 299i) and Water Vole were also seen on several occasions.

More photos and video clips can be seen on http://www.flickr.com/photos/bathgate_wildlife/sets/72157634529316427/

Jim Easton, Bathgate, West Lothian

Plate 299. (a) Four-day-old Water Rail chick, Bathgate, 7 July 2013. (b) Nine-day-old Water Rail chicks, Bathgate, 13 July 2013. (c) Adult with 14-day-old Water Rail chick, Bathgate, 18 July 2013. (d) Adult Water Rail feeding chick, Bathgate, 14 July 2013. (e) Adult Water Rail with slug, Bathgate, 20 July 2013. (f) Twenty-day-old Water Rail, Bathgate, 24 July 2013. (g) Thirty-one-day-old Water Rail, Bathgate, 4 August 2013. (h) Fifty-one-day-old Water Rail, Bathgate, 24 August 2013. (i) Black-headed Gull with male Great Crested Newt, Bathgate, 9 June 2013. © All by *Jim Easton*





Am I seeing the collapse of the Swift population in Glasgow?

C. DARLASTON

Plate 300. Swift. © Ian Foulton

Ten years ago, I used to walk through streets in parts of Glasgow in summer and see and hear screaming parties of Swifts displaying around the buildings until nearly dark (after 11 p.m. in June). It was never as exciting as, for example, Castle Douglas, where the buildings are lower and the Swifts scream down the street at knee level, but it was the ever-present sound of their calls on fine summer evenings that alerted me to their presence and their thrilling chases around the buildings. Now, I wish I had paid more attention to recording numbers, as year on year they have become fewer, even in areas not badly affected by renovation (e.g. Battlefield and Hillhead). My focus was and still is location and conservation of nesting areas.

In the early days of searching, Swifts were found around the older buildings in the west end of the city, mainly south of Great Western Road and Kelvindale and around Queens Park - especially in Battlefield and Pollockshields. In the east of the city they were in Dennistoun and Tollcross. In these locations I generally recorded screaming parties of between 10 and 20.

The greater excitement was finding larger colonies in Milton, Barmulloch, Ruchazie, Garthamlock, Easterhouse, Wellhouse, Barlanark,



Plate 301. Dougrie Drive, Castlemilk. © Clare Darlaston



Plate 302. Gable close-up; nest sites are unnoticeable till you see a Swift go in. © Clare Darlaston

Castlemilk, and Drumchapel. These are the so-called 'peripheral estates' where many of the buildings date from the 1940s and 1950s and the era of slum clearance. Most larger Scottish cities have this style of building. Not only did cracks and gaps in the concrete lintels on these post-war houses provide nest sites for them, but the proximity to the urban fringe of trees and fields must make feeding easier. Screaming parties were generally from six to 30. Some nest sites were recorded, but exactly how many nest sites there were it was never possible to ascertain; the number in a screaming party may vary from 30 to six from moment to moment and is no indication of the number of nesting pairs

As a generalisation, in the early days of Swift survey (2000 onwards) core areas would have screaming parties of up to 30 birds. There were areas where smaller numbers were recorded, e.g. Maryhill, but I have not recently seen birds in most of those, but nor have I searched extensively.

For the three years 2010–12 we had cold wet summers, and Swift surveying was difficult, for the birds only party in fine weather. The summer of 2012 was a breeding failure for many areas, with Swifts giving up and leaving as early as mid-July.

At the same time renovation had been proceeding at a fast rate throughout the peripheral estates. Whole areas have been covered in scaffolding, while the lovely crumbling concrete eaves are clad with PVC soffits, confusing and excluding the birds.

In summer 2011 I toured three of the previous 'Swift priority areas' - Castlemilk, Barmulloch and Lochfield. In these areas recent extensive renovation of the houses had removed the old nest sites. The Housing Associations (under GHA's umbrella) had willingly created new nest sites by various methods, but these had not been 'found' by the birds and there was a horrible silence over the streets that used to be the hub of screaming parties of up to 30 birds.

Plates 303–305 right. (top) Before renovation with Swifts nesting. **(middle)** After renovation, nest sites lost. **(bottom)** Box site provided by GHA. © All by Clare Darlston

This summer, 2013, the weather was better, so I decided to make an effort to look at as many as possible of these priority areas. The results of my searches, compared with previous surveys, were no more encouraging. In Barmulloch the most I saw was six Swifts, in Milton four (but in a different location from previously), in Castlemilk four and in Barlanark four.





Plate 306. A hole cut in to the PVC soffit on the gable now provides a better design. © Clare Darlaston

In the peripheral estates, none of the new sites have been adopted. The few remaining sites I found were in buildings that had not been renovated. Thus there remain, to my knowledge, two or three nest sites in Castlemilk, one (possibly two) in Barmulloch and maybe two in Lochend. In Drumchapel, where, due to 'right to buy', not all buildings were renovated, I did not see any Swifts there over two visits this summer on fine evenings. Nest sites in one half of Barlanark have been lost to demolition, as have many other sites in the east end. Some sites remain in neighbouring unrenovated properties, but observable birds were down to half a dozen.

In the older tenement areas, I have seen no Swifts around Hillhead recently, though there is still a smaller colony in Hyndland. On two visits to Battlefield Avenue, I saw none. Between loss of nest sites and awful weather, it is now hard to find Swifts in Glasgow.

It is clear that unless at least some nest sites can be retained during renovation of a scheme, the birds will leave the area entirely, and the chances of them ever returning are, I believe, non-existent. My hope is that if it is possible to retain one or two of the original sites for long enough (but I do not know how long is long enough), Swifts may eventually recolonise using the new nest sites.

One of the big unanswered questions is - what happens to the dispossessed Swifts? There is no evidence of new colonies in Glasgow, only a potentially catastrophic decline in numbers.

*Clare Darlaston,
Concern for Swifts (Scotland)
Email: swiftscot@yahoo.co.uk
Tel: 07900 637 452*

North-east Scotland's breeding Cranes

H. MAGGS

Old written records, artefacts and place names indicate our ancestors' familiarity with Cranes, but definitive evidence of historical breeding in Scotland is hard to come by. However, it seems inconceivable that Cranes did not breed in many parts of Scotland up until at least some time in the Middle Ages.

We have anticipated the re-colonisation of Scotland by breeding Cranes for some years now. The pattern of movement and breeding colonisation by Cranes across North-west Europe over the past two decades indicated, in our calculation, that occupation of Scottish breeding sites was pretty much inevitable. The re-colonisation of the UK began in England during the late 1970s in Norfolk. Since the 1990s, numbers have increased and new English sites have been colonised. In 2012, the UK population stood at 22 pairs.

A pair was suspected to have unsuccessfully bred in Caithness in 1997, but this did not result in long-term re-colonisation. In 2012, breeding was confirmed in North-east Scotland and it is likely that there had been previous breeding attempts at the same site in earlier years. This is the first confirmed breeding in Scotland in

modern times, with a single chick fledging in both 2012 and 2013.

Cranes are extremely susceptible to disturbance, to the extent that this could jeopardise the whole re-colonisation process. To help ensure this does not happen, the site location is being kept confidential. There is currently no sanction available within existing Scottish legislation to effectively prevent disturbance of this species. Addition to Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 would provide such a sanction. RSPB Scotland has been coordinating monitoring of breeding activity and any disturbance through a Crane Conservation Group, made up of a small group of RSPB staff, volunteers and local landowners.

The local community are aware of the birds' presence, understand the disturbance issue and are generally supportive of actions to protect the Cranes. The mixed farming system in the area appears to be benefitting the birds. We would like to thank all the farmers who are helping the Cranes gain a breeding foothold in Scotland.

Hywel Maggs, RSPB Scotland.
Email: Hywel.Maggs@rspb.org.uk



Plate 307. Crane family, undisclosed site, North-east Scotland, June 2013. © H. Maggs

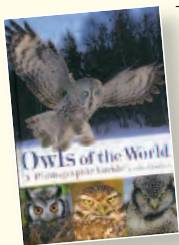
BOOK REVIEWS

The book reviews published in *Scottish Birds* reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC.

Owls of the World: a photographic guide. Heimo Mikkola, 2012. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-3028-5, hardback, 512 pages, £34.99.

I am not particularly a fan of photographic bird guides, as birds can be captured in a myriad of different lights, postures and habitats, and quite often the salient identification features are not captured in the photograph and can cause confusion. However there are some photographic guides which stand out above the rest simply because of the impact and quality of the stunning photography. I think *Owls of the World* falls into this category!

The introductory section of this book covers general information on owl adaptation, behaviour, evolution, distribution and conservation based on research from around the world. The species accounts contain lavish and spectacular photographs from some of the world's finest natural history photographers, covering all of the world's 250 species of owls, with particular attention to subspecies differences, ageing and sexing. Each species account covers concise text on identification, habitat, food, distribution and voice of these birds, along with accurate range maps.



This is a superb photographic guide to this charismatic group of primarily nocturnal birds, and I would recommend that any serious ornithologist should have this book on their shelf.

Michael Thornton

Wildlife & The Law. Alan Stewart, 2012. Argyll Publishing, Glendaruel, Argyll, ISBN 978-1-908931-15-3, paperback, 288 pages, £9.99.

Alan Stewart's latest book is subtitled 'a field guide to recognising, reporting and investigating wildlife crime in Scotland'. I feel that this is something of a misnomer, since it is not a book I would consider anyone taking into the field. I also wonder who the book is aimed at. Countryside professionals (however you define them) should be conversant with the legislation described in this book, although it is useful to have it gathered into a single volume. However, legislation frequently changes and the author warns in his introduction that the contents of the book should be checked against current law - this is a book that is likely to require re-publication on a regular basis. 'Wildlife & the Law' deals with a complex subject and, whilst hardly a page turner, it explains the law as it relates to wildlife crime in reasonably plain language. It covers a wide range of issues, from the familiar raptor persecution, egg collecting and animal cruelty to perhaps lesser-known areas such as taxidermy and importation of endangered species. The principal strength of the book is in having the author's considerable wealth of experience and his use of real examples of crime to interpret the law.



Andrew Bielinski

Birds of North-east Scotland Then and Now. Adam Watson and Ian Francis, 2012. Paragon Publishing, Rothersthorpe, Northants, 978-1-78222-033-6, paperback, 185 pages, £24.99.

Adam Watson is considered to be the world's authority on the natural history of the Cairngorms, having completed detailed fieldwork in this area since the 1940s. This book, however, provides detailed ornithological field observations primarily on the Turriff and Upper Deeside areas. As well as providing detailed notes and field observations in species accounts, it includes papers on species and habitat change in a series of appendices. This includes very interesting and valuable papers on the summering population of Snow Buntings in North-east Scotland, breeding Greenshanks in Deeside and notes on Ring Ouzels in the region. These papers and notes present previously unpublished accounts on these species.



The great value in this book lies in the meticulous field notes and data collected by Adam Watson and others going back to the 1940s. These detailed field studies and notes will serve as an invaluable baseline data set, which can be compared with data in more recent avifaunas, such as *The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland* edited by Ian Francis and Martin Cook. The book, however, fails to fully make comparisons with more recent data from this region.

Although Adam Watson established one of the longest running studies of Golden Eagles in the world, collecting data on this species in Upper Deeside since the 1940s, very little of this study is presented in this publication, which I found disappointing. However, these data, as well as other long-term data sets collected by Watson *et al.* are published elsewhere.

The book effectively illustrates habitat change in the region using a series of photographs taken by the authors and others, showing amongst other things, the devastating effects of overgrazing by unsustainable populations of deer and sheep.

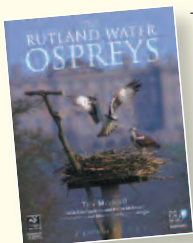
This book provides an invaluable account of birds in North-east Scotland and will provide interesting reading for anyone with an interest in Scottish ornithology.

Mike Thornton

The Rutland Water Ospreys.

Tim Mackrill, with Tim Appleton and Helen MacIntyre, 2013. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-7414-2, hardback, 160 pages, £20.00.

This combined effort by Tim Mackrill, Tim Appleton and Helen MacIntyre, with a foreword by Roy Dennis, is an engaging account of the Rutland Water Osprey translocation project, re-establishing Ospreys in the Midlands as well as initiating the re-colonisation of Wales.



The book delves into the return of the Osprey to the reservoir and intertwines the stories of key characters (human and

Osprey) between 1996 and 2012. There is impressive detail given to every level of the project, setting the scene against the wider history of Osprey persecution and leading us through the trials and tribulations of rearing the first chicks in captivity. The account of each breeding season until 2012 is full of twists, turns and exciting 'firsts'. We then follow the birds south on migration in the last third of the book as Mackrill synthesises the results of recent satellite tracking to describe their routes, behaviour and the threats they face. Helpful advice on how to see the Ospreys provides a satisfying conclusion.

This is a deeply personal account that interweaves the stories and experiences of volunteers and those permanently involved over the years. In addition, the book is beautifully illustrated by John Wright. It appeals to those with both avid and little interest in osprey conservation, emphasising the value and potential of bird conservation projects in re-establishing once-vibrant populations.

Ben Garlick

A Photographic Guide to the Birds of the Cayman Islands.

Patricia E. Bradley & Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet, 2013. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-14081-23645, paperback, 288 pages, £25.00.

This small field guide covers the three small Caribbean islands in the Cayman group and is a handy size to fit in one's luggage. The introduction gives a summary of the geography, climate and vegetation of the islands, together with excellent maps showing the best sites to visit. The 218 species pages are thorough. The text

describes the 50 breeding species and all the prolific migrants, with a list of vagrants at the end of the book. The photographs are superb. Many plates show different sexes and ages although there are no size comparisons and few are illustrated in flight. Local names are given where they exist and, like several island guides, the book provides a comprehensive guide for visitors and islanders alike, hopefully boosting local interest. There is a checklist of breeding species for each island and a list of endemic subspecies for which identification details are described in the text.

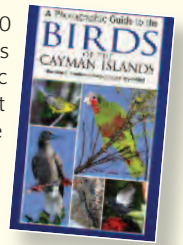
Although I have never visited the islands, I passed this book by my daughter, who has been twice and has birded Grand Cayman using an earlier field guide by the same author. She and I would certainly recommend it.

Norman Elkins

The Snowy Owl. Eugene Potapov & Richard Sale, 2012. T. & A.D. Poyser, London, ISBN 978-0-7136-8817-7, hardback, 304 pages, £50.00.

