



Scottish Birds

published by the
SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB



VOLUME 34(2) JUNE 2014

Scottish Birds

Established in 1958.

Published quarterly by:

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To advertise in *Scottish Birds* or
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Designed and typeset by:

Pica Design, 51 Charlton Crescent,
Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN.
Email: pica@pica.co.uk

Printed by:

Swallowtail Print Limited,
Unit 2 Drayton Industrial Park,
Taverham Road, Drayton
Norwich, Norfolk NR8 6RL.

Front Cover:

Velvet Scoter, Musselburgh,
Lothian, February 2014.

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ISSN 0036-9144

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 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. 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.

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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.

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SC 009859

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President's Foreword



Plate 110. Chris McNerny and Coll islanders travelling to Lunga, April 2014. © Coll Bunkhouse

I write this foreword having just returned from the beautiful island of Coll. John Bowler, Jane Cleaver and I represented the SOC at the Coll Bird Festival, an event organized by George McConnachie of Development Coll. This involved a weekend of birdwatching activities including guided walks, talks at the community hall, and SOC-led boat trips to the seabird colonies on Lunga, Treshnish Isles. The weekend was a great success with participation from both visitors and islanders (and fantastic weather). It was particularly enjoyable showing the islanders Puffins and other

seabirds for the first time, and to see their amazement at the beauty of these birds at close quarters. It is planned that the event will be repeated next year, again in late April, and I encourage all SOC members to consider going.

The spring conference held in Aberdeen this year was very well received. Sincere thanks to BTO Scotland's Anne Cotton and Ben Darvill, the North-East Scotland SOC branch - particularly Alan Knox and John Wills, and Jane Reid of the University of Aberdeen, for organizing such an excellent event. Thanks also to all the speakers who gave such interesting talks.

Much of the programme for the autumn weekend conference and AGM in Perth has been confirmed. The line-up of speakers looks varied and excellent and we hope it will appeal to a wide audience. I do hope as many members as possible will attend the event, the highlight of the Club year. We are also pleased to announce that the Clyde SOC branch has agreed to host the next Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference in Glasgow, so we look forward to seeing you there.

For the majority of our members, June is the time of year when their SOC subscription renewal notice comes through (enclosed with this issue of the journal, if applicable) and we hope that we can continue to count on your support for another year. Naturally, we are grateful for renewal payments in any form. However, as a small charity, it greatly assists us if members are willing and able to pay by Direct Debit. This very secure payment method results in less paperwork for members and reduces staff time and resources spent on administration. If you normally pay by cheque or bank card but would like to set up a Direct Debit, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Waterston House or click on the 'Switch to paying by Direct Debit' link if renewing online via the SOC website.

As I write this, spring has arrived here in Clyde with many summer migrant birds arriving. It is always invigorating and refreshing to hear the first Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers of the year, and to witness the turn of the seasons.

Best wishes to all and good birding - Chris McNerny, SOC President



Plate 111. White-billed Diver, third-calendar-year, Widewall Bay, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, 29 April to 21 May 2012. © *Morris Rendall*

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2012

R.Y. MCGOWAN, C.J. MCINERNY & M.S. SCOTT
on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

This is the fifth annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), covering 2012. Previous reports have covered the periods 2005–08, 2009, 2010 and 2011 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, McGowan *et al.* 2013).

This year's report is the last in which Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* and Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* appear, as they are now considered sufficiently numerous to permit assessment of records at local level for records from 1 January 2013. Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* will be assessed locally from the same date. Similarly, due to an increase in occurrences in Britain, the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) will no longer assess records of Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, and so from 1 January 2013 records of these two species will be reviewed by SBRC. A summary of these changes is given in Appendix 2.

In this report we give details of a late acceptance of an Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* in Dumfries & Galloway from 2007 which becomes Scotland's first.

In 2012, there were two Black Brants *Branta bernicla nigricans*, recorded only once previously in Scotland. Also, remarkably, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* reappears on the *Scottish List*, following its removal in 2010.

In contrast, in 2012 there were no accepted Scottish records of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* for a third successive year, and there have been no observations of Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* since 2008, equalling the four-year blank period of 1981–84. Similarly, there were no occurrences of Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* for a second successive year; the last period with successive blank years was 1962–64.

The Northern Isles' near-monopoly of passerine species was maintained for a further year. With the exception of Water Pipit, only 24 individual songbirds on the SBRC list were seen outwith the Northern Isles in 2012 and only eight of these were on the mainland.

Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual BBRC reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the *Scottish List* (Forrester 2013).

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

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year. Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
- Total number in the current year (2012).

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2012, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2012 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years are sometimes accepted locally without formal submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided. Revised details are also provided for some pre-2012 records published previously.

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

- Year.
- Recording area (www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network/).
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present throughout; in some cases it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Existence of a photograph, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'

- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, local recorder and/or others.

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

Species coverage

Species coverage is unchanged from the last report. Rare subspecies of several species on the SBRC list are still assessed by BBRC, the most important being Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*. For these, the accounts in the SBRC report summarise accepted BBRC records in order to give as complete a picture as possible of the species' occurrence in Scotland.

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC list. Appendix 3 lists minor corrections to previous SBRC reports.

SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the SOC Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current members are Hywel Maggs (Chairman), John Bowler, Mark Chapman, John Nadin, Martin Scott, John Sweeney and Mark Wilkinson with Chris McInerny as non-voting Secretary and Bob McGowan as non-voting Museum Consultant. Mark Wilkinson replaced Alan Lauder during the period when the records reported here were assessed.

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

Acknowledgements

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

Next, we thank the following current and former recorders and report compilers for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Paul Baxter, Mark Chapman, Paul Collin, Jon Cook, Martin Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Rob Fray, Keith Gillon, Angus Hogg, Hugh Insley, Hywel Maggs, Ray Murray, David Parnaby, Scott Paterson, Chris Pendlebury, Mike Pennington, Brian Rabbits, Malcolm Ware, Stephen Welch, Jim Williams, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas. Jill Harden and Jill Pilkington are thanked for facilitating the donation of the corpse of the Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* to National Museums Scotland.

We appreciate Keith Naylor's scrutiny of past SBRC reports and thank him for his continuing valuable contribution. We thank Ian Andrews for making available the database of records of scarce and rare species used during the preparation of Forrester *et al.* (2007).

Systematic list of accepted records

Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*

1: 0: 2

Table 1. Accepted records of Black Brant in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Outer Hebrides** Àird an Rùnaire, North Uist, adult, 24 April, photo (S.E. Duffield).
Outer Hebrides Poll nan Crann ('Stinky Bay'), Benbecula, adult, 11 May, photo (P. Stronach *et al.*).

Black Brant is extremely rare in Scotland, with just one previous record, a bird present at Loch Gruinart, Islay (Argyll) from 20 October 1989 to 17 May 1990.

The second and third Scottish records (Duffield *et al.* 2012) are possibly the same individual loitering in west coast areas of Uists (Outer Hebrides), being undetected for nearly three weeks.

These observations follow up to ten wintering in England and Ireland in the past few years, so it is surprising it has taken so long for another to be located in Scotland.

(Breeds in north western Canada, Alaska and eastern Siberia, and wintering mostly on the west coast of North America from southern Alaska to California, but also some in east Asia, mainly Japan.)

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

0: 5: 0

Table 2. Additional records of Egyptian Goose in Scotland, 2011 and 2007.

2011: **Dumfries & Galloway** Castle & Kirk Lochs, Lochmaben, 1–3 November, photo (B.D. Henderson *et al.*).
2007: **Dumfries & Galloway** Dalswinton, Castle & Kirk Lochs, Lochmaben, 13 July, photo (B.D. Henderson).

Egyptian Goose was only recently added to Category C of the *Scottish List*, in 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012). Subsequently, a number of older records have come to light, and others are expected to be forwarded to the committee.

The Dumfries & Galloway individual in 2007 predates the Orkney 2008 record and thus becomes the first for Scotland.

Both sightings are considered more likely to relate to birds from feral populations than to escapes from captivity.

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



Plate 112. Black Brant, adult on right, Poll nan Crann ('Stinky Bay'), Benbecula, Outer Hebrides, 11 May 2012. Note the thicker white collar shown by this subspecies. © Peter Stronach

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*

197: 148: 25

Table 3. Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Highland** Mellon Udrigle, Ross & Cromarty, 16–19 April (K.D. Shaw, A.C. Steele *et al.*).
Moray & Nairn Buckie, 13 March (G. Garner, M. Harding *et al.*).
Moray & Nairn Burghead, adult, 12 April to 8 May, also sub-adult 19–23 April (F. Antley, T. Back, J. Poyner, M.J.H. Cook *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Portsoy, second-calendar-year, 17 March to 29 April, (P.A.A. Baxter *et al.*).
Orkney Water Sound, South Ronaldsay, adult, 15 January to 5 February, photo (B. Hamill *et al.*).
Orkney Mull Head, Papa Westray, adult, 27 April, photo (A.J. Leitch *et al.*).
Orkney Widewall Bay, South Ronaldsay, third-calendar-year, 29 April to 21 May, photo (J. Branscombe *et al.*).
Orkney Renwick Head, Mainland, two, adult summer 29 April, photo (K.E. Hague).
Orkney Tor Ness, North Ronaldsay, two adults, 30 April, photo (R.J. Else *et al.*).
Orkney Outshore Point, Sandwick, Mainland, adult, 30 April, photo (A. Mitchell).
Orkney Lighthouse, North Ronaldsay, adult, 6 May (M. Warren).
Orkney Evie, Eynhallow Sound, adult, 3 June, photo (A. Forsyth *et al.*).
Orkney Renwick Head, Mainland, probable adult 9 June, photo (C. Bielby *et al.*).
Orkney Howequooy Head, Mainland, adult, 11–19 June (E.J. Williams, S.J. Williams *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Port Nis & Sgiogarstaigh (Skigersta), Lewis, up to three, 22–26 March, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Port Nis & Sgiogarstaigh (Skigersta), Lewis, two, 9–10 April, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Port Nis & Sgiogarstaigh (Skigersta), Lewis, two (possibly same as above), 23 April, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).
Shetland Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), 10 January to 6 April (B.H. Thomason *et al.*), see also McGowan *et al.* (2013).
Shetland Kirkabister, Mainland, adult (returning), 8–22 January (R.A. Haywood *et al.*), 28 April (M.S. Chapman, R.W. Tait), see also McGowan *et al.* (2013).
Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, adult, summer, 28 May (D.J. Britton).
Shetland Sand of Sand, Fetlar, first-summer, 10–13 June, photo (J.A. Rowlands *et al.*).