These authors wrote the Poyser title *The Gyrfalcon*, and now bring their knowledge and experience to describing the life of this enigmatic Arctic hunter. Few species evoke such an impact as seeing a Snowy Owl - an experience possible for the keen birder willing to travel to the highlands or islands of Scotland.

The 304 pages include an introduction and 11 chapters



covering: What makes a Snowy Owl?; Breeding Range; Palaeontology, systematics and evolution; Winter and summer habitats; Breeding; Timing of hatching; Diet; Numbers and population density; Winter range and winter records; Snowy Owl friends and foes; Snowy Owls and people. Appendices give scientific names of birds, mammals and amphibians and plants mentioned in the text and a glossary of specific terms used, and also an extensive list of over 680 references, and a thorough index. There are 62 colour and 42 black-and-white photographs, five maps, and over 110 figures, tables and charts which tie in with different topics within the book.

A major strength of this book is the level of Russian literature consulted, making it particularly comprehensive and authoritative. It is excellent, packed with information yet readable, and produced to the usual high standard expected of the Poyser series.

Stuart L. Rivers

Looking for the Goshawk.

Conor Mark Jameson, 2013. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-6487-7, hardback, 368 pages, £18.99.



Goshawks excite many birdwatchers; to some they become an obsession. This is a lively account of the author's quest to establish whether there were, indeed,

Goshawks living near his home, a quest hindered by the secretive behaviour of his subject, the brevity of the encounters and the difficulty of certain identification. In the course of the story one learns much more about the Goshawk

than one would get from an academic monograph. Beyond the birds themselves, Jameson explores his own and others' fascination with the Goshawk and the meaning that the bird has had for those who have become obsessed with it.

From the start, Jameson realised that he needed not only to consult the experts but to visit them on their home ground, to go out with them to observe the birds - or, more often, not to observe the birds but merely to observe the signs that they had left in the form of prey remains and feathers. He went as far afield as Berlin and New York, where Goshawks breed in city parks in which they can be seen by any patient observer. Unfortunately, British game-preservers not only ruthlessly persecuted Goshawks in the past, but also continue to do so today, with contemptuous disregard for the law and public opinion.

Conor Jameson's skill with words takes one into the places where he has pursued his passion; one can smell the dampness, feel the breeze and be startled with him as a bird clatters suddenly from the trees. He has an equal ability to portray the personalities of his fellow Goshawk enthusiasts - I can hear them speaking from the pages. This book establishes Jameson as a nature writer of the first rank. I defy anyone not to enjoy it.

Jeremy Greenwood

The Birds of Eigg. John Chester, 2013. Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, Isle of Eigg, ISBN 9781782800538, paperback, 159 pages, £12.00.

The Isle of Eigg is one of those magical places that almost anyone, birdwatcher or not, at some time hankers after visiting.

Now, thanks to the tireless observations - and erudition - of John Chester (or John the Bird, as he is known on the island), who has lived there since



1986, there is an authoritative bird guide available. The initial sections give a description of the island and a personal overview of its birdlife. Indeed, one learns nearly as much about John as one does about Eigg, as the text is interspersed with anecdotes and commentaries by friends and colleagues of the author. But the main body of text, a systematic list of Eigg birds, is serious stuff, drawing mainly on the author's extensive observations, but with reference to previous publications providing information in earlier years. Even here there is some levity - for example a record of a Golden Eagle attempting to make off with a dachshund! There are some charming black-and-white drawings of both common species and rarities, and a few colour photographs. For anyone planning to visit Eigg, this is an essential companion; for the hankers, this charming little book may well turn thought into action.

Jeremy Brock

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

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

Any divers, swans... a project to computerise the Fair Isle Bird Observatory daily log

Daily log - it's an institution at all observatories. On Fair Isle, every single night during the migration seasons of spring and autumn, more or less on the dot of 9.00 pm, the stentorian voice of the warden booms out to quell the background hum of conversation. There is silence (as a working biro is sought), an air of palpable anticipation (which may be related to whether or not the cocoa and homebakes have arrived) and finally the science of the log begins...

An average log might see counts of 60–80 species, more on a good day. Log on a *really* good day can take quite some time - ample justification for those sticky cakes, since log can require energy-sapping levels of concentration. Let's say for argument's sake 70 species a day, every day for six months of the year. That's a lot of numbers. Multiply that by the 60+ years of Fair Isle Bird Observatory's history and you have a quite monumental pile of numbers. This is a phenomenal historical record of the observations at one of Europe's foremost migration sites.

The value of that written record has never been in doubt, but building the new observatory highlighted just how potentially fragile that record is. Although the key observations (such as rarities, peak counts, first dates and so on) are summarised in annual reports, the raw data for many of those years exist in a single, printed copy. Realising the potential for losing those data to a catastrophic event such as a major fire spurred us on to think urgently about a long-term back-up.

Some progress was made over the last decade in computerising the data for the year in question but the majority of our daily logs remained as single paper volumes. And it soon emerged that there was another important factor to consider too. Looking to the future is crucial to FIBO in all sorts of ways, and ornithology is foremost among those. What should our main ornithological goals



Plate 308. David Parnaby taking the log on Fair Isle. © David Parnaby

be? Where are the efforts of our staff best directed? Should we continue the long-term programme, monitoring migration through the whole island, or would we gain more from switching to a smaller census area combined with a more intensive study of certain key species? In order to answer to those questions about the future we need to be able to analyse the past. What are the strengths and weaknesses of what we already have? Answering that question is effectively impossible until all those numbers are computerised...

So began phase 1 of the project, which, at the time of writing, is almost complete. Over the course of the winter of 2011/12, we scanned over half of the existing log pages. They were digitised off the island by AEL Data Services (the scanning process ensures that the originals remain on the island, reducing the possibility of

them being lost or mislaid). The remaining logs were scanned in 2012/13, and we have just received the files back from AEL. This will then allow us to produce some basic analyses of a phenomenal dataset, which, for some species, stretches over 75 years (since there are in fact quite good records for some species dating back well before 1948 when the Observatory was founded, back to 1936 in some cases). Those initial analyses comprise phase 2 of the project, which we shall embark on in winter 2013/14.

The purpose of this article is twofold - to tell SOC members about the project, but also to thank the various people involved so far. In particular, we are indebted to the Club, who have generously grant-aided the digitisation process with a grant of up to £15,000 from *The Birds of Scotland* Fund. In addition, I should like to thank all those who participated in the brainstorming meeting on Fair Isle in July 2011, but particularly David Jardine for his role in securing the above-mentioned funding and Ian Newton for acting as a referee on the application; Alan Knox for much very helpful advice on the practicalities of the digitisation process; and Will Miles for scanning the data. We plan to report again in *Scottish Birds* soon, with some initial results and analyses.

Roger Riddington, Chairman FIBOT

May Days - past, present and future

As I start to pen these words, the rain is lashing down and the wind is blowing a gale from the west. It's definitely not a day for being on the Isle of May! But, it's 15 September and by an odd coincidence, 47 years ago to the day, the weather was quite similar and that's exactly where I was.

To put it into context, it was just a few weeks after England won the World Cup and a few days after the first episode of *Star Trek* appeared on TV! 'It' was my first ever visit to the Isle of May in September 1966, as a member of the annual party from the Ornithological Society of the Edinburgh Academy. According to the report of our visit in *The Edinburgh Academy Chronicle* by our leader, John (Jock) King, "the weather conditions were hopeless for migration and we did indeed have a lean time". But, despite being stuck on for an extra day, our bird list included a Long-eared Owl and my first ever Green Sandpiper. Perhaps our expectations were lower then, but from that point I was hooked!

It was no coincidence that my first experience came through the Edinburgh Academy, as the school had ornithological 'history' being also the *alma mater* of George Waterston and the group of fellow birdwatching pupils who founded the observatory in 1934. It had all begun five years before when a group consisting of George

Plate 309. The Low Light (The Isle of May Bird Observatory) after its recent renovation. © Mark Oksien



Waterston, Ian (JHB) Munro, J.G. Stewart, Archie (AGS) Bryson, Hugh Simpson and Frank (HFD) Elder met at George's house in Inverleith Terrace in Edinburgh and formed the Inverleith Field Club. Although the focus was birds, it was as much a social club as a bird club and in 1933, the keenest birdwatchers took things a step further and formed the Midlothian Ornithological Club (MOC).

The group were already well aware of the exploits of the "Good Ladies", Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul, who had been visiting the Isle of May since 1907 and by 1933 had 'collected' no fewer than two British firsts (Pied Wheatear and Siberian Stonechat) and three of the four Scottish firsts for the island at that time (Nightingale, Woodchat Shrike and Melodious Warbler).

Inspired by the 'Ladies', the club organised a weekend camp that September when, almost fatefully, many of them experienced a 'fall' for the first time. A game of football was in progress against the lighthouse keepers when the goalkeeper noticed a Bluethroat on the touchline! By the time the game had finished, a total of six had been seen along with numerous other species. During that night of classic conditions of drizzle and a south-east wind, Frank Elder recalled that "the lighthouse lantern was beset by fluttering migrants which continued until dawn".

The die was cast and further encouraged by articles by W.B. Alexander in *British Birds* about the observatory on Heligoland, and by Ronald Lockley about his observatory on Skokholm, the decision was made. The MOC would set up Scotland's first bird observatory on the Isle of May. With permission granted from the Northern Lighthouse Board, all they needed was the money to fund the operation, specifically to build a trap and renovate the old coastguard house that was to house the observatory. Their budget for the work was the princely sum of £50 and following an appeal circular, they raised the impressive total of £83 which also allowed investment in both the ringing hut and the library! Even given the value of the pound eighty years ago, it was a somewhat more modest investment than the redevelopment currently in progress, of which more later.

After the war, the Observatory re-opened in 1946 and moved to the Low Light. Since then, until this year, the premises remained very much the same and while they had undergone a number of changes and alterations, these were mainly cosmetic or through the addition of updated equipment. When we first arrived in the *Fair Morn* piloted by Willie Hughes on 12 September 1966, there were no fridges, we peered at our books by the light of 'Tilley' paraffin lamps and we started a relationship with 'Elsie' (the outdoor chemical toilet) that was to last until 2012! Indeed, the island itself has changed more than the Observatory - gone are a number of structures and buildings, the fog horns no longer boom, the Iron Bridge to Rona has been demolished and the *Mars* and *Island* wrecks are fast becoming heaps of rust!

Despite the changes, the character of the May remains the same for me as it did all those years ago. It's the birds that draw us there, and over the years, the May has certainly had its fair share of them with the total number of species recorded, currently standing at 285. While it may not have the total and profile of George Waterston's younger offspring, Fair Isle, it has still had five British firsts (Pied Wheatear in 1909, Siberian Stonechat in 1913, Isabelline Shrike in 1950, Siberian Thrush in 1954 and Olivaceous Warbler in 1967) and seven Scottish firsts (Ortolan Bunting 1885, Nightingale 1911,

Plate 310. Some Isle of May regulars (left to right: Calum Scott, Iain English, Robert Hay, Stuart Rivers and Mark Oksien) saying goodbye to 'Elsie'. © Mark Newell





Woodchat Shrike 1911, Melodious Warbler 1913, Pine Grosbeak 1950, Firecrest 1959 and Radde's Warbler in 1962).



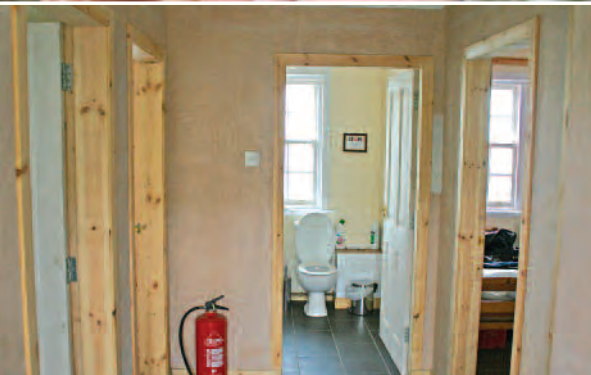
Since the Observatory was founded in 1934, some 90 new species have been added and even now, the list continues to grow with eight species (Tawny Owl in 2008, Little Egret and White's Thrush in 2009, Avocet and Tundra Bean Goose in 2011, Black-winged Stilt in 2012 and White-billed Diver and Bridled Tern in 2013) recorded for the first time in the last five years. That's 55 since I first went in 1966. From a personal point of view, my Isle of May list stands at 159 which rather oddly is also the total number of nights that I have spent there - some 29 weeks! I've had some great weeks and one or two dreadful ones in south-westerlies, but the lure of never knowing what the weather will be like and what may turn up is all part of the attraction. You always travel with optimism!



My list may not sound many for all those weeks spent trudging across the island from Ladies Bed to Rona, but I can claim a couple of 'firsts' for the May - a Red-throated Pipit in 1971 and the first live Blyth's Reed Warbler in 2003 (a dead one was found in 1991). We found the pipit at Cross Park, below the South Horn and my abiding memory is less of the chase and more about the three pages of meticulous notes and drawings put into 'Special Notes' by the late and sadly missed, Jeff Watson, which undoubtedly clinched the deal with the rarities committee. A far cry from some of the lazy, or non-existent, descriptions that sometimes get submitted with a dodgy photo today! Thankfully, we managed to trap the 2003 Blyth's Reed Warbler, found in the little gully running down from the South Horn and the views in the hand were certainly helpful when, in an amazing coincidence, I found the May's second record in exactly the same place, some four years later, almost to the day!



All birders have their stories and regular visitors to the May will all have their own favourites. I well remember our trip in 1970 when I was lucky enough to go with my brother Julian, in the



Plates 311–315. Inside the recently renovated Isle of May Bird Observatory showing the kitchen, a bedroom and the new toilet. **Insets;** Woodchat Shrike, June 2013 and Blyth's Reed Warbler, October 2007. © All Jonathan Osborne

company of Donald and Jeff Watson and Ian Munro. I 'ticked' my first Bluethroat, and Barred and Icterine Warblers, and the icing on the cake was when we found an Arctic Warbler on Ruff Green and in a perfect 'drive', managed to push it all the way up past the lighthouse and into the Top Trap. It's so often all about being in the right place at the right time - clearly demonstrated by my brother when he made his second school visit in 1967. He was in the right place to record the May's first Spotted Crake, but perhaps not quite when the departing party hurried from the Low Light down Holyman's Road to catch the boat at the end of their week. He briefly saw a large grey warbler under the bridge, but he was young and inexperienced and cajoled by "Hurry up, we're going to be late". No further investigation was made. The following day, the next party found the UK's first Eastern Olivaceous Warbler in exactly the same place. Though it's not just about 'conventional' rare birds, as the May's location means that some mainland birds are very scarce - ably demonstrated by my trip in 1985 when I recorded Little Grebe, Mute Swan, Hen Harrier, Coal Tit and that major rarity, Blue Tit, for the first and only time. I managed to eventually catch up with Collared Dove this year (and Woodchat Shrike), but don't get me going on Yellowhammer and Mistle Thrush!