White-billed Diver is a scarce visitor to Scotland, with ten or more birds being reported annually. Most occur in Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Highland, with some preferred localities being used each year in spring as presumed stop-overs between wintering and summering areas. In Shetland, a small number of wintering individuals are believed to return to the same sites in successive years and summering birds have become almost annual, with Orkney being a favoured location. There may be some overlap among these records given the birds' mobility, but clarification is problematic.

Observations are now coming from other north facing coasts in east Scotland, and these, too, could be regular spring stop-over areas. Scott & Shaw (2008) discussed the phenomenon of increasing numbers of records in north-west Scotland, and this also now applies to the north-east coast.

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

Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

2: 26: 8

Table 4. Accepted records of Continental Cormorant in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Fife** Kilconquhar Loch, adult, 7 June, photo, (D.E. Dickson).
Lothian Port Seton, adult, 4–13 February, photo (A. Brown).
Shetland Lochs of Hillwell and Spiggie, Mainland, five adults, 31 March to 20 May, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*).
Upper Forth Airthrey Loch, 25 January, photo (A. Cotton).

Continental Cormorant is a rare visitor to Scotland, with a pattern of most records along the east coast and Shetland in the first half of the year. There were only three accepted Scottish records by 2007, but since then multiple sightings annually, with a high of five simultaneously on Shetland.

The total number of individuals in Scotland becomes 36. The east coast bias is likely to be observer-led, with just one accepted west coast bird to date. The distribution of Continental Cormorant is continuing to expand on the Continent and in the UK (Balmer *et al.* 2013), so observations in Scotland are likely to become more frequent.

Claims of Continental Cormorant after 1 January 2013 will not be assessed by SBRC (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012; Appendix 2).

(*P. c. sinensis* breeds throughout central and southern Europe and has expanded recently into parts of northern Europe; outside the breeding season it occurs both inland and on coasts through much of Europe, including England. *P. c. carbo* breeds in north-west Europe including Iceland, Norway and the British Isles.)

Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

46: 7: 1

Table 5. Accepted records of Night-heron in Scotland, 2012.

2012: Outer Hebrides Hirta, St Kilda, adult female, found dead, 16 March, skin, National Museums Scotland, NMS.Z 2013.164 (J. Pilkington).

Night-heron is a less-than-annual visitor to Scotland, with a spring peak in observations. There is a wide geographical spread but the most likely areas of occurrence are the south, the Northern Isles and the Outer Hebrides. The existence of a free-flying colony at Edinburgh Zoo (Lothian), with at least two birds still remaining in 2012, perhaps obscured trends in the past, but the number of free-flying birds in Scotland has decreased over the past decade or so.

The last three Scottish records have all been in spring from the Outer Hebrides, suggestive of overshooting from the southern Europe population.

(Holarctic with four subspecies, nominate *nycticorax* breeding in mainland Europe and into Asia, and *N. n. hoactli* in North America. Both populations move south in winter.)

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

3: 6: 1

Table 6. Accepted records of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2012.

2012: Highland Corpach, Lochaber, 22 September (C. Mertens, K. Middlemiss).

Cattle Egret remains very rare in Scotland, with this bird nudging the total to double figures. No real pattern or trend is evident, but the last three records have been in the west, with the only east coast birds being in Angus & Dundee and Caithness.

(Occurs commonly in sub-tropical and temperate areas throughout the world, the European population being centred on the Mediterranean, extending north to central and western France, with increasing numbers of records farther north. Generally a short-distance migrant.)

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

37: 42: 1

Table 7. Accepted records of Great White Egret in Scotland, 2012.

2012: Highland Munloch Bay, Ross & Cromarty, 24 April (A. Williams *et al.*).
Shetland Vatshoull, Whalsay, (returning), 13 January 2012 (J. Dunn), see McGowan *et al.* (2013).

Great White Egret is a rare but increasingly frequent visitor to Scotland, with sightings in most areas and most months. It is likely that some duplication of records occurs as individuals move from site to site.

With breeding confirmed for the first time in England in 2012, following an increase in numbers (Pitches 2012), it is surprising that only one was seen in Scotland in 2012, down from nine in 2011. This is the lowest total since a single sighting in 1999 in Outer Hebrides.

As from 1 January 2013, records of this species in Scotland will be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012; see Appendix 2).

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

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

19: 13: 2

Table 8. Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Angus & Dundee** Bridge of Dun, adult or second-calendar-year, 19 August (C. McGuigan). **Lothian** Faseney Water, Lammermuir Hills, 4 June (C.N. Davison).

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

There were just two records in 2012: the Bridge of Dun sighting was the first for Angus & Dundee and the Lothian sighting was the second for that area.

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

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

c. 325 (1968–2004): 42: 3

Table 9. Accepted records of Rough-legged Buzzard in Scotland, 2012, with an additional record for 2010.

2012: **Highland** near Forsinard, Sutherland, second-calendar-year, 25–26 April, video (J. Clarke). **Orkney** Orphir Hills, Mainland, adult female, 29 February to 2 May, photo (M. Sinclair, I. Watt *et al.*). **Shetland** Laxobiggin, Mainland, juvenile, (returning) 5 November **2011** to 23 March, photo (M.S. Chapman *et al.*), see also McGowan *et al.* (2013). **Shetland** Baltasound, Unst, adult, 27 September, photo (T. Davison, R.M.R. James, D.A. Nadin). **2010:** **Fair Isle** two, juveniles, 16 October, photo (S. Geary, M. Newell *et al.*).

Rough-legged Buzzard is a scarce passage migrant to Scotland, occurring mostly on the eastern side of the country and in the Northern Isles, with numbers tending to peak in late autumn. Birds occasionally overwinter.

Overwintering birds have become rare in recent years. The last loitering mainland Rough-legged Buzzard was one in the Lammermuir Hills (Lothian) on 16–21 February 2006, and prior to that, a summering bird on 1–25 June 2005 at Loch of Strathbeg (North-east Scotland). The last wintering mainland birds were in 2002, when at least two were at the Ythan Estuary (North-east Scotland), and one was in Caithness. The additional record for 2010 brings the revised total for that year to 11, exceeding the ten observed in 2011; the three records for 2012 represent the lowest annual total since 2007.

With upland observers becoming more numerous in the past decade due to wind farm survey work it is perhaps more evident that the decline in this species in Scotland is a real one.

As from 1 January 2013, records of this species in Scotland will be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012; see Appendix 2). Identification can still be problematic and observers should also be alert to the possibility of North American vagrant Rough-legged Hawk *B. l. sanctijohannis*.

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

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

81: 13: 0

Table 10. Additional record of Red-footed Falcon in Scotland, 2007.

2007: **Perth & Kinross** Dalrawer, Aberfeldy, adult female, 30 May to 1 June, photo (A. Mcleod, J.S. Nadin *et al.*).

Red-footed Falcon is mainly a rare late-spring migrant to Scotland, with most sightings coming from Shetland, Orkney and North-east Scotland. Although it is not quite annual, since the late 1960s there has been at least one sighting every other year, with the exception of the three-year period 1986–88, when no birds were seen.

The 2007 sighting was unusual, being made at an inland location. This was only the second occurrence in Perth & Kinross, following the first at Kinloch Rannoch in 1947. The total for 2007 has been revised to three.

There have been no records since 2010, and the species remains much sought after in Scotland.

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

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
69: 62: 3

Table 11. Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2012.

- 2012: **Argyll** Gott Bay, Tiree, adult, 6–7 August, photo (J. Bowler, K. Gillon *et al.*).
Highland Brora, Sutherland, juvenile, 28–30 October, photo (D. MacAskill).
Lothian Tynninghame, adult, 1–4 August, photo (M.D. Hodgkin *et al.*).

White-rumped Sandpiper is a scarce, but annual, visitor to Scotland from North America, with most observations in autumn in the Hebrides.

The two observations on the east coast fit the broad pattern of mainland incidence, with these being the second record for Sutherland and the 15th for Lothian. The Tiree sighting was the fifth for Argyll, where all occurrences have been on Tiree or Islay.

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

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
12: 10: 1

Table 12. Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2012.

- 2012: **Outer Hebrides** Loch Sanndaraidh (Loch Sandary), North Uist, fourth-calendar-year, 22 March, photo (S.E. Duffield).

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



Plate 113. White-rumped Sandpiper, adult, Tynninghame, Lothian, 1–4 August, 2012. © Ian Andrews

consistent with its rarity. This was the second sighting in Outer Hebrides, and one of the five most northerly in Scotland. It is possible that sub-adults are being under-recorded, and SBRC encourages observers to look out for these and submit descriptions of potential candidates.

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

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

34: 3: 2

Table 13. Accepted records of Alpine Swift in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Lothian** Corstorphine Hill, Edinburgh, 17–18 August, photo (I. Moore *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Butt of Lewis, Lewis, 24–25 March, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).

Alpine Swift is a very rare visitor to Scotland, seen usually between mid-April and late July. Spring occurrences probably involve overshoots from breeding grounds on the Continent, while those in summer relate to wandering non-breeders. There are very few autumn records.

The Corstorphine Hill sighting, the fourth for Lothian and second for Edinburgh, is notable for its city centre location and for being observed on two consecutive days. The occurrence on Lewis (Outer Hebrides) was on the earliest date yet recorded in Scotland.

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

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* 0: 0: 1

Table 14. Accepted records of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Shetland** Scalloway, Mainland, juvenile, 15–19 October, photo (R.M. Fray *et al.*).



Plate 114. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, juvenile, Scalloway, Mainland, Shetland, 15–19 October 2012. © Jim Nicholson

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is an extremely rare bird in Scotland, with just one accepted record, on Shetland in October 2012.

This species was removed from the *Scottish List* in 2010, with the words: “Given its steep decline farther south in Britain, it seems unlikely to be reinstated in the foreseeable future” (McInerney 2011, ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012). So it is genuinely extraordinary that a sighting was made just two years later in Shetland (Fray 2013). However, it seems likely that this individual did not derive from the highly sedentary and declining British population (*D. m. comminutus*), but instead originated from northern Continental Europe. If so, the Scalloway bird would of the nominate subspecies *D. m. minor*, which would be the first occurrence for Scotland and the UK. The bird was well photographed, though not trapped, and the record is being assessed by BBRC/BOURC to establish its racial identity.