So far, I've talked about the past but what of the future? Thanks to the generosity of many individuals, trusts and organisations, including the SOC, we have at long last been able to carry out a major redevelopment of the Low Light in 2012-13. The major change is the addition of a new extension, housing three new bedrooms, a flushing toilet and a shower room, while within the existing building the old dormitory has been transformed into an open dining kitchen with the small room at the back becoming a spacious

storeroom and larder. The lounge remains much the same although the space occupied by the old bunks has been transformed into an 'office' area, while the old kitchen is now the 'Boot Room', perfect for all those wet jackets and muddy wellies! There's still a bit of snagging to be done, but we're nearly there and when we have the necessary funds, we're planning to install solar panels to provide a limited electricity supply.

The new facilities have been roundly praised by all this year's visitors, even by some of the 'old stagers' who felt the character of the Low Light might be lost, and so we're hoping for a bumper year in 2014. I started by talking about how I and a good number of my contemporaries had been inspired to add to our birdwatching experiences by visiting the Observatory as youngsters and so it seems that the time is now right to turn the clock back and try and bring on the next generation to take both the Observatory and the SOC forward. The details are still to be worked out but the plan is for the IOMBO Trust and the SOC to come together and establish a 'Young Birdwatchers Week' from next year, helping to forge greater links between our organisations and provide some training and experience for the next generation of birdwatchers. Keep an eye out for details in the New Year.

Bookings for 2014 are open to members of the Trust on 1 January and for non-members on 1 February, so do have a look at the website, www.isleofmaybirdobs.org, for details of how to join and how to book. As for me, I'll be back next year, optimistically looking for another 'first' or at the very least a Mistle Thrush!

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Plate 316. Approaching the Isle of May. © Jonathan Osborne





Plate 317. Ascension Frigatebird, Bowmore, Islay, Argyll, 5 July 2013. © Vernon Bonarjee

Ascension Frigatebird, Bowmore, Islay, 5 July 2013 - second Scottish and Western Palearctic record

J.M. DICKSON

With only one previously accepted record of Ascension Frigatebird in the Western Palearctic (an exhausted bird caught in a net on Tiree in 1953), the likelihood of further occurrences were well off most British birdwatchers' radar. The unexpected happened on the morning of 5 July 2013 with the sighting of a very strange seabird on the harbour wall at Bowmore, Islay. With such a large and peculiar-looking bird in such a location, it was not surprising that even non-birdwatchers were trying to figure out what this bird was, and this was the case for two separate groups who independently discovered this bird.

The first known sighting was made at about 08:10 by Tor Egil Matre. He noticed a bird with a very large wingspan land on the harbour wall. Tor and his brother-in-law Dr Vernon Bonarjee, both on holiday from Norway, collected their cameras and went out and took some photos. The bird was being mobbed by a few gulls, but stayed put

until it flew off around at 08:40. At the time Vernon thought it could be some kind of large juvenile seabird, perhaps an albatross! The following day they showed their photos to some people at an RSPB stand on the Arran ferry.

As it transpired, news of the bird's presence had already reached the outside world through the efforts of more non-birdwatchers at the harbour! At around 08:25 two Islay fishermen, Tom Redman and Jim Brown also saw the bird sitting on the harbour wall. Realising that it was something quite different they called over to Jim Sim who was also on the pier. Jim was on holiday from Renfrewshire, however, not being a birdwatcher, he was unsure what he was looking at, but did fetch his camera and he managed to take six photos. Later that morning, Jim showed the photos to Mary McGregor, the manager at RSPB Gruinart reserve, and she in turn Emailed them to her colleague David Wood at the RSPB

Oa reserve. David identified the bird as a juvenile frigatebird, with initial thoughts it was a Great Frigatebird and put the news out to various bird groups. Shortly afterwards, John Bowler on Tiree Emailed back to confirm the identity not as a Great, but rather a very similar plumaged juvenile Ascension Frigatebird - almost 60 years to the day since the bird on Tiree!

It was not long until various groups of Islay birders were on the trail trying to relocate the bird. It was last seen flying off into Loch Indaal being mobbed by gulls some four hours earlier. Despite a couple of unconfirmed reports from local Islay folk the bird was not seen again that day. This caused a dilemma for the potential large number of UK twitchers who would almost certainly descend on Islay should the bird settle somewhere. Despite the fact the bird had not been relocated, around 30 hopeful birders arrived on the early ferry the following day, with most having driven overnight from the south of England. Apparently a few more also arrived by plane. There was no great sense of optimism due to the fact that a few Islay birders had been out searching for the bird from early morning without any luck and as the day went on all reasonable hope of seeing this bird faded.

Plates 318–319. Ascension Frigatebird, Bowmore, Islay, Argyll, 5 July 2013. © *Tor Egil Matre*

Four days later on 9 July at around 19:00 there was what sounds like a very plausible description of the same bird seen flying around and dip-feeding just offshore from Point Sands Caravan Park near Rhunahaorine Point, Kintyre (George Stevenson per Eddie Maguire). This feeding behaviour is apparently typical of this species - being a surface feeder and unable to dive it plucks fish from the water. Unfortunately, no photographs were taken and, despite further searches the next day, this bird was not seen again.

Identification

The difficulty with identification arises from the fact that there are five species within the genus *Fregata* - Ascension (*aquila*), Magnificent (*magnificens*), Great (*minor*), Christmas Island (*andrewsi*) and Lesser (*ariel*), which all have similar immature plumages. Each species takes several years to progress from juvenile to breeding adult and plumages at each stage can look quite different, but since birds spend their life wandering the oceans before returning as adults to breed some of the plumages have not been well studied until fairly recently. The paper describing the Tiree Ascension Frigatebird as new to the Western Palearctic (Walbridge *et al.* 2003) describes the juvenile plumages for each of species well, and relates how the Tiree bird was originally misidentified as Magnificent and then confirmed as Ascension after its review



some 50 years later. Important features to help with immature frigatebird identification are: size, head colour, shape and extent of the breast band and white-belly patch and the presence or absence of a white extension onto the axillaries and underwing coverts.

With South Atlantic populations of Lesser and Great Frigatebirds on Trinidad and Martin Vaz islands in Brazilian waters now seriously threatened or extinct the only likely species to occur in British waters are Magnificent or Ascension. Until the re-identification in 2003 of the 1953 Tiree individual, it was generally assumed that Magnificent was the only species capable of reaching British waters from the Caribbean. This species has an overall worldwide population of around 200,000 individuals and is apparently increasing, but the smaller numbers in the Caribbean are threatened and decreasing. The population of Ascension Frigatebirds on Boatswainbird Islet 250 m off Ascension Island is around 25,000 to 30,000 individuals (BirdLife 2013).



Plate 321. Ascension Frigatebird, Bowmore, Islay, Argyll, 5 July 2013. © *Jim Sim*

After identifying this Islay bird to genus, the main features confirming the specific identity were sorting out the very similar juvenile Great Frigatebird from Ascension and also to consider Magnificent. This involved looking at the position, extent and shape of the breast band, absence of any russet on the head, the presence of an axillar spur and a sharp cut off

Plate 320. Juvenile Ascension Frigatebird on Boatswainbird Islet. © *John Stewart Smith*



between the white of the head and the dark mantle. The Islay bird had all the features to confirm its identification as a first-stage juvenile Ascension. Without the excellent photographs, including flight shots, this sighting would surely just have gone down as another unidentified frigatebird in British waters. Praise and congratulations are due to the two groups of non-birdwatchers who took an interest in the bird and obtained the necessary evidence to substantiate its identity.

Discussion

To put this record into context, other than the previous juvenile on Tiree in 1953, there had only been one confirmed record of Ascension Frigatebird more than a few hundred miles from Ascension Island, and that was from western Africa. However post-fledging dispersal out at sea is poorly documented (Ashmole *et al.* 1994). The journey to Islay would be over 4,000 miles for this species, which is not normally known as an ocean wanderer. However, recent research by RSPB staff and the University of Exeter using GPS loggers is shedding more light on movements at sea, with first years foraging up to 608 km from Ascension, and birds travelling as much as 2,662 km in 60 hours and 3,800 km in 12 days, further than previously thought (Opel 2013). There have been several other reports of frigatebirds from the UK and Ireland before, with most not identified to species level, though two were confirmed as Magnificent Frigatebird (1998 and 2005).

A paper in preparation (Chalmers in prep.) looks at the timing of frigatebird records in British waters and speculates that occurrence of Ascension Frigatebirds may be more frequent than records suggest. The author looked at weather patterns at the time of the Tiree and Islay sightings and found that both were during similar periods of high pressure extending up the Atlantic into British waters. Some of the unidentified frigatebirds show a marked bunching in the summer period. This contrasts with the Magnificent Frigatebird records, which occurred in November 2005 and December 1998. Both of these appear to be storm driven individuals from the remnants of Caribbean/Atlantic hurricanes, and that in 2005 was associated with an influx of Laughing Gulls. Although the sample size is very small the findings are very interesting.

We can only hope that the population of Ascension Frigatebirds on Ascension Island recovers from past feral cat and Black Rat predation and current long-line fishing threat. The cat eradication programme looks to have been effective, as six years after the main island of Ascension was declared cat free, two pairs were found nesting at the end of 2012 and in January this year produced the first chick in over 180 years since the last successful nesting attempt (Fisher 2013).

Acknowledgements

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Plates 322–324. Mongolian Plover, Lossiemouth, Moray & Nairn, 16 July 2013. © Margaret Sharpe

Mongolian (Lesser Sand) Plover at Lossiemouth, July 2013 - first record for Moray & Nairn

M. SHARPE

The east beach at Lossiemouth is one of my most favourite wildlife haunts: I have walked it for years, several times a week, sometimes twice a day! It's a glorious three-mile sandy stretch, merging into a long shingle bank that stretches round a bay, backed by conifer plantations. A good place to watch a host of sea and shorebirds, glimpse a cetacean fin or two, or watch the odd seal that comes ashore.

This summer has been particularly fine, and from mid-June I had been out most days, hoping to observe the start of the autumn migration. On 4 July, three Sanderlings in full breeding plumage had appeared, and over the next few days their numbers rose steadily. The weather remained warm with light winds, and the Sanderlings kept pouring in, swelling to a flock of over 80. By 14th I had noted two colour-ringed individuals, and thought I had caught sight of a possible third in amongst the blur of running legs.

So, on the evening of 16 July I was back, hoping to secure that third elusive Sanderling. I caught up with the flock at the far end of the beach as usual, and they were in small, loose groups feeding on the tide line as it receded. Although

they were spread out, they were generally heading towards me, so I sat on the sand and waited for them to pass, making it much easier to observe their legs. Meanwhile, I had a quick usual scan along the shingle with my binoculars, and wham... there it was, a plover with red chest feathers! What is that? I have to confess I wasn't sure, other than it ran and bobbed like a plover, and I knew it was something unusual, but not to what degree. I had a distant memory from books, and knew I had to get in closer with my camera for at least a record shot.

I inched forward, prone on the sand, taking blurry grab shots as I was still too far away, holding my breath and hoping to get closer. The Sanderlings had now reached my position and were beginning to stream past me. With one eye on the plover, and one eye scanning legs, I kept working my way forward on my elbows. Then I couldn't believe it, a Sanderling streaked past resplendent with colour-rings! Argh dilemma, where to look first? I hurriedly took snaps of the Sanderling hoping to get another better chance later. The plover was now about 20 metres away, and I felt I could not dare chance going any closer. I glanced over my shoulder, and as luck would have it there were

no approaching dog walkers or joggers to disturb the birds. I noted that the plover stood slightly taller than the nearby Ringed Plovers, it had a gorgeous brick-red chest, striking black-and-white face markings and fawn head and back; overall a beautiful bird.

There was a brief moment long enough to take some record shots, but all too soon the plover was flitting around again unsettled by the Ringed Plovers chasing one another. Finally, it banked round and headed eastward along the bay and was all too quickly out of sight. Not keen to chase it along the shingle, I waited nearly an hour, hoping it would return. The sun was still warm, the tide was near full out and people had started to appear on the beach. I started to feel that the window of opportunity had now closed. So, catching up with the colour-ringed Sanderling now feeding on a sand bar, I noted its colour combination, and headed for home.

Once home, it was a mad rush to fire up the computer, download the images and compare them with the book photographs and illustrations. A thin black line trimming the edge of the red chest feathers seemed to confirm it was a male Mongolian Plover, one of the forms of Lesser Sand Plover, but I still couldn't quite believe it. Not trusting my identification, I dashed off Emails for second and third opinions. In the morning I was back on the beach at first light at the same spot, and scanned the bay for hours, but with no luck.

In the next few days, word spread, my Email inbox started to fill up, and I realised just how 'mega' a rarity the bird was. I did and still do, feel very privileged and lucky to have seen it at all. I had so very much hoped somebody else would re-sight the plover, but continued beach searches proved fruitless. Then some 11 days later, I received an Email informing me that a Mongolian Plover had been found in Co. Cork, Ireland. By comparing the flank feather patterns from mine and the Irish images, it was generally felt they matched well enough to confirm that it was in fact the very same individual that I had seen.

Margaret Sharpe

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Status of Lesser Sand Plover in Scotland

The BOURC currently regards Lesser Sand Plover as a single species with two distinct groups of subspecies: atrifrons and mongolus (other taxonomic authorities regard the two groups as full species). The 'atrifrons group' (Lesser Sand Plover) contains three races: atrifrons, pamirensis and schaeferi, which breed in Central Asia and the Himalayas and winter along the coasts of East Africa, the Middle East, India to Thailand, Malaysia and Borneo. The 'mongolus group' (Mongolian Plover) comprises two races: mongolus and stegmanni which breed in eastern-most Russia to Kamchatka and the Bering Strait and winters along the coasts from the Arabian Gulf to India, southern China and Japan, Indonesia, New Guinea and Australia.

There have been five previous records of Lesser Sand Plover in Britain, with two of these in Scotland:

- 1991:** North-east Scotland, adult or first-summer, Donmouth, 18–19 August
- 1997:** Sussex, adult, Pagham Harbour, 14–16 August
- 2002:** Lincolnshire, female, Rimac, 11–15 May
- 2003:** Hampshire, male, Keyhaven Marshes, 22–26 July
- 2004:** Lothian, adult male, Aberlady Bay, 8–9 July

The two Scottish records and the Hampshire bird are attributed to birds of the 'mongolus group', while the Sussex and Lincolnshire birds were of the 'atrifrons group' (for field identification of the forms see Garner et al. 2003). The dates of occurrence are consistent with aberrant navigation by birds during their spring or early autumn migrations, and interestingly all were in breeding plumage. Either juveniles are being overlooked or vagrancy by Mongolian/Lesser Sand Plovers is a consequence of hormone-fuelled wanderings by older (adult) birds.

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Scotland's sixth Bridled Tern - July/August 2013

M. NEWELL & M. SOUTER



Plate 325. Bridled Tern, Isle of May, 27 July 2013. © David Pickett

Bridled Tern on the Isle of May, 27 July 2013 - first island record

M. NEWELL

On 1 July 2013, a Bridled Tern appeared on the Farne Islands, Northumberland which brought about a little disappointment that it hadn't chosen the Isle of May terns to consort with. By 5 July, it had relocated a short distance to the Northumberland mainland and hope rose that it might decide to venture north as other non-breeding and post-breeding terns have been known to do. However, its next port of call was to the south in Cleveland, and it was even seen off Flamborough Head in Yorkshire before returning to the Farnes from 13 July where it was then seen daily. Although it disappeared again on 25th, it was felt that it was now getting too late to be lured to the Isle of May, even if it did come north, as the number of Common and Arctic Terns on the May were now dwindling. With no further sightings from the Farnes for a couple days, I had given the tern roost at Kirkhaven regular scans. I also knew that other isle residents were doing the same despite never really thinking anything would turn up.

On 27 July, a calm day had enabled the crew of the *May Princess* to do a spot of fishing while the visitors were ashore, and they kindly donated

numerous Mackerel to the island cause. With a fine evening it was decided by the Fluke Street residents to barbeque the fish down in front of the Visitor Centre overlooking the harbour and we gathered there just before 19:00. With the fish cooked to perfection I was just about to receive my quota when I glanced up to see a dark tern flying over Kirkhaven. Grabbing my bins a momentary glance was all that was needed and I shouted "Stop, it's the Bridled Tern", or something to that effect. Cutlery and dinner were cast aside as all the assembled island residents picked up binoculars and telescopes as the tern flew away from us and appeared to land on the sea rocks out of view. Turning away, but uphill, I reached a vantage point from which I could see the bird and take in the relevant features. We watched the Bridled Tern repeatedly drop down to join the assembled terns on the Pillow rocks, between which it was making various sorties out to sea. It even came inland and flew over our heads near the Visitor Centre but always returned to the sea rocks. After about 45 minutes, with the news phoned out, we returned to our fish supper. The tern was seen in the tern roost up until dusk (about 22:00), but despite searching from 06:00 the following morning it was not seen again. The brief stay mirrored the appearance of the Sooty Tern that occurred in the Isle of May tern colony in July 1989, not long after a Bridled Tern had been seen on the Farne Islands earlier in that summer. With my near four month island vigil

supervising the seabird studies for 2013 just days from ending, the Bridled Tern was a stunning way to bookend the season which had begun with a sighting of 15 Sperm Whales!

Description

A similar size compared to adjacent Arctic Terns and structurally barely any different with narrow wings, long tail and fairly small head. At rest the legs were longer than Arctic Terns more in proportion to Common Tern. Buoyant flight which coupled with the upperpart colouration somewhat recalled Long-tailed Skua. Quite easily spooked by other terns which at times appeared to not tolerate it in close proximity, and tended to sit on its own, some distance from other roosting terns. Head: the crown, nape and ear coverts were black as was a black loreal stripe from the eye to bill base which was approximately equal in width to the eye. Above this was a white forehead which extended behind the eye ending in a blunt point. Although broadest above the bill it still formed a clear white V when viewed head on. All

underparts were a clean white. The upperparts were a grey brown which contrasted with more blackish brown wing feathers at rest. In flight the grey brown coverts graded somewhat into the darker primaries, primary coverts and secondaries. There was also a narrow darker bar along the leading lesser coverts with the leading edge to the inner part of the wing also pure white, which was very obvious when viewed head on. The underwings were white with a diffuse grey brown border. At rest the tail appeared slightly longer than the closed wings: it was deeply forked, with most of the tail a similar grey brown to the upperparts. The 5th (second outermost) tail feathers were darker while the outer tail feathers were white. The black bill was straight and slightly stouter than in Common Tern. Legs blackish. In flight it was heard to call on a couple occasions sounding similar to a Kittiwake's sharp alarm call.

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Plates 326–329. Bridled Tern, Isle of May, 27 July 2013. © David Pickett



Bridled Tern, Ythan Estuary, 8 August 2013 - the second North-east Scotland record

M. SOUTER

In the late afternoon of 8 August I headed for the Ythan estuary to count the Eiders at high tide. Due to the ducks departing to their moulting areas, numbers were down and all were visible from my vantage point on top of the dunes. I therefore quickly tallied the 897 birds roosting along the river banks. With time on my hands, I decided to check out the Foveran bushes for early migrants. With no migrants to be seen, I headed back via the mouth of the Ythan in order to look at the gull roost. This area sometimes attracts large numbers of Great Black-backed Gulls, so I stopped and scanned. There were only six gulls, but many terns adorned the beach. As a Black Tern and a number of Roseate Terns had been reported earlier, I panned through the flock.

I soon came across a very dark tern and initially thought I had stumbled upon the Black Tern. However, this bird was too large for that species. The bird appeared even larger than the Common and Arctic species nearby, but closer inspection showed this was caused by its dark feathers contrasting more strongly with the sand, whereas the lighter extremities of other terns tended to become invisible to the distant eye. It also had an elongated profile, with the head low and neck extended. The long black bill and dark eye stripe together gave the impression of an extended projection. This was

certainly not a Black Tern, but was it a Bridled or perhaps a Sooty? I quickly digi-scoped some record shots.

I searched for my mobile phone in order to summon support, but as luck would have it I had left it at my house. I therefore headed for my car and drove the mile home. Having confirmed the species as a Bridled, I tried calling local birders Chris Gibbins and Hywel Maggs, both of whom failed to answer. I therefore rocketed back to the beach and managed to find Chris sat in a telephone blind spot. From my photos, he agreed with the identification and headed rapidly towards the mouth of the Ythan, followed by me, phone in hand calling the local grapevine.

Upon reaching the viewing point, it was obvious the bird had gone. The area was thoroughly searched by the arriving throng but no dark tern was found. After an hour and with still no sign of the bird, I had to leave. Happily for those patient birders who waited as the tide ebbed, the bird later returned to the same area of beach where originally found and was clearly seen and its identity confirmed. As the light faded the tern flew off again and was last seen heading north towards the ternery. Despite various parties carrying out a continual search the next day, the bird was not seen again.

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Subsequent to its departure from the Ythan Estuary, the Bridled Tern reappeared on the Farne Islands from 15–19 August.

Plates 330–331. Bridled Tern, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, 8 August 2013. © Harry Scott





Plates 332–335. Bridled Tern, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, 8 August 2013. © Harry Scott

Status of Bridled Tern in Scotland

This tropical and sub-tropical species has four subspecies, with breeding populations on the Pacific coast of Central America (Onychoprion anaethetus nelsoni), in the Caribbean and West Africa (O.a. melanoptera), from the Red Sea through the western Indian Ocean (O.a. antarcticus) and from Indonesia, Australia and western Pacific (O.a. anaethetus). Birds winter at sea and migration/dispersal patterns are little known.

The first British record (Dungeness, Kent, 1931) was of the form antarcticus, but others have not been assigned to race. There have been 23 individuals recorded in Britain to the end of 2012, with five of these seen in Scotland:

- 1979:** Orkney, Stromness, Mainland, first-summer, 6–7 August
- 1988:** North-east Scotland, Sands of Forvie, one, 2 August
- 1993:** Highland, The Perches, Isle of Eigg, one, 21 July
- 1994:** Argyll, Tiree, one, 30 June to 9 July
- 2003:** Angus, Arbroath, adult, 19 July

Like the 2013 individual, several of the previous British occurrences have involved birds which have wandered to more than one

county/recording area. The earliest find date is of a fresh wing on Lundy, Devon on 22 April 1977 and the latest of a recently dead bird on 19 November at Dungeness, Kent in 1931. The earliest live bird was one at Rye, Sussex on 16 May 1993, and the latest one at Scarborough, Yorkshire on 18 October 1990. The majority of initial find dates have been in June (7), July (7) and August (6) with the 2013 bird and other Scottish records fitting well into this pattern.

The 2013 individual was seen over a total of 50 days, just exceeding the previous longest stay of 49 days by a bird in 1988. Remarkably that bird was also first found in Northumberland, on 11 July, and was presumed to be the same individual as the one seen at Sands of Forvie/Ythan Estuary on 2 August that year. Only three others have been seen for more than three days (23 Anglesey 1988; 39 Isles of Scilly 1991; 10 Argyll 1994), with most noted only on their day of discovery.

Unsurprisingly for a pelagic seabird, the majority of British records have been from coastal sites, mostly in south and east England, but it has been found inland on four occasions (Leicestershire 1984, Essex 1991, Northamptonshire 1993 and Yorkshire 1994).



Plate 336. North Haven (foreground), South Haven (background), the bird observatory (far right) and the storm-petrel ringing garages (directly below the observatory), Fair Isle, Shetland, July 2013. © Will Miles

Two Swinhoe's Petrels on Fair Isle in 2013 - second and third records for Scotland

W.T.S. MILES

Since ringing my first Storm Petrel on Fair Isle in 2005, I have spent many summer nights every year mist-netting and ringing storm-petrels in Scotland. Like many bird ringers, I use vocalisation play-back to attract the birds in. Tracks of different storm-petrel vocalisations are assembled into a playlist, which is then played continuously through the night via a battery-powered speaker and MP3 player. Typically, playlists have included male and female Leach's Petrel purr- and chatter-call tracks and Storm Petrel purr-call tracks. However, ever since The Sound Approach team produced the brilliant *Petrels Night and Day* (which includes Swinhoe's sounds on the two CDs that come with the book) I have also included a track or two of Swinhoe's Petrel chatter-calls.

For seven years I have played Swinhoe's calls in this way (on over 100 nights in total on the Outer Hebrides and Shetland), but until 22 July 2013 I had never heard or seen anything to suggest that a Swinhoe's Petrel had ever been attracted by play-back of the tracks. Storm-petrel

ringing sessions have been carried out annually by the wardens on Fair Isle since 1957 and over the years more than 33,000 Storm Petrels have been ringed; however, Swinhoe's calls have been played on the isle only since 2011. Playing Swinhoe's calls was always entirely speculative; a shot to nothing based on the off-chance that maybe one day a wandering individual might be attracted in.

Hearing the call

Storm-petrel ringing is a normal part of summer life at Fair Isle Bird Observatory, and on the night of 21/22 July 2013 conditions for a 'stormie' session were absolutely perfect. Thick fog covered the island, creating exceptionally dark conditions; the wind was very light, with just a breath of an easterly; and wave movements were minimal, so the night was also very quiet - ideal for play-back calls and real calls to be clearly audible. The previous night, conditions had been similar and a good early season total of 26 Storm Petrels and two Leach's Petrels had been trapped and ringed.

Just after midnight on the 22nd, the bird observatory team set up two mist nets, one facing north into North Haven and the other facing east into South Haven. Each net had a speaker system underneath it, each playing a mixed playlist of various petrel vocalisations. The speaker under the South Haven net was playing the following calls on repeat: Leach's - Leach's - Storm - Storm - Swinhoe's - Leach's - Storm - Leach's - Swinhoe's - Madeiran - Storm. The Swinhoe's track was a customised track I had created back in 2008, by cutting together a series of Swinhoe's chatter-calls (all from *Petrels Night and Day*), minimising periods of silence and increasing the volume and sound balance of the calls. It comprised of both male and female chatter-calls, occasionally with the calls of Streaked Shearwaters quietly in the background.

That night, Richard Cope and Teresa Donohue were manning the North Haven net, David Parnaby and Noa Eden were on the South Haven net, and Billy Dykes was ferrying petrels from the nets to the ringing shed, where I was based, ringing and releasing birds. Soon after the speakers went on (at about 00:15) Storm Petrels began to fly in, and by the end of the night a total of 44 had been trapped and ringed, plus two Leach's (one at 01:10 and the other at 02:00). At 02:30 I happened to walk out of the garages with BD and hear the chatter-calls of a Swinhoe's Petrel being played from the speaker under the South Haven net, and the same calls coming from an area south of the net, just offshore. For a split second, I thought that the Swinhoe's calls coming from offshore must somehow be another recording or an echo, but then I realised that they were not in synchrony with the track being played, were totally pure (without Streaked Shearwater recordings in the background), were not coming from the speaker under the North Haven net (set further north and not playing Swinhoe's then anyway) and that the source was in mid-air and moving rapidly around. The penny dropped and I ran towards South Haven yelling, "There's a Swinhoe's calling!" I could hear real and recorded Swinhoe's Petrel chatter-calls at the same time, and right from the off, this was a useful (and pretty unique) situation for double-checking the call identification.

DP and NE joined BD and me standing on the low cliff top, listening. The bird continued to call from out in the haven in front of us, very loud and clear, but now from a stationary position just a little way offshore (it must have landed either on the water or a nearby rock). Suddenly, the sound system automatically switched track from Swinhoe's to Madeiran Petrel, and with Madeiran playing the bird gave a few more chatter-calls, but then went silent. We had all been waiting for the bird to fly in towards the net, but now it was silent we felt sure it would vanish back out to sea. The track was quickly switched back to Swinhoe's and the result was instantaneous, the bird immediately resumed chatter-calling. With it calling again, but still at first from a stationary position, DP ran back to the Observatory to get a sound recording device. The bird took off and flew around the haven calling for a while, but then went silent again. DP came back with the device, but the bird was heard no more. It had called on and off for about ten minutes in total, out in the foggy darkness, but at no point was it ever seen.