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

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

86: 11: 1

Table 15. Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2012.

2012: Orkney Redland Firth, Mainland, 24 May (S.J. Williams).

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland. Most occurrences involve juveniles seen in the Northern Isles in autumn. The Redland Firth bird is a typical spring record for this species.

(Nominate *senator* breeds from north-west Africa, Iberia, France and Belgium south to Turkey; *L. s. badius* on Mediterranean islands; and *L. s. niloticus* from Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

286: 52: 1

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



Plate 115. Woodlark, first-winter, Isle of Eigg, Lochaber, Highland, 27–28 October, 2012. © Bob McMillan

The single occurrence for 2012, on Fair Isle on 21 May, represents the lowest annual total since the mid-1960s. Almost 50% of sightings have been on Fair Isle (167), and this one was typical of the established pattern.

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

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

68 (1950–2004): 18: 2

Table 16. Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2012.

2012: Fair Isle Quoy & Auld Haa, 16 October to 5 November (T. Hyndman, J.W. Moss *et al.*).

Highland Isle of Eigg, Lochaber, first-winter, 27–28 October, photo (J. Chester *et al.*).

Shetland Skaw, Unst, 14 November 2011 to 16 January, photo, see McGowan *et al.* (2013).

Woodlark is a rare bird in Scotland, mostly found in late autumn and early winter in the Northern Isles. There has been one instance of attempted breeding, in Angus & Dundee in 1993 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The Isle of Eigg record is notable as the second observation at this location, with the first in 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012), despite this species being extremely rare along the west coast. The fact that it was a first-winter indicates that two individuals were involved and, as such, a remarkable coincidence, being found by the same observer.

There has only been one mainland occurrence since 2000, in Lothian in 2008.

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



Plates 116–117. Red-rumped Swallow, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, 25 May 2012. © Mike Pennington

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
40: 28: 6

Table 17. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Fair Isle** Utra, 22–24 May, photo (D. Back *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Cults, 14 May (I. Broadbent).
Orkney Mirbister, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 22 October (A. Forsyth).
Shetland Skaw, Unst, two, 25 May, photo (R. Brookes, I. Waddington *et al.*).
Upper Forth/Lothian Blackness, 3–4 November (B. & H. Darvill *et al.*).

Red-rumped Swallow is observed in Scotland annually in small but increasing numbers from April through to November, mainly along the east coast and on islands. This recent increase is thought to reflect a northward expansion of the Continental breeding range.

Observations in 2012 were typically scattered through eastern and northern Scotland. The occurrence at Blackness, however, was the first for Upper Forth. Sightings of multiple birds, such as the pair on Unst (Shetland), are very rare; two previous such events were in Lothian in 1987 and 1990.

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



Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
158: 30: 4

Table 18. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2012. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in the text.

2012: **Isle of May** two, 6–8th, then one 9–10 June, photo (M. Newell *et al.*).

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

Outwith the Northern Isles and North-east Scotland, the Isle of May is the only other area with double-figure reports of this species (15). Occurrences of two birds have only been reported twice before, in Orkney and in Shetland, both in 1988, a year that yielded the third highest annual total for Scotland (14).

There were two occurrences in the Northern Isles in 2012: in Orkney a single bird was observed on 14–15 August, and one was seen in Shetland on 23–24 September.

The dates reported for 2012 are typical of the consistently narrow spread of arrival dates in both spring and autumn.

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

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

46: 12: 2

Table 19. Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2012, with an additional record for 2010.

- 2012: Angus & Dundee** Lunan Bay, 18–21 October, photo (L. Berry, J. Cook *et al.*).
Fife Kilminning, 18–21 October, photo (K.J. Gibb, M.D. Hodgkin *et al.*).
2010: Fair Isle Quoy, 13–14 October, photo (R.J. Nason, D.N. Shaw *et al.*).

Radde's Warbler is a very rare late autumn visitor to Scotland, with the majority of occurrences in the Northern Isles, and the remainder along the east coast.

It is noteworthy that the only two sightings in Scotland during 2012 were on the mainland, and that both birds appeared on the same day in late October and departed four days later. The Fife bird was located near to an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*, with a Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* also being found at the same site, making a trio of rare warblers.

An additional record for 2010 brings the total for that year to five birds.

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



Plate 118. Subalpine Warbler, male, Mingulay, Outer Hebrides, 22 May 2012. © Adam Cross

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

60: 23: 2

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

The two seen in 2012 were both in Shetland, with one at Symbister, Whalsay on 12 October and the other at Sumburgh Farm, Mainland on 20 October.

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

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

194: 49: 5

Table 20. Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler (excluding the subspecies *albistriata*) in Scotland, 2012. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in the text, and include an additional record for 2011.

- 2012: Outer Hebrides** Mingulay, male, 22 May, photo (A. Cross, M. Wood).

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

There were two occurrences of *cantillans*, or unassigned individuals, in Shetland: one at Virkie, Mainland in May and another at Quendale, Mainland in May/June. In addition, there were two records of *albistriata*, both in May: one was on Tiree (Argyll), and the other on Fair Isle (Hudson *et al.* 2013). The Tiree sighting was the first for the recording area and, indeed, the first for south-west Scotland.

Also reported here is a late addition for 2011: a bird not assigned to race occurred at Swannay, Birsay (Orkney) on 19–24 April (J. Williams pers. comm.), increasing the total for that year to 11.

The BOURC's Taxonomic Sub-Committee is currently assessing some proposals on the taxonomy of Subalpine Warbler (BOU 2014). Currently, three subspecific taxa of Subalpine Warbler are known to have occurred in Scotland (Collinson *et al.* 2014).

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

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

53: 6: 2

Table 21. Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Argyll** Totronald, Isle of Coll, male, 8 June (I. Lycett *et al.*).
Isle of May 7–9 June, photo (M. Newell, J.J. Squire *et al.*).

Melodious Warbler is a very rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, recorded in most years but not all: for example, 2001, 2004, 2005 and 2009 were blank years. About three-quarters of occurrences have been in the Northern Isles, with almost identical totals for the three recording areas.

The occurrences for 2012 represent the first for Argyll and the seventh for the Isle of May. There have been only two other years in which Melodious Warbler has occurred *only* in recording areas outwith the Northern Isles; one was in 1997 in the Outer Hebrides, and the other was in 1913 when the first Scottish specimen was collected on the Isle of May (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The early June dates for the birds reported here are typical for spring Melodious Warblers. The Isle of May bird lingered for a few days, fitting the general pattern of recent years.

Last year's report included a late acceptance for Orkney in 1997. Due to an oversight, that record was omitted from the total, but this has now been adjusted to 53.

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

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

many: c. 209: 33

Table 22. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Angus & Dundee** Windyhills/Castlesea Bay, male, 27 May, photo (K. Edwards, G. Smith).
Argyll Carnan Mor, Tiree, male, 28 May, photo (J. Bowler).
Isle of May 22–25 May, trapped, photo (M. Martin, N. Morrison).
Isle of May 29 May to 2 June, trapped, photo (M. Oskien *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Collieston, male, 9 June, photo (P.S. Crockett *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Balmedie, male, 9 June (P.A.A. Baxter, C. Gibbins *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Mingulay, adult, 11 June, photo (A. Cross, M. Wood).

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

Sightings in 2012 conformed to typical date and localities; three were on the Scottish mainland.

Table 23. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2012.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	8	1	5 Jun–2 Jul	12 Sep
Orkney	6	1	30 May–30 Jun	5–6 Oct
Shetland	9	1	25 May–28 Jun	18 Sep

Numbers of Marsh Warblers recorded in the Northern Isles in 2012 (26) was almost double the total number observed in the previous two years (12 in 2010, and 15 in 2011). The



Plate 119. Marsh Warbler, adult, Mingulay, Outer Hebrides, 11 June 2012. © Adam Cross

fluctuating annual abundance of this species is related, for spring birds at least, to variation in the prevalence of easterly winds in late May and early June, which are presumed to cause birds to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Although most occurrences in 2012 involved birds that stayed for only one or two days, one bird was present from 30 May to 11 June on North Ronaldsay (Orkney).

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

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
139: 11: 2

Table 24. Accepted records of Nightingale in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Isle of May** 30 April to 1 May, photo (M.P. Harris, M. Newell *et al.*).

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

The bird on the Isle of May was the first there since 1996.

In the Northern Isles, claims are assessed locally. One late spring arrival was trapped on Fair Isle on 15 June.

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

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
86: 30: 2

Table 25. Accepted records of Water Pipit in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Fife** St Andrews, 9 February (A. Hogg *et al.*).
Lothian Barns Ness, 25 October 2011 until 30 March (E. Forbes *et al.*); ringed 6 March; same 20 October (K. Gillon, C. Scott) to end of year, see also McGowan *et al.* (2013).
Lothian Aberlady, 8 January, photo (K. Gillon).

Water Pipit is a rare winter visitor to Scotland, often found among seaweed on beaches with Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus*. Its seasonal distribution features a late-autumn arrival, overwintering by a few individuals, and a secondary peak in spring. The majority of sightings to the end of 2012 were in Ayrshire and Lothian.

One apparently overwintering bird was present at the beginning of 2012, having been first noted in late 2010. Details were published by McGowan *et al.* (2013), and are repeated here for 2012.

There were two new records in 2012, both early in the year. The St Andrews sighting was the fifth for Fife while the Aberlady bird maintained the recent run of observations in Lothian.

As from 1 January 2013, records of this species in Scotland will be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (see Appendix 2).

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* 366: 61: 30

Arctic Redpoll is a scarce though annual visitor to Scotland. Most sightings since 2005 have involved the race *C. h. hornemanni* (Hornemann's Redpoll), claims of which are assessed by BBRC, while many earlier occurrences referred to *C. h. exilipes* (Coues's Redpoll). All but five of the 61 birds during 2005–11 were in the Northern Isles, with the majority occurring in autumn. Claims of Coues's Redpoll in the Northern Isles are assessed locally.

In 2012, most Arctic Redpolls seen in Scotland were in the Northern Isles in autumn. A total of three were accepted as Coues's Redpoll (or unassigned to race), claims of which are assessed locally within those islands.

Table 26. Accepted records of Coues's Redpoll in the Northern Isles, 2012.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	-	14 Jul	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	2	-	19 Oct–9 Nov

In addition, BBRC accepted 27 records of Hornemann's Redpoll in Scotland (Hudson *et al.* 2013), all but two occurring in autumn. There was a single bird in Argyll, two in Fair Isle, four in Orkney, two in Outer Hebrides, and 18 in Shetland. This is the highest total for Scotland since 1996, when 85 were observed.