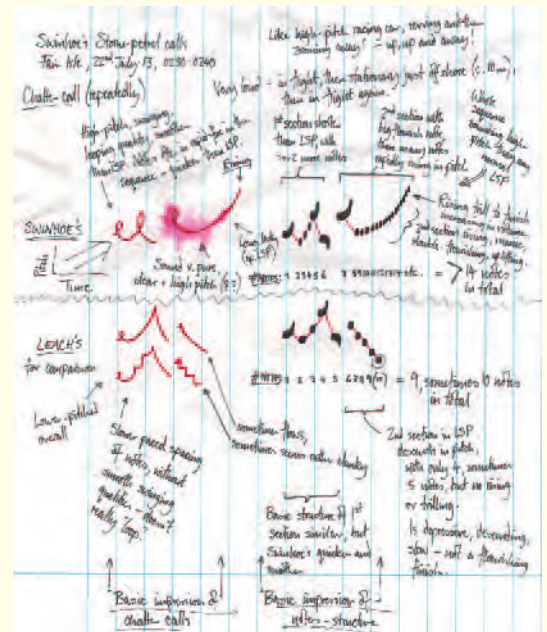


Figure 1. Notes made on 22 July 2013 describing the call of the Swinhoe's Petrel heard earlier that night in South Haven, Fair Isle, Shetland. © Will Miles



Plate 337. Swinhoe's Petrel (first bird), Fair Isle, Shetland, 27 July 2013. © Will Miles

We soon discovered that RC and TD had heard the bird too. Hearing raised voices, they realised something good was going on in South Haven and walked across from the North Haven net, heard the bird calling just offshore in South Haven, and RC recognised it as a Swinhoe's Petrel too, without prior knowledge of the identification.

We waited until well after dawn had passed before packing up that night, but the bird had gone. None of the team had any doubts about the identification and everyone was elated to have been involved in the record, but we also hoped that the story would not end there; with just the calls, the darkness and nothing more.

The first sighting

From 22nd to 26 July the weather was calm on Fair Isle and the observatory team were able to do storm-petrel sessions every night. It was an excellent few days, with over 150 Storm Petrels and four Leach's Petrels trapped and ringed, magnificent views of a pod of four Orcas that toured the island on the afternoon of the 25th,

and the discovery of a flock of eight Two-barred Crossbills on the 26th. The week was characterised by drifting fog, thickening on the 26th and greatly reducing light and visibility for the storm-petrel session that night. It was the first night with similar conditions to those on the 22nd, when the Swinhoe's Petrel had been heard; however, the fog was *even* thicker and the air increasingly heavy and brooding, like that before a tropical storm. Fair Isle was conjuring a rare atmosphere; never before had the darkness felt so charged and promising. As I sat at the net that night, waiting for the first petrels to come in, it was as though the island was saying, "get ready".

The team on the 26th/27th included me, Kieran Lawrence, Tegan Newman, Daniel McGibbon, TD and NE. Two nets were up, in an 'L' shape facing east into South Haven, and as on the 22nd, the speaker system under the nets was programmed to play vocalisations of various storm-petrel species, including Swinhoe's. The night ticked along nicely and by 01.25 am we had caught 32 Storm Petrels and one Leach's Petrel.

At that time, I happened to be at the net with DM when suddenly we heard the calls of a Swinhoe's Petrel seemingly very close to us, just a few feet away. We were at the middle of the net, having just extracted a Storm Petrel, but we swiftly moved aside in case the Swinhoe's came in. Back at the net pole, I began to prepare some equipment to make a recording of the calls; however, almost immediately I saw a large storm-petrel fly into the net just above the speaker (which at that point was playing Swinhoe's). On quickly reaching the bird I gently took hold of it. It felt far larger than a Storm Petrel, but slightly smaller than any Leach's I had ever held. It was in the middle shelf of the net, just sitting in the pocket, and carefully I parted its wing tips to look at the rump - no white. The bird was all-dark, like a shadow in the mesh, and my heart began to race! I quickly took the bird out of the net and placed it in a bird-bag, then asked everyone to double check that there were no other petrels in the net (which there weren't), to turn off the sound system and to close the mist-nets.

We walked over to the ringing shed and the Storm Petrel was ringed and released before I sat down to examine the dark-rumped bird in the light. It had to be a Swinhoe's, but I wanted to see all the features to be certain. They were all there, it really was one. I put it back into the bird bag, we gathered up all the ringing kit, and took everything up to the observatory ringing room. As

we walked up, I put the news out by text to various folk off the island, including DP, who unfortunately was in Sunderland that night (his time would come though). The bird was ringed and measured, as an appreciative crowd gathered made up of observatory staff, guests, and many islanders (some in nightwear) who had driven up to the observatory to see the petrel - an amazing rarity, even by Fair Isle's standards.

The bird was soon taken back to South Haven to be released. I stood facing the sea with the bird on the palm of my hand, letting it acclimatise to the night, free to go when it was perfectly ready; and after a couple of minutes it shuffled onto my fingertips, opened its wings and flew off strongly out into the darkness. As this happened however, three of us heard a distinctive chatter-call come from far offshore. We only heard it once, very faintly, somewhere out in the gloom, but it had sounded like another Swinhoe's Petrel.

The second bird

Following the capture of the Swinhoe's Petrel on the 27 July, the weather remained calm and settled and storm-petrel ringing sessions were carried out in the early hours of the 28th, 30th and 31 July and the 1st, 5th and 6 August. During these sessions 374 Storm Petrels and seven Leach's Petrels were trapped and ringed, but there was no further sign of the Swinhoe's.

Plates 338–339. Swinhoe's Petrel (second bird), Fair Isle, Shetland, 7 August 2013. © Will Miles



On the night of 6/7 August, the weather was slightly overcast but again very calm, and the observatory team set out for another petrel session at 23:30. One 18-m mist-net was set facing into South Haven, the usual sound system was placed under the net, and once this was on a steady stream of Storm Petrels were trapped and ringed (86 in total) and at least two Leach's Petrels were heard and seen frequently overhead (2013 was a record season for Leach's Petrels on Fair Isle, with a final total of 20 trapped and ringed. The previous highest total was 14 in 1999). The team that night comprised of DP (now back from Sunderland), Logan Johnson, Rachael Redfern, TD, DM, KL and me.

At 02:20, KL was sitting at the south end of the net and I was at the north end, when we saw a large storm-petrel hit the mesh close to where I was standing. Given the obvious presence of Leach's Petrels that night, indeed within the previous two minutes, and total lack of any Swinhoe's calls, I approached the bird expecting it to be a Leach's. The first things I saw were its legs, neither of which was ringed. In the hand, it felt about the right size for a Leach's, but on turning the bird over I saw that everything about it was dark. It was *another* dark-rumped storm-petrel!

Feeling totally astonished, I extracted the bird and placed it in a bird-bag, KL turned off the sound system, we checked that there were no more petrels in the net, and then furlled the net shut. We took the bird over to the ringing shed, where DP and I quickly finished processing and releasing the last batch of Storm Petrels. Then, for the second time in 11 days, I sat down to check the features of a dark-rumped storm-petrel and confirmed the mind-bending truth that it really was a *second* Swinhoe's Petrel. I looked up at the faces around the room and every single one was beaming happiness.

As with the first Swinhoe's, everything was then transferred the short distance up the hill to the observatory ringing room. There the bird was ringed, measured in detail and photographed, then soon taken back to South Haven to be released. Standing at the edge of the haven, with a small crowd gathered behind, I took the bird out of a bird-bag and carefully placed it onto the open hands of Dennis Coutts (who, amazingly, happened to be visiting from Shetland that particular night purely on the off-chance that a Swinhoe's Petrel would be caught). The bird sat quietly for a few minutes on Dennis's binocular-worn palms, then fluffed itself up slightly, spread its wings and darted off towards the open sea.

Plates 340–341. Swinhoe's Petrel rump patch and tail (left), showing slightly V-shaped tail fork, and Leach's Petrel tail (right), showing more U-shaped tail fork, Fair Isle, Shetland, July 2013. © Will Miles



The second Swinhoe's Petrel was recaptured during routine storm-petrel sessions in the early hours of 8 August, nightly from the 11th to 15th, on 17 August, and finally on 3 September. The first Swinhoe's Petrel was seen only on 27 July. The second individual behaved unlike any other storm-petrel ever caught during mist-netting sessions on Fair Isle by making regular returns to the trapping area (note that Storm Petrels attracted to sound-lures are almost exclusively non-breeding birds and, despite the unusual behaviour of the second Swinhoe's, there were no indications that the Swinhoe's were breeding on Fair Isle). Following detailed consultations between FIBOT and the BTO during this period, petrel sessions were not held at the havens between 18 August and 2 September and Swinhoe's tracks were not played during a session there on 3 September (and trapping operations ceased immediately when the bird was caught that night). This proved to be the last session of the year, since sessions stopped entirely at the end of the first week in September, the usual end point of the storm-petrel ringing season on Fair Isle.

Identification of the calls

If Leach's Petrel sounds like "a goblin on acid", Swinhoe's is a goblin on speed. The calls on 22 July were similar to Leach's, but faster and with a greater number of high-pitched flourishes. Each chatter-call was amazingly loud and had a manic looping quality, like a very high-pitched racing car revving up a few times and then zooming away. Like Leach's, each call comprised of two parts. The first part was made up of roughly six notes in very rapid succession (Leach's is normally just five and slightly slower paced), beginning high pitched (one note), then low pitched rising up high to a big flourish (roughly four notes), then low again (one note). The second part included at least eight or nine notes (Leach's usually just four or five), beginning with a big high-pitched flourish (one note), followed by a rapid-fire rising crescendo (seven or more short notes in increasingly quick succession) that started low but rose exponentially in pitch and volume to a shrill, twanging end. The second part was much less like a Leach's call than the first part, and by far the more distinctive sound. The second part of a Leach's Petrel chatter-call typically involves four



Plates 342–343. Swinhoe's Petrel bill (top) showing relatively short and deep structure in relation to Leach's Petrel (bottom), Fair Isle, Shetland, July 2013. © Will Miles

or five notes descending down in pitch relatively slowly and is quite different to the spritely, looping, flourish-and-zoom finale of Swinhoe's.

On 22 July, the calls struck me as different to any petrel I had ever heard before and I was certain they were the chatter-calls of a Swinhoe's Petrel. In this, it was perhaps a great help to have spent many nights in 2007–10 listening to hundreds of Leach's Petrels calling at their breeding colonies on St Kilda and North Rona; also, to be relatively familiar with recordings of Swinhoe's calls (not least from seven years of play-back). However, the really critical factor that helped us *all* identify the calls that night, was that the Swinhoe's track was playing, the bird was calling back to it, and that it was possible to hear real and recorded Swinhoe's Petrel chatter-calls at the same time - because they were clearly a perfect match.

Plates 344–345. Swinhoe's Petrel upperwing (top) showing characteristic pale carpal bar and white bases to the exposed outer seven primary shafts, and underwing (bottom) showing outer seven primary shafts, and underwing (bottom) showing glossy greyish-black surround to grey-brown interior 'lining', Fair Isle, Shetland, 27 July 2013. © Will Miles



Identification in the hand

The criteria for identification of Swinhoe's Petrels are now well established (e.g. Cubitt *et al.* 1992, Cubitt 1995, Baxter & Scott 2000, Flood & Fisher 2011, Howell 2012). The Fair Isle birds both had an entirely dark rump patch with no trace of any pale feathering, distinct white bases to the exposed outer seven (first bird) and outer six (second bird) primary shafts, a slightly V-shaped rather than U-shaped tail fork, and a short, deep bill structure relative to Leach's Petrel (plates 337–347). In addition, both birds showed characteristic pale carpal bars (plate 344), the underwing was glossy greyish-black with a grey-brown interior 'lining' (plate 345) and, surprisingly, in both birds the shafts of at least the outer three tail feathers were found to be white-based (plate 346; this feature is unlikely to be visible in the field).

The size, structure and appearance of the two birds unequivocally fitted with the established plumage criteria and biometrics of Swinhoe's Petrels but not with identification criteria for the potential confusions species' (Flood & Fisher 2011, Howell 2012). These include: Leach's Petrel (same size as Swinhoe's but lacks distinct white bases to outer primary shafts and usually shows at least some pale rump feathering, even in "dark-rumped" *chapmani* Leach's Petrels of the Pacific); Ashy Storm-petrel (same size as Swinhoe's, but lacks distinct white bases to outer primary shafts); and Black, Markham's, Tristram's and Matsudaira's Storm-petrels (dark-rumped and with distinct white bases to primary shafts, but all markedly larger than Swinhoe's).

Discussion

The Fair Isle Swinhoe's Petrels are the latest addition to a series of extra-limital records of the species occurring in the North Atlantic, dating back to 1983 (see James & Robertson 1985, Bretagnolle *et al.* 1991, King & Minquiez 1994, Bolton 1998, Morrison 1998, Baxter & Scott 2000, Robb *et al.* 2008, Flood & Fisher 2011). To date, the only known breeding sites of Swinhoe's Petrels are around the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea and the only known wintering area is the northern Indian Ocean (Brooke 2004, Morrison 2008, Flood & Fisher 2011, Howell 2012). Encounters with this species in the Atlantic Ocean never fail to amaze and never fail



Plate 346. Swinhoe's Petrel rump patch and tail feathers, showing how the outer tail feather shafts were white-based (the pattern was the same on both individuals), Fair Isle, Shetland, 7 August 2013. © Will Miles

to raise questions. Is there an Atlantic breeding population? Does the species 'wander' into the Atlantic via the tip of South Africa and/or via the Red Sea and then overland into the Mediterranean? Why do individuals return again and again to the same ringing site and sound-lure, when Storm Petrels and Leach's Petrels do not? Did more than two individuals visit South Haven on Fair Isle calling in 2013? Will the Fair Isle birds return in future years? The species has an alluring aura of mystique, and gaining answers to the many questions raised by the North Atlantic records presents a considerable challenge. Tracking storm-petrels at sea using ultra-miniature data-loggers is in its infancy. However, these developing techniques combined with the species' site fidelity and responsiveness to sound-lures, may present ways to begin to understand the occurrence of this tiny seabird on the opposite side of the world to where it breeds.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Magnus Robb, Killian Mullarney and The Sound Approach team who produced *Petrels Night and Day*. For their voluntary help and brilliant assistance during the 2013 storm-petrel season on Fair Isle, thanks go to Billy Dykes, Noa Eden, Rob Hughes, Logan Johnson, Kieran Lawrence, Daniel McGibbon, Tegan Newman, Rachael Redfern, Alex Rhodes, Freya Stout and Jacob Wood. Roger Riddington, David Parnaby, Mark Bolton and Ken Smith provided useful feedback on the draft. The massive positive public response to the first Swinhoe's Petrel for Fair Isle was staggering, I had never experienced (or expected) anything like it and I would like to thank everyone who contacted us personally about the events. Finally, special thanks to Paul Baxter for getting me hooked on storm-petrels, here on Fair Isle through the summer of 2006.



Plate 347. Swinhoe's Petrel (second bird), Fair Isle, Shetland, 7 August 2013. © Will Miles

Status of Swinhoe's Petrel in Scotland

There is only one previous Scottish record, a bird trapped by Paul Baxter and Harry Scott during a storm-petrel ringing session at Cove Harbour, Aberdeenshire, on 5 August 2000 (Baxter & Scott 2000, Forrester *et al.* 2007).

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Rock Thrush, Scotstown, North-east Scotland, July 2013 - first Scottish mainland record

M.B. COWIE



Plate 348. Rock Thrush, Scotstown, North-east Scotland, July 2013. © Dave Pullan

On 18 July 2013, having checked that a Red-backed Shrike was still at St Fergus, I decided to drive down to Scotstown, about half a mile away, and arrived at 14:45. I frequently birdwatch from the car park in the dunes next to a small field which often holds cattle. The field is only a short distance from the sea and nestles in the landward side of the sand dunes. The area is potentially good for migrants. Over the years Snow and Lapland Buntings, Redpoll, Twite, Redstart etc. have turned up. These kept my interest alive in the hope something unusual could appear.

I parked as usual and started scanning. At once I saw a bird standing on a strainer post at the far side of the field, roughly 300 yards away. At this time the sun was very bright and through the telescope the bird was decidedly blurred, but an orange haze around the rear end of the bird had me puzzled. It had a distinctive profile - upright stance with a long, sharp bill. Its posture and size suggested Wryneck, but the orange colour and long bill ruled this out.

I then walked into the field and set up my telescope, viewing the bird in an annoying shimmer. It was unfamiliar to me, but Rock Thrush flitted uneasily through my mind. I took a photo through my scope, but, having forgotten my specs, had to return to the car to see what I'd snapped! I immediately turned to Rock Thrush in my *Collins Bird Guide*, viewed the photo and decided to get back quickly as the possibility of that species was increasing.

The sky was now overcast and the bird had flown onto an open area of ground. This gave a much clearer view and I could see features matching Rock Thrush. At this point I phoned Tim Marshall and described what I'd seen, but because of its rarity and my cautiousness did not name it. I kept watching while the bird obligingly presented me with different views and I took more photos. My wariness evaporated - this had to be a Rock Thrush.

Plate 349. Rock Thrush, Scotstown, North-east Scotland, July 2013. © Pete Shepherd



Soon after, Tim arrived at a fair gallop, looked through the telescope and corroborated my identification. While we were busy spreading the word the bird disappeared for about half an hour, which was very worrying. Tim decided to take a wander round the field in the hope of finding it again, and soon discovered it sitting on the ground in a bunch of nettles and it flew up onto the strainer post again.



Description

Size/structure: a Starling-sized, tubby-looking, short-tailed, long-winged bird, frequently adopting an upright, alert stance. **Head:** slaty-grey head and neck. **Eye:** was big and black, dominating the face. **Bill:** long, fairly thin and sharply pointed. **Upperparts:** mantle looked slightly paler grey than head. Back was liberally marked with white spots. Grey rump. **Underparts:** light brown with darker scalloping overall. A hint of orange was evident running thinly up the flanks and sides of breast. **Wings:** upperwing mainly dark brown, with narrow white feather edging to coverts, though these weren't visible in flight. Underwing appeared to be pale, but good views eluded me. **Tail:** very bright orange, which in flight spectacularly 'lit up' an otherwise sombre bird. Brown central feathers. **Bare parts:** eye and bill black, legs greyish. **Call:** witnesses saw, but didn't hear, the bird call.

The bird remained at the site from 18 July until the evening of 22 July and was seen by a great number of birders including some from England who had missed the bird that was at Spurn earlier in the year.

*Margaret B. Cowie, 8 Watson Crescent,
Peterhead, Aberdeenshire.*

Plates 350–351. Rock Thrush, Scotstown, North-east Scotland, July 2013. (above) © Harry Scott (below) © Pete Shepherd





Plate 352. Rock Thrush, Scotstown, North-east Scotland, July 2013. © Harry Scott

Status of Rock Thrush in Scotland

This species has a fragmented breeding range from Iberia and Morocco east through southern Europe and Turkey, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan to southern Russia, Mongolia and northern China. The entire population is migratory and winters in sub-Saharan Africa from southern Mauritania and Senegal eastwards to the Red Sea and south through eastern Sudan and Congo to Tanzania and northernmost Mozambique.

There have been 28 accepted records in Britain up to the end of 2012, with five of these in Scotland:

- 1910:** Orkney, Pentland Skerries, adult male, shot, 17 May
- 1931:** Fair Isle, one, 8 November
- 1936:** Fair Isle, male, 16 October
- 1962:** Outer Hebrides, Hirta, St Kilda, female, 17 June
- 1970:** Fair Isle, first-year male, trapped, 30 June

The majority of British records have occurred in spring with a very distinct peak in May (14 birds) and a smaller one in June (6), with others found in February (1), April (3), September (1), October (2) and November (1). The earliest one found was a male at Portland, Dorset on 16–24 April 1988, and the latest was the Fair Isle bird on 8 November 1931. The Scotstown bird lingered for five days, and only the 1988 Portland bird (9 days) and an immature male at Minster, Kent on 5 February to 1 April 1983 (56 days) have stayed longer.

Apart from the first British record at Therfield, Hertfordshire on 19 May 1843 and a male at Graveley, Hertfordshire on 8 May 1983, all other records have come from coastal counties, particularly in south and east England, with 10 of these on islands rather than the mainland.

Prior to the Scotstown individual there was a female at Kilnsea, Yorkshire on 25–26 April 2013, though there had been none prior to that since 2004.

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 July to 30 September 2013

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee. Thanks are due to Angus Murray/Birdline Scotland for providing information about arrival dates of summer migrants in spring 2013.

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 warmest July for many years provided several unusual sightings, with the early headlines grabbed by the frustratingly brief appearance of an Ascension Frigatebird in Argyll. Seabirds continued to steal the limelight with a Swinhoe's Petrel and a Bridled Tern later in the month and amazingly further sightings of both in August. Other surprises included a Mongolian (Lesser Sand) Plover and mainland Scotland's first Rock Thrush in July. Late July and early August brought a notable influx of Two-barred Crossbills to the Northern Isles, and August saw a good passage of scarce and uncommon waders while the passerine migration included notable numbers of Greenish Warblers. September had a wide range of passerine migrants, and saw the largest ever documented arrival of Yellow-browed Warblers in Scotland.

Vagrant Canada Geese: Cackling Goose (minima) three were on Sanday (Ork) on 22 September. **Snow Goose:** one was at Barns of Ayre, Deerness (Ork) on 6 July; one at Loch of Skail, Deerness (Ork) on 17 September; a white-phase bird was at Kinloss (M&N) on 29 September. **Garganey:** a female was at Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) on 19–20 August; two at Loch of Hillwell, South Mainland (Shet) on 27 August; an eclipse drake at Cambarns Pool, Motherwell, Clyde on 31 August to 1 September; one at Caerlaverock WWT on 2–3 September, and one at Lochwinnoch RSPB reserve on 28–30 September. **Blue-winged Teal:** an adult female was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17 August; an eclipse drake was at Frankfield Loch, Clyde from 7 September into October. **Ring-necked Duck:** the drake lingered at Dunbar Quarry (Loth) to 14 September (latterly in eclipse); a drake was at Loch of Tingwall, Mainland (Shet) on 5 July; eclipse drakes were at Meikle Loch (NES) on 15–28 September and at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 15th; the latter relocating to Loch of Clickimin, Lerwick (Shet) on 16–19 September. **Surf Scoter:** an adult male, first-summer male and a female were seen intermittently off Blackdog/Murcar (NES) to 18 August, with the female again on 28 August, a drake on 1 September, a drake and two females on 8th, and a drake again on 20–27 September. A drake was off Rhunahaorine Point, Kintyre (Arg) on 10–16 July; a drake in Lunan Bay (A&D) from 7–22 August at least; a female off Portlethen (NES) on 21 August; a drake in the Sound of Harris (OH) on 28 August and in the Sound of

Taransay (OH) on 6th and 23 September. **King Eider:** the drake remained at the Ythan Estuary to 10 July; one was near Burghead (M&N) on 18–22 September.

Fea's Petrel: one flew north past Hemsdale (High) at 17:00, and north past Duncansby Head (Caith) at 20:20 on 7 September.

Great Shearwater: one was seen at Loch Snizort, Isle of Skye (High) on 18 August; one flew past Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12 September. **Cory's Shearwater:** one was seen from the Tarbert, Harris (OH) to Uig, Skye (Arg) ferry on 1 August; one flew west past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13 August. **Sooty Shearwater:** one flew north past Barns Ness (Loth) on 2 July, with four other singles in the month. In August higher counts were 50 past North Ronaldsay on 29th, and 130 off Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 28th. In September higher counts included 80 past North Ronaldsay, 140 flew past Fife Ness, Fife on 7th; a flock of 160 east of the Isle of May on 10th, and at least 1,000 at Burma Bank, off Gairloch (High) on 19 September (the highest ever west coast count). **Balearic Shearwater:** one flew south past Saltcoats (Ayr) on 31 July. In August 14 birds were noted from Ayrshire to North Uist and Angus to Orkney, all singles except two past Portencross (Ayr) on 17th, and two past Saltcoats on 25th. September produced nine birds with two past Saltcoats on 2nd, one off Corsewall Point (D&G) on 16th, and six singles from Borders to NE Scotland between 6–30th. **Swinhoe's Petrel:** one was heard during storm-petrel ringing sessions on Fair Isle early on 21 July, and

then remarkably it (or another) was caught on 27 July, then amazingly a second bird was trapped several times between 7–17 August and again on 3 September - the second and third records for Scotland.

Ascension Frigatebird: a juvenile was present at Bowmore, Islay (Arg) on 5 July - the second Scottish (& British) record.

Glossy Ibis: four were at Caelaverock WWT reserve (D&G) on 30 September. **Little Egret:** one was at Loch Kerry, north of Sheildaig (High) on 6 July, one at Tynninghame (Loth) throughout July, with two there on 30th, and one at Seafield (Loth) on 24th. During August there were at least five in Lothian, three in Upper Forth, one at Vane Farm RSPB reserve (P&K), four in Fife, up to two in Angus, three in NE Scotland, and up to three were in Kirkcudbright Bay (D&G) on 25–31 August. September provided up to three in Lothian, Upper Forth and Fife, one at Montrose Basin (A&D) and one at Port Glasgow, Clyde. **Spoonbill:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve on 17 July and 12–13 August; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 July, with presumably the same bird on Sanday (Ork) on 3 August; one at Kinneil (UF) on 13 August and Skinflats (UF) on 22nd; one at River Esk mouth, Musselburgh on 23 August flew east at 15:30 and then at Aberlady Bay (both Loth) from late afternoon.

Honey-buzzard: an adult was at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 28 July - the second island record; one flew north at Kellas, near Broughty Ferry (A&D) on 12 September; one flew over Newhailes (Loth) on 29 September. **Black Kite:** one flew over Eriskay and then South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 11 September. **Pallid Harrier:** a juvenile was near Sandwood Bay, Cape Wrath (High) on 25 August. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was reported at Tarbat Ness (High) on 29 August. **Hobby:** one flew over

Tynninghame Bay (Loth) on 6 July; one was at Dounby (Ork) on 27 July; one at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 27 July; one at Herra, Yell (Shet) on 3 August, with it or another on Foula (Shet) on 4th; one on Harray (Ork) on 13th; one at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 26th; one flew over Drums (NES) on 27 August. In Angus one was at East Haven on 9 September, it or another at Farnell, near Brechin on 10th, and at Maryton, near Kirriemuir on 13th; one was at Thornhill/Torrie Forest (UF) on 19th, one at White Sands (Loth) on 22nd, and one over Creachan, Barra (OH) on 25 September. **Spotted Crane:** one was seen at Balgavies Loch, near Forfar (A&D) on 13 August; one was at Lochwinnoch RSPB reserve on 27 September. **Common Crane:** the first-summer bird on Unst (Shet) in June was seen there intermittently to 26 September; an adult was at Doune (UF) on 19 August, with it or another seen flying west over the B826 near Doune on 2 September. One flew over Cults (NES) on 17 September, and three over Queensferry (Loth) on 23rd.