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

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* many: 33: 3

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

There were only three individuals in Scotland in 2012. One was present on Fair Isle from 9–10 May, one was North Ronaldsay (Orkney) from 20–24 August, and another was on Whalsay (Shetland) on 9–19 May. The May sightings were the first since 2009. The recent general trend of declining numbers appears to be continuing.

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

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* 276: 37: 3

Table 27. Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in Scotland, 2012.

2012: Outer Hebrides Mingulay, 30 May to 8 June, photo (A. Cross, M. Wood).

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

The sighting on Mingulay was the first occurrence in Scotland outwith the Northern Isles since 2007, and the first in Outer Hebrides since 2003.

Table 28. Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2012.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	1	-	23 May	-
Shetland	1	-	24–27 May	-

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

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

593: 112: 25

Table 29. Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2012, and an additional record for 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 30.

2012: North-east Scotland Collieston, 27 September (P.S. Crockett).

2011: Isle of May 1 October (J.J. Squire).

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

Occurrences in Scotland in 2012 correspond well to the established pattern; a single December sighting for a few days in Shetland was a notable exception to the majority of

autumn records. Just one was observed away from the Northern Isles; the Collieston (North-east Scotland) bird was only the third on the mainland since 2000.

Table 30. Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2012.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	6	-	24 Sep–28 Oct
Orkney	-	3	-	23 Sep–18 Oct
Shetland	-	15	-	26 Sep–10 Dec

A spring occurrence on Fair Isle in last year's report was included in error, but with the addition of the Isle of May occurrence mentioned above, the total for 2011 is unchanged.

(Breeds from northern Fennoscandia to eastern Siberia; winters from north-east India and Nepal to south-east Asia.)

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Appendix 1.

List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

- 2012: White-billed Diver North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 27 March. Loch a' Chroisg, Ross & Cromarty, Highland, 9 October. Great White Egret Wigtown Bay, Dumfries & Galloway, 14 June. Yellow-legged Gull Talmine, Sutherland, Highland, 3 March. Caspian Gull Luthrie, Fife, 12 April. Long-tailed Skua Add Estuary, Argyll, 27 August. Red-rumped Swallow Hirta, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 12 June. Marsh Warbler Loch Nahinie, Ayrshire, 19–20 June. Thortonloch, Lothian, 28 September. Red-throated Pipit Scourie, Sutherland, Highland, 15 May. Little Bunting Foveran, North-east Scotland, 28 September.
- 2011: Marsh Warbler Kineff, North-east Scotland, 5 November.
- 2009: Yellow-legged Gull Castle Loch, Dumfries & Galloway, 5 April.
- 2000: Caspian Gull/Yellow-legged Gull Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, 19–26 June.

Appendix 2.

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

2011	2012	2013	
■	■	■	Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>
■	■	■	Black Brant <i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>
■	■	■	Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>
■	■	■	White-billed Diver <i>Gavia adamsii</i>
■	■	■	Cory's Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
■	■	■	Great Shearwater <i>Puffinus gravis</i>
■	■	■	Wilson's Petrel <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
■	■	□	Continental Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>
■	■	■	Night-heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
■	■	■	Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
■	■	□	Great White Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>
■	■	■	Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>
■	■	■	Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
■	■	■	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>
■	■	■	Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>
■	■	□	Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>
■	■	■	Red-footed Falcon <i>Falco vespertinus</i>
■	■	■	Stone-curlew <i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
■	■	■	Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
■	■	■	White-rumped Sandpiper <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
■	■	■	Continental Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa limosa</i>
■	■	■	Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>
■	■	■	Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>

■	■	■	White-winged Black Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
■	■	■	Franz Josef Land Little Auk <i>Alle alle polaris</i>
■	■	■	Alpine Swift <i>Apus melba</i>
■	■	■	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
■	■	■	Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>
■	■	■	Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
■	■	■	Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>
■	■	■	Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>
■	■	■	Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>
■	■	■	Greenish Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
■	■	■	Radde's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>
■	■	■	Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
■	■	■	Dartford Warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>
■	■	■	Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i> (except <i>S. c. albistriata</i>)
■	■	■	Eastern Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans albistriata</i>
■	■	■	Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
■	■	■	Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i>
■	■	■	Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
■	■	■	Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
■	■	■	Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>
■	■	■	Olive-backed Pipit <i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
■	■	■	Red-throated Pipit <i>Anthus cervinus</i>
■	■	□	Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
■	■	■	Serín <i>Serinus serinus</i>
■	■	■	Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni</i> (except <i>C. h. hornemanni</i>)
■	■	■	Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni hornemanni</i>
□	■	■	Scottish Crossbill <i>Loxia scotica</i>
■	■	■	Parrot Crossbill <i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>
■	■	■	Cirl Bunting <i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
■	■	■	Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
■	■	■	Rustic Bunting <i>Emberiza rustica</i>
■	■	■	Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>

■ = BBRC ■ = SBRC ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC outside core range (see www.the-soc.org.uk/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills/) □ = local assessment

Appendix 3.

Corrections to previous SBRC reports:

2011: Purple Heron, Mountcastle Quarry, Fife, 10–18 April.

Arctic Redpoll, The Bell, Borders, also seen in neighbouring Lothian.

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Revised ms accepted April 2014



Plate 120. St Kilda with (left to right) Stac an Armin, Boreray and Stac Li, 19 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray

Gannet surveys in north-west Scotland in 2013

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

A photographic survey of the Gannet colonies off the north-west coast of Scotland in 2013 found 60,290 Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS) on St Kilda, 11,230 AOS on Sula Sgeir, 5,280 AOS on the Flannan Islands, 4,550 AOS on Sule Stack and 1,870 AOS on Sule Skerry. Since 2004, numbers had increased rapidly at Sule Skerry and the Flannan Islands (47.4% per annum (pa) and 7.5% pa respectively), but had changed little at Sule Stack and St Kilda. The harvested colony on Sula Sgeir increased by 2.2% pa, reversing the trend over the previous 10 years during which the population declined at 1.2% pa.

Introduction

North-west Scotland has colonies of Gannets *Morus bassanus* on St Kilda, the Flannan Islands, Sula Sgeir, Sule Stack, and Sule Skerry. In 2013, Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned an aerial photographic survey of the numbers of Gannets at these important but infrequently counted colonies. In addition, an up-to-date assessment was required to review the basis for the licensed taking of young Gannets (gugas) from the island of Sula Sgeir. The aim of the fieldwork was to achieve 100% photographic coverage of each of the five colonies in the region and from these make counts of Apparently Occupied Sites (AOS), to compare with counts made from similar images taken during the last Scottish Gannet survey in 2004 (Murray *et al.* 2006).

Methods

The surveys were flown back-to-back on 18–19 June 2013 (Figure 1). In addition to the pilot there was a principal photographer, a back-up photographer and a third observer who was responsible for transferring camera card images to a laptop computer, which enabled each colony to be quickly photographed several times and from different angles with each circuit of the aircraft; thus, maximum photographic coverage was obtained in the minimum time, thereby reducing potential disturbance to the colony. Eighty-five digital images suitable for detailed counting (c.4% of the total number taken) were subsequently selected for making counts. Together these gave 99% coverage of the five colonies. Missing areas on Boreray were photographed from the sea or land. All the images were then manipulated in Photoshop, to draw on section boundaries that had been used in previous surveys to subdivide the colonies (Murray & Wanless 1986, 1997, Wanless 1987). This ensured that repeat counts of the sections, by the same or different observers, were standardized with respect to sectional boundaries. As in previous surveys, the count unit used was the Apparently Occupied Site (AOS, defined as a site occupied by one or two Gannets, irrespective of whether nest material is present). Images were viewed on a computer screen using either Photoshop or Paint Shop Pro 7 software and each AOS was blocked out with a dot using the paintbrush option. Counts by each observer were initially made blind, i.e. without knowing past counts or counts made by the other counters, removing any chance of subconsciously counting high or low because of prior information.

For most colonies the main counter, S. Murray, made more than one count. Average sectional values for his counts were calculated before combining with values from one (or occasionally two) additional counters (S. Wanless and M. Harris), to give overall mean section values. These mean section values were then summed and rounded off to the nearest 10 to allow for computational errors, to give a mean colony total that was taken to be the best estimate of colony size in 2013.

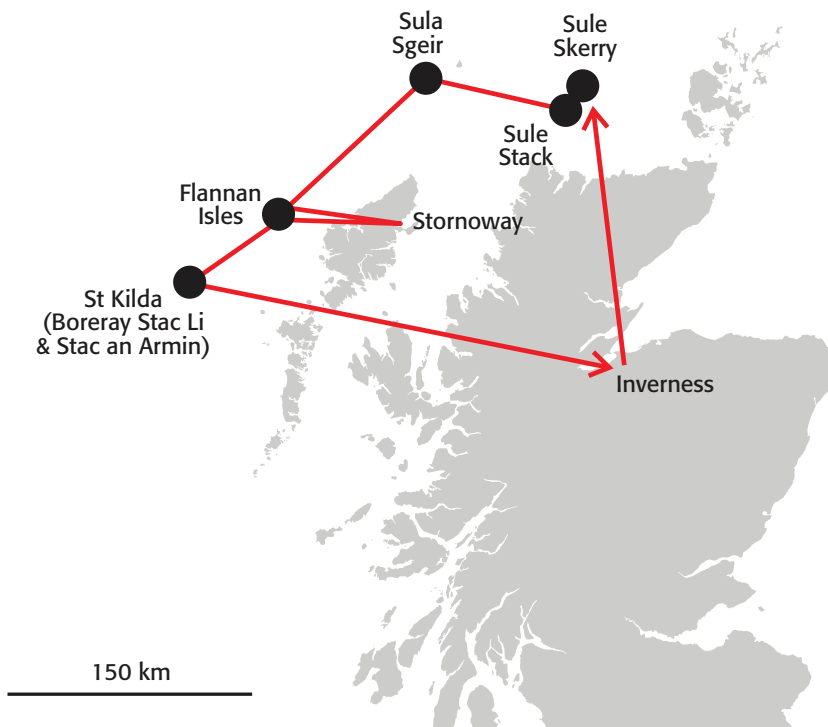


Figure 1. Locations of the five Scottish gannetries surveyed on 18 & 19 June 2013 and the flight routes between them.