American Golden Plover: one was at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 26 August. In September there was an adult at Bakkasetter, then Fleck, Mainland (Shet) on 19–21st; an adult on Fair Isle on 12th; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3rd, and an adult on Sanday (Ork) on 18–30th, with two there on 22nd; at least three on Benbecula/ South Uist (OH) between 3–10th; two adults and two juveniles on Tiree (Arg) between 5–23rd, and an adult at Portnaluchaig, near Arisaig (High) on 15–19 September; **Pacific Golden Plover:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 July. **Mongolian (Lesser Sand) Plover:** a male was present at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 16 July (remarkably the bird was relocated in County Cork, Eire on 27–28 July). **Temminck's Stint:** one was at Rigiá Pool, near Cove (NES) on 2–9 July; one on the River Spey at Kingston (M&N)

on 26 July; one was at Letham Pools, Fife on 7–10th and 14 September. **Baird's Sandpiper:** one was at Wester Sand, Holm (Ork) on 31 August; a juvenile was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 5 September, and two juveniles were at Stoneybridge, South Uist (OH) on 10–14 September. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** an adult was on Foula (Shet) on 2–3 September.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: one was on Berneray (OH) on 29–30 July; one on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 7 August; one on Burray (Ork) on 22–26 August; a juvenile at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 3 September, and one at Northton, Harris (OH) on 3rd, with two there on 6th; one at Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 4 September; a juvenile was at Loch Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 5–8th; one at Vallay, North Uist (OH) on 6th; a juvenile at Kilaulay, South Uist on 7th, and a juvenile at West Loch Ollay, South Uist on 7–10th; a juvenile at Scarista, Harris on 12th; one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 15–17th; one at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 17th; two on West Burra (Shet) on 17th; one on Sanday (Ork) on 18–20th; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–21st, and one at Balcomie, Fife Ness, Fife on 28 September. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** on Shetland there were six birds between 2–30 September; one on Fair Isle on 22–24 July. On Orkney one was on North Ronaldsay on 19 July, an adult on 10–19 August; a juvenile from 29 August to 7 September, and another on 13–30 September, with two on 15th; a juvenile at Loch of Tankerness, Mainland on 17th, and one on Sanday on 18–20 September. Up to 18 were on the Outer Hebrides, all in September, including two at Stoneybridge, South Uist on 9th; and two at Ardkenness, South Uist on 22nd. In Argyll there was a juvenile at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 5 September; one at Middleton, Tiree on 10th; a juvenile at Loch a' Phuill again on 24–25 September. Elsewhere there was one at Vane

Farm RSPB reserve (P&K) on 15 July; an adult at Letham Pools, Fife on 21 July; single adults at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve on 4 August and Meikle Loch on 4–5th (both NES); one over St. Abbs (Bord) on 24th; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve (NES) on 24–25th; one at Crinan (Arg) on 29 August; a juvenile at Frankfield Loch, Clyde on 3–10 September; one at Glenborrodale, Ardnamurchan (High) and a juvenile at Hogganfield Loch, Clyde on 7 September; a juvenile at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 9th; a juvenile at Forfar Loch (A&D) on 16–22nd; one at Spey Bay (M&N) on 18th; one at Baron's Folly Loch (Bord) on 20th, and one again at Frankfield Loch, Clyde on 30 September. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Loch Ordais, Lewis (OH) on 30 August to 1 September; a juvenile was at Loch Paible, North Uist (OH) on 1–5 September; two juveniles were at Balephetrish/Clachan and Gott Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 6th, with one still from 7–12 September; a probable adult bird was at Black Mill, Isle of Luing (Arg) on 7 Sept; one was at Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 9

September. **Upland Sandpiper:** one was on Fair Isle on 25 September. **Hudsonian Whimbrel:** one was at Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 30 September. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6 July was the first for the island; one was at Bishopburn, Loch Ryan, near Stranraer (D&G) on 28 July; one was at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 19 August; one at Pool of Virkie/Clevigarth, Mainland (Shet) on 16–30 September. **Grey Phalarope:** first of the autumn were two north of Fair Isle on 11 July, then relatively few reported - one past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) and one in Portnahaven Harbour, Islay (Arg) on 15 September; two at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) and singles at Griminish Point, North Uist, at Machrihanish, Kintyre (Arg) and Corsewall Point (D&G) on 16th; two past Rubha Ardvule, SU, and one past Turnberry Point (Ayr) on 17th, with two past Turnberry on 18th; one at sea NW of Luinga Mhor, Arisaig (High) on 19th; one at Stinky Bay, Benbecula and three off Rubha Ardvule on 20 September. **Wilson's Phalarope:** a juvenile was at Broadford Bay, Isle of Skye (High) on 16–21 August.

Pomarine Skua: widespread in small numbers starting with one c1 mile north of Fair Isle, on 4 July. In August higher counts included five adults past Dalgety Bay, Fife on 15th, and five past St. Abbs Head on 24th. In September higher counts were six past Chanonry Point (High) on 3rd; five past St Abbs Head (Bord) on 7th; three past Eyemouth (Bord) on 25th, and four off Hound Point (Loth) on 28 September. **Long-tailed Skua:** a juvenile was off Saltcoats (Ayr) on 30 August. In September a juvenile flew past Fife Ness, Fife on 6th; one past Collieston (NES), an adult past Kinghorn Harbour, Fife, and a juvenile past Eyemouth (Bord) on 7th; an adult past Barns Ness (Loth) and a juvenile off Tynninghame Bay (Loth) on 8th; a juvenile past Griminish Point, North Uist (OH) and a juvenile over Loch Sandary, North Uist on 16th; one past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 17th; a juvenile past Ardivachar, South Uist on 20th; a juvenile off St Abb's Head (Bord) on 26th, and a juvenile was c5 miles west of Red Point/Loch Torridon on 28 September. **Sabine's Gull:** one was at sea c7 miles west of Gairloch

Plate 353. Wilson's Phalarope, Broadford Bay, Skye, Highland, August 2013. © Bob McMillan



(High) on 3 July; one seen c4 miles NNE of the Isle of Skye (High) on 12 July, one in the same area on 26 July, and one off the Stornoway-Ullapool ferry on 9 August; one off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9th; one NE of the Isle of Skye (High) on 13–14 August; one past Maiden's Harbour (Ayr) on 18th; one at Ardivachar, South Uist (OH) on 20th; three at Loch Gairloch (High) on 21st; an adult c6 miles off Elishader, Skye on 23rd. Two adults were off Red Point/Loch Torridon (High) on 25th; a first-summer was off Rona, Isle of Skye on 28–29th. Two flew past the Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) and one was off Labost, Lewis on 31 August; an adult off Ardvule, South Uist on 1 September; one off Gairloch (High) on 5 September; four at Broadford Bay, Isle of Skye (High) on 16th; two juveniles past Griminish Point, North Uist on 16th; one flew past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 18th; a juvenile at Ardivachar, South Uist and one off Tiree (Arg) on 21st; at least one off the east coast of Harris (OH) and a juvenile in Stinky Bay, Benbecula (OH) on 23rd; a juvenile was off Barns Ness (Loth) on 25th, and two juveniles off the Shiant Islands (OH) on 27 September. **Ring-billed Gull:** one was at Skinflats (UF) on 13 August, with presumably the same bird at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 31 August, and there again on 26 September; an adult was at Dingwall (High) from 26 August to 19 September at least; an adult was at Traigh Ghrianaidh, Tiree (Arg) on 27–28th and at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 30 August.

Mediterranean Gull: away from regular Lothian, Fife, UF, Ayrshire and D&G haunts an adult was at Arbroath (A&D) from 24 July; a juvenile at Baron's Haugh RSPB reserve on 24th; one at Caerlaverock (D&G) on 26–29 July; a second-summer at Bingham's Pond, Clyde on 26–29 July; an adult at Erskine, Clyde on 27th; one at Brow Well/ Caerlaverock (D&G) on 6–8 August and 29 August; a juvenile near Loch Sandary, North

Uist (OH) on 15–17 August; a second-summer at Graemeshall, Mainland (Ork) on 19 August; a first-year bird at Baltasound, Unst on 27–28 August and 9–11 September; a second-winter at Gruline, Mull (Arg) on 1 September; an adult at Sandhaven (NES) on 1 September; a juvenile at Kirkwall (Ork) on 4 September; an adult at Embo (High) on 10th; two first-winter birds at Crinan and one at Lochgilphead (both Arg) on 15 September, and one at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 21 September. **Laughing Gull:** an adult was on Sanday (Ork) on 19–30 September. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult was at Brow Well/ Caerlaverock (D&G) on 6–9th and 14 August; one was at Browhouses (D&G) on 25 August. **Iceland Gull:** one was on Sanday (Ork) on 17 September, and one at Boddam (Shet) on 18 September. **Glaucous Gull:** a juvenile flew past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 17 September; one was at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 27 September. **Bridled Tern:** the roving adult first found in Northumberland was seen on the Isle of May on 26 July and at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 8 August. **Gull-billed Tern:** one was at Scatness/Pool of Virkie, South Mainland (Shet) on 27–31 July. **Black Tern:** one was at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 27 July and 5 August; two off Kinghorn, Fife and one at Musselburgh (Loth) on 6 August; one c1 mile east of Harris (OH) on 7th; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve (NES) on 9th; one flew past St Abbs Head (Bord) on 11th; one at Blackness Castle (UF) on 21st; a juvenile at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 22nd; one off Thorntonloch (Loth) on 24th; a juvenile flew past Girdle Ness (NES) and a juvenile was at Letham Pools, Fife on 26th, with it or another nearby at Wildemess GP, Ladybank, Fife on 28th. In September a juvenile was off Embo (High) on 1st; two flew past Kirkcaldy, Fife on 6th; one past Fife Ness, Fife on 6th, three on 7th, and one on 8th; a juvenile off Kinneil

(UF) on 7–8th; a juvenile in the Sound of Barra (OH) on 8th; two off Collieston (NES) on 15th; one off Dornoch (High) on 15–16th, and one off Troon (Ayr) on 18th. **Little Auk:** the first of the autumn was one off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19 September.

Turtle Dove: one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 11 September; presumed same still on 19th; one on Fair Isle on 23–24th; one at Boisdale, South Uist (OH) on 24th; one at Kilkenneth, Tiree (Arg) on 25th; one at Palace, Mainland (Ork) on 28th, and one at Northbay/ Morghan, Barra (OH) on 28–30 September. **Snowy Owl:** the lingering male was seen again on Hirta, St Kilda (OH) on 3 July and 10 September; one was near Blackhamar, Rousay (Ork) on 3–4 July. **European Nightjar:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24–26 August, and one on Fair Isle on 26 September. **Roller:** an extremely elusive bird was at Glean, Barra on 29–30 September- the second record for the Outer Hebrides. **Hoopoe:** one was at Hoxa, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 September. **Ryneck:** one on Fair Isle on 23 August; one at Cove Bay (NES) on 24 Aug; one on Foula (Shet) on 24–25th; singles at Sumburgh (Shet), at Girdle Ness (NES) on 25–27th, and the Mull of Oa, Islay (Arg) on 25–27 Aug and near Port Ellen, Islay on 27th; one was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 26 August and on 29 August; one near Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 10 September, one at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 14 Sept; **Golden Oriole:** one lingered on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from June to 3 July; an immature bird was at Glean/ Garrygall, Barra (OH) on 23 September. **Red-backed Shrike:** a male was at St. Abbs Head (Bord) on 1 July; one on Fair Isle on 2nd, and a female near St. Fergus (NES) on 14–21 July. In August there were eight birds on Shetland between 19–29th, one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26th and 29–31 August, and six in NE

Scotland between 24–26th. In September a juvenile was near Dervaig, Isle of Mull (Arg) on 5–13th; a juvenile at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 6–8th; at least five on Fair Isle between 6–26th; one at Bru, Lewis (OH) on 17–18th; one on Sanday (Ork) on 17–19th and 22–25th; one on North Ronaldsay on 18 Sept; one at Aith (Shet) on 21–24th; one at Fladdabister (Shet) on 21–25th; singles at Baltasound and Skaw, Unst on 23rd; one Cunningsburgh (Shet) on 23rd and 25th; one at Eoligarry Church, Barra (OH) on 29 Sept; one at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 28–30 September.

Brown Shrike: one on North Ronaldsay on 24–29 September was the first for Orkney; an immature was at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 27–30th; one was near Balcomie Farm, Fife Ness, Fife on 28th, and one at Collieston (NES) on 28–29 September, the latter two both firsts for the respective areas. **Short-toed Lark:** singles were on Foula (Shet) and on Fair Isle on 25 August, and at Sumburgh (Shet) on 26–27 August. One was at Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 21–22 September and one on Foula (Shet) on 30th.

Greenish Warbler: on Shetland two were at Sumburgh, Mainland on 23–24 August, with one still on 25–27th; one at Ham, Foula on 23–25 August; one on Out Skerries on 25–28th, one at Isbister, Whalsay on 25th and 29th; one at Quendale, Mainland on 25th; one at Hoswick, Mainland on 25th; two were on Foula on 26th, with one still on 27th; one at Brough, Fetlar, and one at Sandwick, Mainland on 27th; one on Foula on 28 August to 2 September; one at Quendale on 29–30th, and one at Skaw, Unst from 29 August to 5 September. Two were on Fair Isle on 26–27 August, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23–29 August. Elsewhere one was at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 23–25 August; at Lybster (Caith), Tarbat Ness

(High) and at Bridge of Don, Aberdeen (NES) on 24th; with others in NE Scotland at Longhaven Quarries, Boddam and Collieston on 24–25th, one at Blackdog on 25th; at least one at Loirston CP, Girdle Ness on 25 August, and one at Whinnyfold on 27 August. One was at Killimster, near Reiss (Caith) on 27 September. **Arctic Warbler:** all sightings were in September. On Shetland one was at Maywick, Mainland on 5th; one at Baltasound, Unst on 11–12th; one at Munness, Unst on 19–20th; one at Scalloway, Mainland on 19th; one at Lund, Unst on 23rd; one at Bigton, Mainland on 24–28th, and one at Loch of Voe, Mainland on 30th. One was trapped on Fair Isle on 4th, an unringed bird seen on 5th, another on 6th, and a further bird on 13th. On Orkney one was at Rendall, Mainland on 19th and one at St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay on 26th.

Yellow-browed Warbler: all sightings were from September. The first were singles at Skaw and Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 10th. An unprecedented passage, particularly from 24th, brought record numbers to many areas. In Shetland notable counts included 100+ on Unst on 26th, with 60 at Baltasound alone (a new Scottish record site count); 13 on Foula on 26th; 15 at Voe, Mainland on 28th; 10 at Quendale, Mainland on 28th, and 19 at Sandwick, Whalsay on 29th. Birds were on Fair Isle from 17 September, with higher counts of 16 on 25th, at least 40 on 26th; then 32, 20, 29 & 12 on the next four days. On Orkney North Ronaldsay hosted birds from 17th, with largest totals of 11 on 25th, 17 on 26th, and 13 on 29th, and other notable counts were four on Sanday on 19th, with six there on 25th, and six on South Ronaldsay on 25th. On the Outer Hebrides the first was one at North Loch Eynort, South Uist on 21st; thereafter ones and twos widespread with higher counts of six Barra on 25th, five at Castlebay,

Barra on 26th, and 12+ on Barra on 27th. Elsewhere birds arrived from 19th, mostly ones and twos but higher counts in the east were of four at Tarbat Ness (High) on 25th, with five there on 26th; three at Collieston (NES) on 26th; four at Arbroath (A&D) on 28th; four at Buddo Ness, Fife on 25th, five at Kilminning, Fife Ness, Fife on 26th, and six at Boarhills (all Fife) on 27th; at least 20 on the Isle of May on 24th, with 10 still on 25th; three at White Sands (Loth) on 26–28th and at Barns Ness (Loth) on 26–27th, and Scoughall (Loth) on 28th; five at St Abb's (Bord) on 25th, with 13 there on 26th, 10 on 27th, and five on 28th. Notable counts from west coast areas were one at The Oa, Islay (Arg) on 27th; three at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 29th, and one at Baron's Haugh RSPB reserve, Clyde on 28th.