Results

St Kilda (Boreray, Stac Li & Stac an Armin)

The St Kilda population is probably stable (Figure 2), with a few very small increases confirmed photographically on Boreray and Stac an Armin between 2004 and 2013, but not on Stac Li. Qualitative differences in the count photographs and observer variation between years are the most likely explanations for most count differences.

Boreray

There were 32,333 AOS in 2004 and 32,240 in 2013. Some small increases were identified in 2013, but overall there is no evidence for any major change in numbers or distribution since 2004 (Plate 121).



Plate 121. Boreray is the most challenging gannetry in the North Atlantic to survey, 19 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray

Stac Li

There has been an apparent increase from 13,369 AOS in 2004 to 14,990 in 2013, but it has not been possible to find photographic evidence for specific areas of expansion. However, small increases in density, distributed throughout the rock would be difficult to detect unless AOS appeared in areas historically unoccupied, such as the ground adjacent to the Gannet hunters' bothy (Plate 122).



Plate 122. Stac Li summit viewed from the south, showing the Gannet hunters' bothy (arrowed) with potential nesting space in front and above, 19 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray

Stac an Armin

There were 13,921 AOS in 2004 and 13,060 in 2013. Despite this apparent decrease there were identifiable increases in colony extent found on the East Face (Plate 123), continuing an expansion first noted in 1994.



Plate 123. Stac an Armin east face, west face of Boreray behind, 19 June 2013. © SNH/J. Harden

Sula Sgeir

The count in 2013 was 11,230 AOS, a 21.5% increase over the 9,225 in 2004. There has been a clear and identifiable increase on the summit ridge of the colony (Plate 124) and there would appear to be space for colony expansion, although overall the colony has remained within the limits first identified in 1985.

Flannan Islands

In 2013 there were 5,280 AOS compared with 2,760 in 2004. The colony had very large numbers of non-breeders present in 2013 and ample space to expand on Roareim (Plate 125).



Plate 124. East cliffs and summit ridge of Sula Sgeir, with the guga hunters' bothies visible top right, 18 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray



Plate 125. Flannan Islands, left to right, Eilean na Gobha, Brona Cleit and Roareim with sub-colonies, left to right, Sgeir an Eoin, Arch Stack, Main Stack and Roareim, 19 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray

Sule Stack

In 2013, there were 4,550 AOS, compared with 4,618 in 2004. There have been no changes in numbers or colony extent since at least 1994, which would suggest that the rock is fully occupied. However, unoccupied areas remain within the north-east, north-west and south sections of the rock (Plate 126).

Sule Skerry

In 2004, the colony consisted of only 55–60 AOS on the west side of Stack Geo (Blackburn & Budworth 2004), by 2013 this had increased to 1,330 AOS, with an additional 540 on the east side (Plate 127).



Plate 126. The centre rock and summit of Sule Stack from the east; the small, detached North Rock (right) has never held breeding birds, 18 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray



Plate 127. Sule Skerry, showing the fast-growing gannetry on each side of Stack Geo, 18 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray

Discussion

While numbers of Gannets at most British and Irish gannetries have increased in the long-term, strong density dependent effects have been apparent with rates of increase at large, long-established colonies markedly lower than those at smaller, more recently founded ones (Lewis *et al.* 2001, Davies *et al.* 2013). Accordingly, comparing the 2013 counts with those from 2004 indicated that numbers had increased rapidly at the two smallest colonies, Sule Skerry and the Flannan Islands (47.4% per annum (pa) and 7.5% pa respectively), but had changed little at the largest colony St Kilda (Table 1, Figure 1). Although the colony on Sule Stack is relatively small, the count in 2013 indicated little or no overall change in numbers. The medium-sized colony on Sula Sgeir increased by 2.2% pa, reversing the change over the previous 10 years when the population declined at 1.2% pa.

Table 1. Counts and rates of change of AOS at gannetries in NW Scotland, 2004–13.

Colony	2004	2013	Change (%)	Rate of change per annum (%)
St Kilda, Boreray	32,333	32,240	-0.3	0
St Kilda, Stac Li	13,369	14,990	+12.1	+1.3
St Kilda, Stac an Armin	13,921	13,060	-6.2	-0.7
St Kilda Total	59,622	60,290	+1.1	+0.1
Sula Sgeir	9,225	11,230	+21.5	+2.2
Flannans	2,760	5,280	+91.3	+7.5
Sule Stack	4,618	4,550	-1.5	-0.2
Sule Skerry	57	1,870	+3200	+47.4
Total	76,282	83,220	+9.1	+1.0

Setting the 2013 counts in a longer-term context further highlights the rapid increases in numbers at the Flannan Islands and Sule Skerry (Figure 3). Both of these sites appear to have plenty of unused, suitable nesting habitat for Gannets and thus have considerable potential for further expansion. The lack of change in numbers on Sule Stack is consistent with the situation over the last 80 years, with Gannets apparently occupying all the suitable breeding areas, so that the colony is probably at maximum capacity. It is possible that the recent colonisation and rapid increase of the colony on nearby Sule Skerry is partly due to the lack of space on Sule Stack.

St Kilda poses formidable counting problems (Plate 120) but it seems clear the population increased in the 20–40 years following the cessation of harvesting by the St Kildans in 1930. Since then numbers have been fairly stable (Figure 2), even though there would appear to be ample potential nesting habitat on Boreray and Stac an Armin.

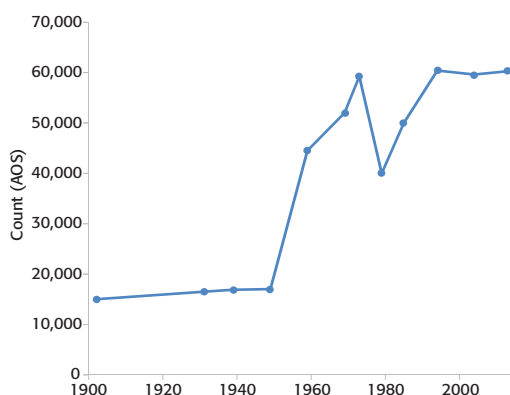


Figure 2. Counts of Gannets (AOS) on St Kilda, 1900 to 2013.

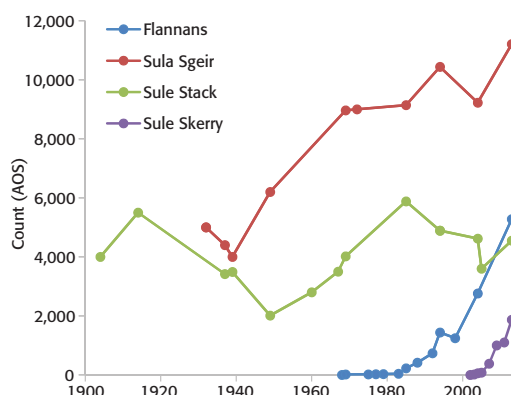


Figure 3. Counts of Gannets (AOS) on Sula Sgeir, Flannan Islands, Sule Stack and Sule Skerry, 1900 to 2013.



Plate 128. Sule Skerry with Sule Stack 10 km distant to the south-west, 18 June 2013. © SNH/S. Murray

Numbers of Gannets on Sula Sgeir have also been relatively stable, with some fluctuations, over the last 30 years (Figure 3). Here also there would appear to be some, although not extensive, unused breeding habitat, suggesting that the population may not be at maximum carrying capacity with respect to nest sites. The 2013 count indicated that numbers of AOS increased over the last nine years despite annual harvesting of young by the men of Ness. Given that the current harvesting license is for 2,000 well-grown chicks per year (equivalent to at least 17% of annual chick production), the capacity for Sula Sgeir to increase from its own production would appear to be relatively limited. However, the colony may be a sink population with recruits originating from St Kilda and Sule Stack fueling the increase.

Conclusions

The 2013 survey of the five north-west Scotland gannetries confirmed the importance of this region for Gannets, which held c.42% of the Scottish population at the time of the last national survey in 2004.

St Kilda remains the largest colony in the East Atlantic, although the Bass Rock, predicted to hold c.60,000 AOS around 2012, rivals St Kilda in size (Murray 2011). Conditions off north-west Scotland also seem favourable for the formation of new colonies with numbers at the newly colonized site on Sule Skerry increasing rapidly and an embryonic colony first recorded on Barra Head (Outer Hebrides) in 2007 (Miranda Forrest pers. comm.). Gannets are also periodically recorded breeding on Rockall, although it seems unlikely that a colony could be established here, given that in stormy conditions waves break right over the rock (Murray *et al.* 2014).

Given that the pace and magnitude of environmental change is likely to increase in Scottish waters over the next decade e.g. as a result of the imminent ban on fishery discards and the development of major offshore renewable energy schemes, maintaining the time series of Gannet counts will be essential for assessing any impacts on this species.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to our pilot David Rutter whose skill and enthusiasm made the aerial surveys both possible and successful and also to Jill Harden for high-quality photographic support, despite being in the nausea-inducing back seat. We are grateful to Paul Sharman, the National Trust for Scotland's ranger on St Kilda and Stornoway Coastguard for local weather reports, Scottish Natural Heritage for funding and Andy Douse for support and comments on the manuscript.

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Revised ms accepted February 2014



Plate 129. Hen Harrier, Langholm, Dumfries & Galloway, June 2010. © Laurie Campbell

Hen Harriers on Skye, 2000–12: nest failures and predation

R.L. McMillan

Hen Harrier nesting success was studied on Skye from 2000 to 2012, during which period there were 88 breeding attempts, 47 of which resulted in nest failures, with predation the most likely cause. To obtain more accurate information on predation at Hen Harrier nests, four cameras were used at nests between 2009 and 2012. Evidence from these cameras and post-mortem examinations showed that predation by Red Foxes was the commonest cause of nest failure, 65% of failures being attributed to foxes. In 75% of cases predation took place after dark. Foxes killed two incubating adult females on the nest. Foxes mainly preyed young from two to four weeks old, but as recently fledged young return to the nest site to roost, they are also at risk. As fledglings increased in size, nest sites became more detectable by foxes. In the absence of nest camera evidence, it was often impossible to attribute a cause of failure, as no conclusive evidence was left at the nest site. In one instance, foxes visited nest sites over a period of up to 10 days until all the young were removed. At another site an adult fox brought cubs to a nest when small young were removed. There was little evidence that adult Hen Harriers can successfully defend their young against an incursion by a fox either in daylight or darkness.

Introduction

The Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* is a Scottish Biodiversity List Species and meets criterion 3a of the Species Action Framework as a threatened species which is a focus of conflicts of interest with stakeholders with other objectives notably game management. It is included in the statutory list of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The Hen Harrier Conservation Framework (Fielding *et al.* 2011) considered eight factors potentially affecting their distribution. Constraints ranged from grazing pressure which might reduce the heathery habitat important for prey species, to wind farms. Illegal persecution was a significant constraint in some areas, whilst in others, shortage of prey and suitable nesting habitat were identified. Predation by mammals such as foxes, and avian predators such as crows, was identified as a possible constraint on breeding success.

Hen Harriers have been studied on Skye, Highland, since 2000 where breeding sites have mainly been associated with forestry plantations. Although persecution is a significant problem in some parts of the UK, during the course of this Skye study, there was only one known instance of human interference. This paper concentrates on nest failure rates and predation by Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. Unlike other islands in the Hebrides, the fox is well distributed on Skye (Scott 2011).

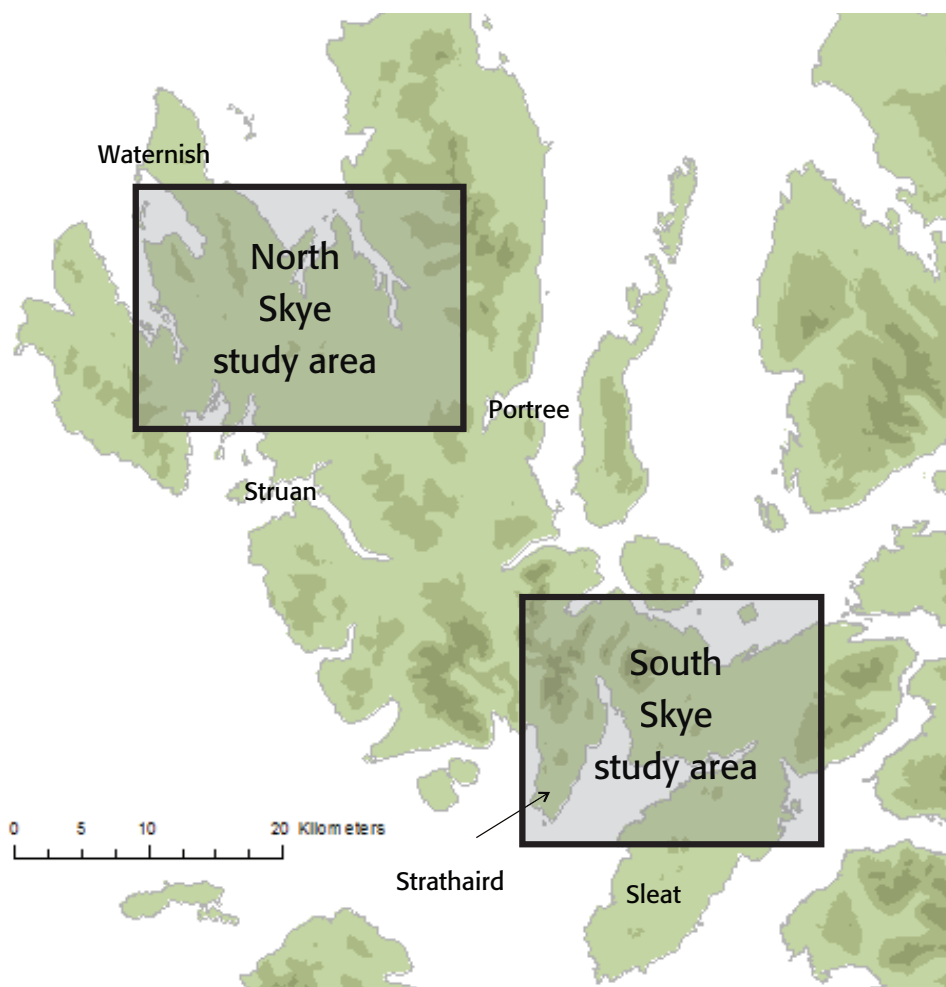


Figure 1. The Hen Harrier study areas on Skye, 2000–12.

Study area

When the study commenced in 2000 all the known breeding sites were located in the Sleat and Strathaird areas of south Skye, but the last of these was successful in 2004. Harriers were also known to nest in north-central Skye and from 2005 a study area evolved, eventually extending to 15,000 ha, lying north of the B885 Portree-Struan road and extending to Watemish. As in the south, the North Skye study area was associated with forestry plantations and moorlands immediately adjacent. Both study areas are shown in Figure 1.

Methods

Fieldwork was conducted under licence issued by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and followed current 'best practice' guidelines (Hardey *et al.* 2009), which recommend a minimum of four visits to territories to check site occupancy, to locate nests early in incubation, to check for young, and to check for fledged young.

Green & Etheridge (1999) acknowledged the high risk of predation to this ground nesting species and emphasised the importance of observing and counting young in flight before determining fledging success. Hardey *et al.* (2009), Whitfield & Fielding (2009) and Baines & Richardson (2013) all provide examples of evidence found at nest sites which could allow causes of failure to be determined. Attributing causes of failure can be extremely challenging, and not all types of evidence found can be described as conclusive. A thorough search of nest surrounds was carried out for evidential traces when a nest failure was discovered. However, with many nest failures there was no conclusive evidence of causal factors.

In 2008, a successful grant application was made to SNH for nest site cameras in respect of an action "which improves, protects and manages native species and habitats". Four nest site cameras were purchased from the RSPB Technical Department. Nigel Butcher of the RSPB provided training and support; for further information on the technology see Bolton *et al.* (2007). Nest site cameras were used at selected sites between 2009 and 2012.



Results

2005–08

Hen Harriers had been monitored on Skye for nine years from 2000 to 2008. The mean failure rate of nests was 51% (Table 1). Looking exclusively at the North Skye data from 2005 to 2008, the failure rate was higher at 62%. The percentage failure rate peaked at 80% in 2006, when from the five pairs which laid eggs, 22 young hatched. Two broods failed at less than two weeks and another two failed at greater than two weeks, the latter suspected by fox predation, and only two young fledged. Failure rates in the next two years remained high and there was growing concern that predation by foxes was the main cause of failure (see Plate 130). However, the evidence was weak, as it was often impossible to attribute causes.

Plate 130. Evidence of Red Fox predation of Hen Harrier chick, with bitten and chewed feathers in quill, Skye, August 2008. © R. McMillan

Table 1. Summary of Hen Harrier breeding success, all Skye, 2000–08.

Year	Active territories	Nests	Mean clutch size	Total young hatched	Total young fledged	Mean fledged per nest	Failed with eggs	Failed with young	Total nests failed	Cause of failure
2000	4	4	3.7	12	11	2.75	0	1	1	Predator
2001	3	3	3.7	5	5	1.66	1	0	1	Unknown
2002	5	3	2	2	2	0.66	1	1	2	Predator Unknown
2003	8	7	?	?	8	1.12	3	1	4	Predator Unknown
2004	8	8	?	?	20	2.5	2	0	2	Unknown
2005	10	9	5.4	21	16	1.8	1	2	3	Predator Unknown
2006	8	5	5.4	22	2	0.40	0	4	4	Weather Predator
2007	11	9	4.7	42	10	1.1	0	6	6	Predator
2008	11	10	4	28	8	0.8	1	6	7	Predator

Hardey *et al.* (2009) suggest that predation risk increases as young increase in size. If a predator has taken large young, evidence may include bitten off feather quills and trails of down feathers. They also conclude that there may be no signs to indicate small young are taken. In their study in Wales, Whitfield & Fielding (2009) suggested that partially eaten remains or ‘chewed’ feathers of the incubating female and/or nestlings were assumed to be evidence of predation by a mammal (Figure 2). Whitfield & Fielding had also asked observers to record corroborative evidence of the predator involved such as faeces, hair, feathers or distinctive scent. In the Langholm study, Dumfries & Galloway (Baines & Richardson 2013), a number of criteria were applied to assign causes of failure. In the Skye study, the only evidence found by the author was bitten and chewed feathers (Figure 1), or dead young or adults. In the majority of failures, and despite intensive searches in the vicinity of nests, there was no evidence of predation, which led to the decision to install digital nest-site cameras.

2009–12

The data shown in Table 2 from 2009 to 2012 were drawn exclusively from the North Skye study area. Camera evidence was available for several nests each year, and this was supported by other evidence such as chewed feathers and post mortem results. Over the four-year study, cameras were installed at 61% of nests. During the four year period the overall nest failure rate was 57% and based largely, but not exclusively, on camera evidence, 65% of failures could be attributed to foxes.

A total of eight camera activations resulted from fox intrusions, two when the young were less than two weeks old, and six when the young were more than two weeks old. After 2009, cameras were installed only on nests with young as this was considered to be the most vulnerable stage. However, a female incubating eggs was killed by a fox in 2010, confirming that nests with eggs,

Table 2. Summary of Hen Harrier breeding success, North Skye study area, 2009–12.

Year	Active territories	Nests	Mean clutch size	Total young hatched	Total young fledged	Mean fledged per nest	Failed with eggs	Failed with young	Total nests failed	Cause of failure
2009	7	6	5.6	16	9	1.5	2	2	4	Fox 2 Unknown 2
2010	12	10	5.4	36	10	1.0	1	6	7	Fox 6 Unknown 1
2011	12	9	5.25	25	15	1.6	0	3*	3	Fox 1 Unknown 2
2012	5	5	5.00	19	8	1.6	1	2	3	Fox 2 Unknown 1

*though ‘RB3’ was predated by a fox and two young killed, a single young fledged, so the site is regarded as successful.

as well as brooding adults, can be vulnerable to foxes. In 2011, a nest was deemed to be 'successful' as a single young fledged despite its two siblings being killed by a fox on camera. Of the eight recorded predations on camera, only four (50%), had other evidence to indicate that a fox event had taken place. There was no evidence during the study of nests being visited by any other mammalian or avian predators. In 2012, a single nest failed late in incubation and though predation by a corvid could have been a factor, this could not be proved. Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix* were frequent nesting neighbours. Plate 131 provides examples of the camera evidence.