Western Bonelli's Warbler: one was at Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 8–14 September, with another on Whalsay (Shet) on 29–30 September. A bird not definitely identified to one or other Bonelli's Warbler species was seen on Burray (Ork) on 23 September.

Barred Warbler: first of the autumn were singles on Fair Isle on 16th & 22–23 August. Subsequent August records included up to 10 on Shetland, one on the Isle of May on 24th; one at Firth, Mainland (Ork) and one at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 29th, and one at North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 August. In September there were at least 12 on Shetland, at least nine on Fair Isle, and four on Orkney. Elsewhere there was one at Vaul, Tiree (Arg) on 6th; singles at Barns Ness on 7–8th, and Skateraw (both Loth) on 7th; one on the Isle of May on 16–17th, and one at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 26th. **Western Subalpine Warbler:** a male was on Fair Isle from 6 July to 16 September (third male Western there this year). **Eastern Subalpine Warbler:** one was near Linkhouse, Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 24–30 September. **Sardinian Warbler:**

remarkably the male ringed at St Abb's (Bord) on 30 June was seen again there from 25 September into October. **Booted Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 22–28 August; one at Drums (NES) on 26–27 August; one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 28th and one at Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 28–29th; one at Easter Skeld, Mainland (Shet) on 31 August; one on Out Skerries on 26–27 September. **Sykes's Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 26–30 September. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 23 September. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 25 September, and another on 28th. **River Warbler:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23 September.

Icterine Warbler: one was on Fair Isle on 8 July, with others there on 26th and 30 July. In August there were about 11 on Shetland, and then one at Norwick, Unst on 25–26 September. On Fair Isle there was one on 25–28th and 30 August to 2 September, one on 4 September, with two on 5th, and one on 10th. On Orkney there was one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22 August, and on 25th, with one

on Sanday on 19 September. Elsewhere there was one at Kings Links, Aberdeen (NES) on 22 August; one at Torry Battery, Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) and one on the Isle of May on 24th; one at Kirkton of Slains (NES) on 25th; and one at Aberdeen (NES) on 26 August. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** all sightings were in September. One was on Fair Isle on 7th; On Shetland one was at Quendale Quarry, Mainland on 20th; one at Scatness, Mainland on 21–23rd; one on Foula on 21–25th; one at Norwick, Unst on 22–23rd; one at Ronas Head, Voe, Mainland on 23–25th; one at Burrafirth, Unst on 26th; one at Funzie, Fetlar on 26–30th; one at Northdale, Unst on 28th, and one at Sandwick, Mainland on 29th. One was at Hestily, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26th. **Marsh Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle from June to 12 July, with three on 4th, another on 27 July to 1 August, and one on 22 August. One was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 July; one on Foula (Shet) on 25–28 August; one on North Ronaldsay on 7 September; one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 11th; one on Fair Isle on 13 September; one on North Ronaldsay on 19–20

September, with another on 26th; one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 22nd; one on the Isle of Harris (OH) on 29th, and one at Everland, Fetlar (Shet) on 30 September.

Cedar Waxwing: a first-winter bird at Vaul, Tiree (Arg) on 21–29 September was the second record for Scotland. **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush:** a first-summer male at Scotstown Dunes, near St. Fergus (NES) on 18–22 July was the first on the Scottish mainland. **White's Thrush:** one was on Fair Isle on 25 September. **Thrush Nightingale:** one was on Fair Isle on 26–30 August; a first-winter was at Graemeshall Loch, Mainland (Ork) on 26 August; one was near Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 29 September. **Bluethroat:** all sightings were in September. On Shetland there was a male at Sullum Voe, Mainland on 14th; one on Foula on 21st; singles on Mainland at Boddam and Scousburgh on 21st, and Cunningsburgh, Exnaboe and Fladdabister on 22nd; one again on Foula on 25th; one on Skeld, Mainland on 28th and two on Whalsay on 29th. There were two on Fair Isle on 21st, and one there on 25th. Singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17th, 24–25th, and 29th. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 29 September. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** all records were in September. Up to 12 were found on Shetland from 20–30th; up to six on Fair Isle on 19–29th; three on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24–30th, and one at South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 27–29th. Elsewhere one was at Tarbat Ness (High) on 25–26th; one at Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 25–27th; one at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 26th; one on the Isle of May on 29th, and one at White Sands, Dunbar (Loth) on 30th.

Rose-coloured Starling: an adult was near Finstown, Mainland (Ork) on 2–4 July, and at Evie on 6 July; an adult was at Camaschroisd,

Plate 354. Sardinian Warbler, St Abbs, Borders, October 2013. © Keith Hoey



Sleat, Isle of Skye (High) on 15–16 July, and presumably the same bird was at Broadford, Skye on 31 July; an adult was at Browhouses (D&G) from about 22nd to 28 July; an adult at Bridge End, West Burra (Shet) on 11–13 August. **Yellow Wagtail:** a pair bred near East Linton (Loth), and a pair of the Blue-headed race bred on North Ronaldsay - the third time on Orkney; two were at Coble Shore, Fife on 18 July; one at Letham Pools, Fife on 26 July; a peak of five at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 27 July; two juveniles at Barns Ness (Loth) on 21 July; one at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 27 August; there were five at Barns Ness (Loth) on 26 August, with one still on 8 September; one at Allathasdal, Barra (OH) on 8th, and one at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 23rd. **Citrine Wagtail:** on Shetland one was at Quendale, South Mainland on 24 August; one near Pool of Virkie, Mainland on 29 August to 5 September; one at Melby Loch, Mainland (Shet) on 31 August to 3 September; one at Skaw, Unst on 8–9 September, and over Norwick and Haroldswick, Unst on 9th, and one on Foula on 23–24th. A first-winter was on Fair Isle on 12–16 August, with two on 17th, one still to 21 August, and one on 31 August to 3 September; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26 August to 2 September, and a first-winter on Hirta, St. Kilda (OH) on 5–9 September. **Richard's Pipit:** one was on Unst (Shet) on 19 September, and one at Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 22nd. **Olive-backed Pipit:** one was at Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 23 Sept; singles were on Fair Isle and Frakkafield, Mainland (Shet) on 25th, and on Unst and Whalsay (both Shet) on 30 September. One was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25th; one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 26th; one reported on Isle of May on 30 September. **Pechora Pipit:** one was at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 28–30 September.

Common Rosefinch: the singing adult male at Loch Tummel (P&K) remained from June to 15 July. On Shetland there were up to 13 in August, and over 40 in September. One was on Fair Isle on 6 July, with another on 12–17 July, three during 19–29 August, and up to 15 in September. On Orkney there was a juvenile at Stromness, Mainland on 29 August; one at Burray (Ork) on 22 Sept. and about nine on North Ronaldsay between 25 August and 30 September. One was on Hirta, St. Kilda (OH) on 8 September. **Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll:** all reports were from September. On Shetland one was at Hoswick, Mainland on 21–24th; one at Skaw, Unst on 23rd; one at Funzie/Leagarth, Fetlar on 24th; one at Spiggie, Mainland on 25th; one at Valyie/ Norwick, Unst on 26th; one Fladdabister/Aithsetter, Mainland on 26th; at least three at Sullom, Mainland on 27th; one at Ham, Foula on 27–30th, and one at Virkie, Mainland on 28th. One was on Fair Isle on 25–28 September. **Two-barred Crossbill:** the end of July saw a mass arrival of birds in east Britain, though all but one found in Scotland were on the Northern Isles. On Shetland the first seen were a female at Wester Quarff, Mainland and a male on Trondra, Burra on 23 July; with up to 20 others by 31st, plus one on a ship 40–45 miles west of Shetland on 25–31 July, with two on 27th. At least 12 were on Shetland to 7 August. On Fair Isle there were eight on 26 July, at least seven on 1 August, four on 3 August and seven the next day. On Orkney a male and female were at Stromness from 29 July to 2 August, with the male still present on 3rd; six probables at Finstown, Mainland on 8th, and a juvenile on North Ronaldsay on 19 August. A juvenile was at Roseisle Forest, near Burghead (M&N) on 6 August. Later in the period an adult male was at Glenborrodale, Ardnamurchan (High) on 6

September; a juvenile at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 22 September, and it or another at Skaw, Unst on 23–25th. **Parrot Crossbill:** three were at Mains of Usan (A&D) on 25 September.

Lapland Bunting: the first of the autumn were one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28–29 August and 2 September, and one at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 31 August. Small numbers were then seen on the Northern and Western Isles in September with higher counts of 10 on Fair Isle on 9th and 13th; 11 on Hirta, St. Kilda (OH) on 10th; 15 on Fair Isle on 18th, and 10 at Butt of Lewis, Lewis on 19th. Elsewhere one was at Carnan Mor, Tiree (Arg) on 7th; one at Stempster, near Thurso (Caith) on 13th; four at Holborn Head, near Scrabster (Caith) on 14th; singles on the Isle of May on 14th and 24th, with two there on 25th, and three on 26th. Two at Milton, Tiree on 24th, and one over West Hynish, Tiree on 28th, and one at Mull of Galloway (D&G) on 30 September. **Ortolan Bunting:** one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 24 September, and one at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 25th. **Little Bunting:** all reports were in September. On Shetland one was on Foula on 18th, with two there on 19–21st, and another on 29th; one at Leagarth, Fetlar on 24th; one at Wester Quarff, Mainland on 28–29th, and one at Maywick, Mainland on 29th. One was on Fair Isle on 10th, and another on 30th. One was on the Isle of May on 29 September. **Black-headed Bunting:** one was at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 25 August. **Black-and-white Warbler:** one was at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 6 September. **Baltimore Oriole:** one was at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 19th and 23 September.

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Advice to contributors

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

The first part accepts manuscripts on the status, distribution and populations of birds in Scotland and, particularly, changes in these over time. Write-ups of census work find a natural home in this section, as do the culmination of research topics and updates to information in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Original work and observations are encouraged, but summary papers will be considered and key-note papers of a more general nature may occasionally be commissioned. Papers should be fully referenced as in any scientific work, and our house style should be followed. Articles of less than 700 words are generally considered as Short Notes, but are otherwise in the same format.

Authors should bear in mind that only a small proportion of the *Scottish Birds* readership are scientists and should aim to present their material concisely, interestingly and clearly. Unfamiliar technical terms and symbols should be avoided wherever possible and, if deemed essential, should be explained. Supporting statistics should be kept to a minimum. All papers and short notes are accepted on the understanding that they have not been offered for publication elsewhere and that they will be subject to editing. Papers will be acknowledged on receipt and are normally reviewed by at least two members of the editorial panel and, in most cases also by an independent referee. They will normally be published in order of acceptance of fully revised manuscripts.

Scottish Birds publishes obituaries of Club members and others who have contributed to Scottish ornithology. These are organised through Waterston House, where the Office Manager will liaise with contributors. Book reviews are organised through the Club Librarian.

The second part of *Scottish Birds* welcomes informal as well as more serious contributions about any aspect of birds and their habitats in Scotland. It is not peer-reviewed, has minimal editing and contributions can be descriptive, anecdotal, controversial, humorous or quirky. They can report on surveys, express opinions, describe birds and places, look back into history, speculate as to the future and can represent organisations or be the work of private individuals. The documentation of rare and scarce birds in Scotland, plus a wide range of identification, site and species related information is lavishly illustrated by high quality colour photographs. We welcome photographs, maps, cartoons, and will accept basic graphs and tables when relevant. Meeting reports or field trip accounts are all welcome, but our main aim is to focus on Scottish birds in Scotland or abroad. We will occasionally include articles from other parts of the world and sometimes about other wildlife. In terms of length, we accept anything from short notes up to articles of c. 2,000 words. There are no strict guidelines as to format, but we would encourage contributors to follow our house style shown in the excerpts from a recent issue available on the SOC publications web page.

Please submit articles! We very much wish to encourage unsolicited contributions to this part of *Scottish Birds*. The editors spend much time requesting articles – a task that would be far less onerous if they are submitted freely from members and other readers. We wish to make it as easy as possible for contributors to send us material that reflects the enormous range of news, work and opinion relevant to Scotland's birds.

Text, image and graphics formats

Contributions should preferably be submitted in electronic format either on disk or by email to mail@the-soc.org.uk, stating the type of word processing package used if not Microsoft Word or a generic 'rich text format'. Only short articles and letters can be accepted in printed or hand written form. No fees are paid.

Tables, maps and diagrams should be designed to fit either a single column or the full page width. Table and photograph captions should be self explanatory and should be able to stand alone from the text. Please include all captions after the text. For photographs please supply the locality and month/year taken, together with the name of the photographer.

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Reference should be made to *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) for guidance on style of presentation, use of capitals, form of references, etc. Detailed instructions for contributors with respect to house style conventions can be found on the SOC website's publication page.

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Plate 355. In August, I finally managed to book the Osprey hide from Rothiemurchus Estates; booking the hide is something I have been wanting to do for a few years and have always been too busy. The first Osprey flew in about 06.10 while it was still quite dark, so I had to up the ISO to 3200 and still only got 1/160 sec. The picture was obviously blurred which emphasised the speed, but importantly the head, bill and eyes were sharp - which I thought made the picture. In the spray behind the Osprey was an adult female Mallard, which appeared to be biting and hanging on to the upper back of the Osprey. After that I looked for the Mallard and saw one of the female Mallards around the pool had three well grown ducklings, so I presumed that was the Mallard that had attacked the Osprey. There were not that many Osprey dives that morning, a local Osprey had started to call the pool his own territory, often sitting in a nearby tree and chasing other Ospreys away. So the only opportunities were when that Osprey had caught a fish and was busy eating but then, if the Mallard was in the pool, she would always attack the Osprey while it was in the water. When an Osprey catches a fish it is always a struggle to grip the fish securely and to then lift itself up and out of the water while the water is still running off the feathers. So to then have an adult Mallard attempting to bite the feathers on your back and having its weight on your tail, the fish frequently managed to escape the final grip of the Ospreys talons and swim free. This Mallard behaviour just goes to emphasise the sheer strength and skill of the Osprey in a successful capture of a fish.

Equipment used: Canon 1D Mk 4 with Canon 300 f2.8 lens on a tripod, shutter speed 1/1600 sec at f5 and ISO 2500.

David Devonport, Elgin, Moray. Email: dave.forbirds@btinternet.com

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