Plate 131. Intrusion of Hen Harrier nest by Red Fox, RBT site, Skye, 23 July 2010. (a) The initial intrusion at 02:24, then (b–c) fox returning at 21:28 to uplift the final dead youngster, which it had concealed. © R. McMillan

Predation of incubating adults

In 2010, an empty nest was located on 16 May with an adult female dead beside it (Plates 132–133). As this female was in moult, it was thought that it had been incubating a clutch of eggs and that these were subsequently removed by the fox.



Plate 132. Dead female Hen Harrier at the nest, Skye, May 2010. © R. McMillan **Plate 133 (Inset).** Same dead female Hen Harrier as Plate 4 (Skye, May 2010) at the time of the post-mortem, with a fox skull and canines superimposed on the puncture marks. © A.M. Wood

The carcass was examined by A.M. Wood, an avian specialist at the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency, Lasswade, Midlothian. The pattern of injuries found, with fairly symmetrical distribution of puncture wounds on both sides just behind the wings/axillae, together with the often paired puncture wounds in the skin and underlying muscles, suggested the bird had been killed by a fox. In the case of this territory, the male was then successful in attracting another female, which laid four eggs in a new nest some 200 m further west. Although four young subsequently hatched, the nest was predated by a fox on camera (see Plate 131).

On 2 June 2011, a nest containing six small young was found and a camera was installed (RB4 in Table 3). On 10 June, the nest was found to have been predated and the female was dead beside the nest. All the small young had been removed. Again the carcass was examined by Mr. Wood. The appearance was consistent with fox predation though maggot activity had enlarged some of the wounds. The bites on the neck indicated an experienced animal rather than a cub.

In each case, the dead female was left beside the nest. Because the carcasses were discovered and removed soon after the event, it is possible that a fox would have returned to uplift a carcass as food.

Table 3. Evidence of Hen Harrier breeding success from nest site cameras, Skye, 2009–12.

Year	Nest code	Date camera installed	Result	Remarks
2009	CH1	29 May on 6 eggs	Failed on eggs	Female deserted 6 June (lack of provisioning)
	RB1	29 May on 5 eggs	Fledged 4 young	
	RB2	4 June on 3 yg & 2 eggs	Fledged 5 young	
	GR1	4 June on 5 eggs	Fox predation 4 June @ 23:15	All 5 young killed
2010	RBL	14 June on 5 young	Fox predation 28 June @ 21:31	All 3 remaining young killed
	RBU	14 June on 3 yg & 3eggs	Fox predation 1 July @ 19:30	All 3 young killed, cubs brought to nest
	FB	18 June on 6 young	Fox predation (other information)	Camera malfunction, but all young killed
	CH1	18 June on 4 young	Fledged 3 young	
	GR1	25 June on 4 young	Fledged 4 young	
	RBT	12 July on 3 yg & 1 egg	Fox predation 23 July @ 02:20	All 4 young killed
2011	RB4	2 June on 6 young	Fox predation 4/5 June	Incubating ♀ & 6 young killed (infra-red failure)
	RB1	10 June on 4 young	Fledged 4 young	
	CH1	10 June on 4 young	Fledged 3 young	
	UIG	14 June on 4 young	Fledged 3 young	
	RB3	29 June on 3 young	Fox predation 13 July @ 02:00	Killed 2 young, but 1 on wing & fledged
2012	RB3	17.6 on 5 young	Fledged 3 young	Probably natural brood depletion
	RB5	12.6 on 5 young	Fox predation 2.7 @23:30	All 4 young killed
	CH1	12.6 on 5 young	Fledged 5 young	
	CH2	12.6 on 4 young	Fox predation 22.6 @ 01:00	2 young killed & ♀ defended nest but fox returned 10 days later & killed remaining 2 young

Discussion

Nest sites with cameras were visited more regularly than other sites. There is a view that foxes may have been attracted to these nests by human scent and trampling of vegetation. The introduction of larger batteries reduced the frequency of visits from every 5 or 6 days to every 7 or 8 days. As far as is practicable, walk-in approaches to sites were varied. Cameras were used at 19 nest sites during the study and 52% of these nests were successful. Prior to the camera study, between 2005 and 2008, of 31 nests which hatched young, only 14 nests were successful (45%). There was therefore no evidence to suggest that the installation of cameras increased the failure rate or predation risk.

In Galloway, Watson (1977) provided some evidence of fox predation. He also discussed nest failures, but attributed this to crows rather than foxes and suggested that successful nesting had occurred in areas where foxes are plentiful. In later years in Watson's study area, fox predation became an increasingly important factor and may well have been implicated to some extent in the extinction of forest-breeding Hen Harriers in Galloway by the mid-1990s (C.J. Rollie pers. comm.).

Simmons (2000) suggests that ground-nesting harrier species are susceptible to ground predators, with between 9% and 52% of all nests in a sample drawn from seven harrier species, destroyed by predators. He quotes a figure of 18% in a sample of 480 Hen Harrier nests from Picozzi (1984) in a study in Orkney, where there are no foxes, although there are ground-nesting crows on the moorlands.

Green & Etheridge (1999) examined Hen Harrier breeding success in relation to grouse moors and the Red Fox, but their data found no clear evidence for a beneficial effect of the control of foxes and other predators by moorland gamekeepers, on Hen Harrier nest success. Redpath & Thirgood (1997) provide some background to the long established study at Langholm. When fox and crow control ceased on the grouse moor in 2000, it was suggested that higher numbers of generalist predators impacted on other ground nesting birds including the Hen Harrier. (Baines *et al.* 2008). A later paper (Baines & Richardson 2013) provided a breakdown of nest failure rates and causal factors in the times when Langholm Moor was kept and 'unkept', attributing predation by foxes as the main cause of harrier breeding failure.

In Hen Harrier population studies in Wales, Whitfield & Fielding (2009) found that of 86 failed breeding attempts where a cause of failure was attributed, 20 nest losses were due to fox. O'Donoghue (2012) found that predation was a significant issue in Ireland, with 19% of nests lost to predators including foxes. Fielding *et al.* (2011) referred to previous work (Watson) which suggested that variation in the aggressiveness with which harriers defend their nests may affect the susceptibility of eggs and chicks to predation, as may the attentiveness of the parent birds, which may be influenced by the availability of prey (Amar & Burthe 2001). In the Skye study, there was no evidence that either of these factors makes any difference. The aggressiveness and



Plate 134. Hen Harrier, Langholm, Dumfries & Galloway, June 2010. © Laurie Campbell

attentiveness of adult females may be a factor during daylight hours, but in the camera study, six of the eight nest site intrusions by foxes occurred during the hours of darkness. In 2012, a female harrier aggressively defended her nest to a fox intrusion during darkness but lost two chicks initially, and the remaining two in the brood, two weeks later. Although not all harriers flee when a fox intrusion occurs, evidence from this study suggests they offer little resistance to a persistent fox attack and may well be at risk themselves. Though all the young may not be taken initially, they will invariably be killed eventually. Of the two intrusions which occurred during daylight hours, in one instance two live young were left in the nest until the fox returned with cubs two hours later to remove them. The camera images failed to show any resistance by the adult birds. In 2005, a webcam at a nest site at Clyde Muirshiel Park recorded the systematic reduction of a brood of five young Hen Harriers to a single chick, which successfully repelled the fox (C.J. Rollie pers. comm.). No chick on Skye has been recorded successfully repelling a fox.

The long-established practice of claiming birds have fledged at the point of ringing or when the young are fully feathered may be unreliable, but remains part of guidance (Hardey *et al.* 2009). In 50% of the camera activations in this study, there was no other evidence to suggest that there had been a fox intrusion at the nest, in other words there had been a 'clean lift' by foxes at the nest. There is a risk that failures could be attributed to other causes. It might therefore be useful to include 'nest failure rates' as well as fledging rates, as indicators of the health of Hen Harrier breeding populations. In areas not managed for Red Grouse, high failure rates at the chick stage may well indicate a problem of fox predation.

Nest site cameras were deployed as part of the Langholm project between 2008 and 2013 on a total of 11 nests, two of which failed, but with no evidence of fox intrusions. However, there had been intensive control of foxes during this period (A. McCluskie pers. comm.). Whilst it might be argued that foxes will be intensively controlled on all sporting estates, recent analysis of data from Atholl Estates in Perthshire (McMillan 2011, pers. obs.) shows that 'predator' control on some grouse moors can be highly variable and directly relates to the efficiency/commitment of individual gamekeepers. The possibility that Hen Harrier nests will be predated by foxes on some grouse moors cannot be excluded, and in the context of Langholm, it appears that in 1999, when grouse moor management was still in place, there was a sudden occurrence of four nest failures attributed to foxes, in addition to which, two adults were killed on nests (Baines & Richardson 2013). There had been no fox events in the preceding six years of the study. In the subsequent 'unkept' phase of the study 2000–07 there was an average of a single identified fox event each year. At Langholm, 1993–2007, there were a total of 130 breeding attempts from which there were 41 nest failures and 56% of these occurred when the birds were on eggs. In the Skye study, 2000–12, there were 88 breeding attempts with a total of 47 failures, 28% of which were on eggs. The contrast between the two datasets is interesting. The general view amongst raptor workers is that most fox intrusions occur when broods are at the later stage of development and that is supported by results from the Skye study. This is not to say that fox predation did not occur at Langholm, but human disturbance, deliberate or otherwise, may have been a factor given the disproportionate number of failures on eggs.

Whilst Fielding *et al.* (2011) acknowledge that foxes can be important predators they were not included as a predictor in the harrier distribution model. They also concluded that fox impact seems to be largely on harrier productivity rather than distribution, supported by observations by P. Haworth in Kintyre, where breeding harriers and foxes appeared to be abundant. However, these observations are at odds with studies of two areas of Mid-Argyll and north Kintyre, where breeding birds have disappeared and this has been attributed to a large proportion of failures due to predation, possibly by foxes (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2007). J. Halliday (pers. comm. 2013) has updated these data showing that four territories in Kintyre occupied in 1997–2008, were abandoned and this he attributed to a high incidence of failure due to predation, with foxes the most likely predator. Also

in Argyll at the Moine Mhor NNR, J. Halliday reported that up to three pairs had bred between 1989 and 1996 when the territories were abandoned. Although birds returned in 2010 and 2011, there were further failures and J. Halliday suspected that high rates of predation, probably by foxes, and lack of recruitment to the population also explained the demise of this population. In a study in Cowal, Argyll, from a population of eight pairs in 2003, only a single pair bred successfully in 2013 and fox predation is considered to be a factor in the population decline (A. French pers. comm.). During the course of this study, breeding pairs disappeared from south Skye with the exception of 2011, when a pair returned after a 10-year gap, but failed.

Madders (2010) noted that the extent of first rotation forestry was in decline in the west of Scotland and predicted that the loss of this habitat would lead to a reduction in numbers of harriers breeding. New *et al.* (2011) modelled the population dynamics at Langholm. In afforested areas, as the canopy closes and small mammals reduce in numbers, New *et al.* suggest that in the long term the population size could not be maintained as there would not be enough young harriers to replace the older birds lost to the population. However, in the context of the Skye study, whilst there have been some population fluctuations, clutch and initial brood size has remained high, suggesting that lack of food has not been a factor. The difficulty has been brood survival and nest failures as a result of fox predation. In the context of the 'New' model, with fewer young birds fledging, or occasional breeding adults predated by foxes, the problem of recruitment to the breeding population would be exacerbated. Evidence from Skye, and a number of other areas, suggests that successive failures as a result of predation may contribute to the abandonment of territories, making populations less viable, and in some regions directly impacting on distribution.

Digital nest site cameras have proved to be an extremely useful research tool and the images, along with other material found at nest sites, provides compelling evidence that fox predation of Hen Harrier nests on Skye is considerably higher than that apparently recorded in any other area of the UK or Ireland. The technology would seem critical for any future research into establishing causes of nest failure or brood depletion.

Hayhow *et al.* (2013) reported that the breeding population of Hen Harriers in the UK and Isle of Man declined between 2004 and 2010. They concluded that a 20% decrease in Scotland may be related to habitat change and illegal persecution. It appears that further declines occurred in 2012 which has prompted SNH to commission additional work on the Hen Harrier Conservation Framework (SNH 2013). In the Skye study, only three nests were found in 2013, the lowest number recorded since the study commenced.

Problems of human persecution remain a priority for the conservation of this species. However, it cannot be the exclusive focus when there are clearly other problems in forests and moorlands not managed for other sporting interests. The challenges facing Hen Harriers are complex, but when high nest failure rates occur there is a need for a detailed interpretation of causal factors.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Ken Crane and Kate Nellist for detailed observations in the study area. Scottish Woodlands, Forestry Commission Scotland and J. Robin Dixon provided unrestricted access to the study area. Access to windfarm roads at Ben Aketil and Edinbane was extremely helpful. The ongoing monitoring study has been part-funded by Haworth Conservation Ltd. and Ben Aketil Wind Energy Co. The nest site camera study has been grant-aided by Scottish Natural Heritage, supported by Atmos Consulting and Haworth Conservation Ltd. Mr A.M. Wood of VLA Lasswade carried out post mortem examinations of dead adult birds and young. The images are by the author and Mr. A.M. Wood. I am grateful to other harrier enthusiasts for many useful discussions. Nigel Butcher of RSPB has provided ongoing help and technical support. Paul Haworth and an anonymous referee have provided helpful comments on early drafts of this paper.

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Revised ms accepted February 2014



Plate 135. Hawfinch (one of a pair), Crichton campus, Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, March 2010. @ Brian D. Henderson

The status of the Hawfinch in Dumfries and Galloway, 1832–2013

B.D. Henderson

The Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* first bred in Dumfriesshire during the first decade of the 20th century (Gladstone 1910). The purpose of this short paper is to evaluate and document recent changes in status of the Hawfinch in Dumfries and Galloway.

Methods

An extensive literature search was undertaken for records of Hawfinch in Dumfries and Galloway. Sources included the *Transactions and Journal of Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* (1878 to present), *Annals of Scottish Natural History* (1892–1911), *Birds of Dumfriesshire* (Gladstone 1910), *Scottish Naturalist* (1912–22), *Scottish Birds* (1958–present), local county ornithological bulletins and reports (1962–77) and *Dumfries and Galloway Bird Reports* (1985 to present). Unpublished records were sought from local and visiting ornithologists and naturalists including those no longer living in the county. The handwritten and typescript notes of J.G. Gordon (early 20th century) and A.D. Watson (late 20th century) were consulted.

Results

Fifty-three records were found for the period 1832 to 1959, of which 14 were pre-1900. Thirty-one were from Dumfriesshire. The earliest reference is to a specimen preserved in Monreith House, Wigtownshire dated 1832, which Sir Herbert Maxwell is certain must have been obtained locally (Gordon c.1930). Sir William Jardine (1839) writing of the distribution of the Hawfinch in Great

Britain stated that 'In the north it is a straggler, but has been killed and seen in the counties of Durham and Cumberland, reaching across the border to Dumfriesshire'. The Hawfinch is not mentioned in either of the *Statistical Accounts*, nor does Gray (1869) mention it as occurring in Wigtonshire. Later, however, in 1871, Gray writes, 'Mr. George Kirkpatrick has informed me that a Hawfinch was shot near Newton Stewart in Wigtonshire in January, 1871. Service (1908) wrote 'As a Galloway species the Hawfinch has long had a place, but the records are few and far between' and mentions six Hawfinch records for the period 1868–1908. Gladstone (1910, 1924, 1930) details 29 Hawfinch records for the period 1862–1927. Eighteen Hawfinch records are mentioned in various volumes of the *Transactions and Journal of Proceedings of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society* (1878–1930). Ninety-three records were found for the period 1960 to 2013, of which 46 were from Kirkcudbrightshire.

Hawfinches have been recorded at 64 locations in Dumfries and Galloway, namely within the broad-leafed riparian valleys of the Annan, Nith and Ken-Dee systems, of which 40 were only single sightings (Figure 1). Seventy-four records (51%) were from Dumfriesshire.

Birds were recorded in 30 10-km squares, six of which accounted for 60% of total records (Table 1).

Table 1. 10-km squares with more than five Hawfinch records showing number of records and main sites within each 10-km square in Dumfries and Galloway 1832–2013.

10-km square	Number of records	Main locations
NX89	34	Thornhill, Carronbridge, Drumlanrig
NX97	14	Dalskairth, Crichton, Dumfries/Lincluden/Troqueer
NX65	11	Cally Estate, Gatehouse of Fleet
NX46	9	Newton Stewart, Knockman Wood
NX66	7	Laurieston, Hensol/Orchard Wood
NX98	7	Hollywood, Auldgirth

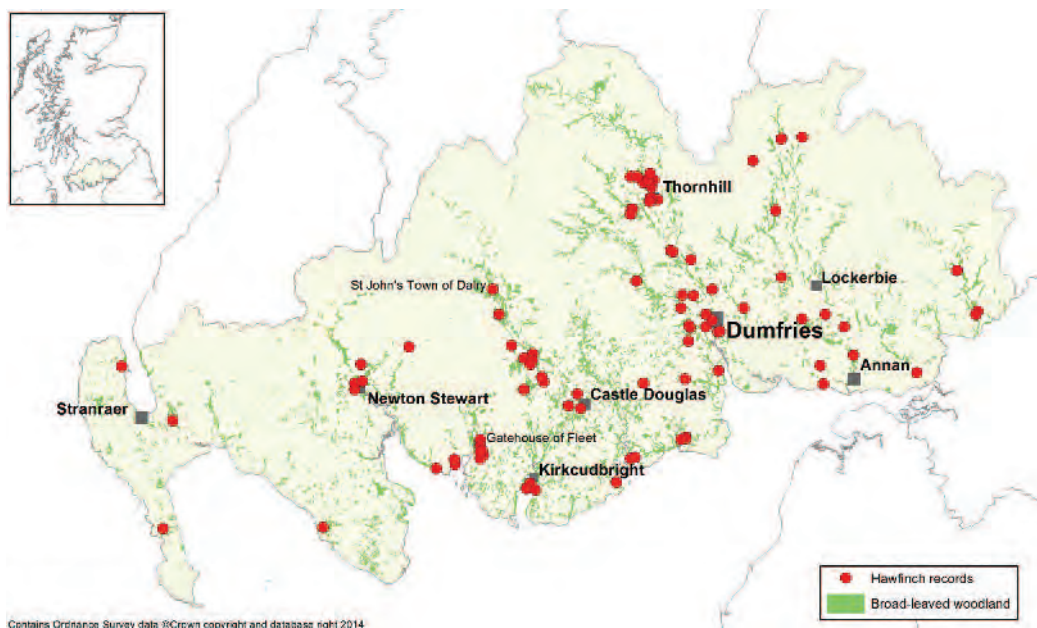


Figure 1. Distribution of Hawfinch in Dumfries & Galloway, 1832–2013.

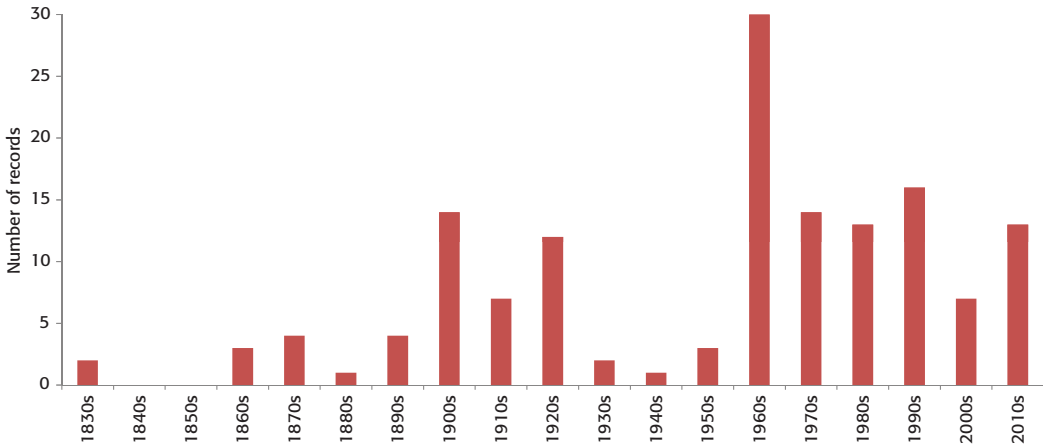


Figure 2. Records of Hawfinch in Dumfries & Galloway, 1832–2013.

Numbers recorded have shown marked fluctuations with peaks in the early years of the 20th century and post-1960 (Figure 2).

Seasonal Occurrence

Seasonal occurrences of Hawfinch in Dumfries and Galloway show a distinct peak in spring (Figure 3). Forty-two percent of all recent sightings occurred from 21 March to 31 May. Since 1990, around half of records occurred during April and May. No September records were noted.

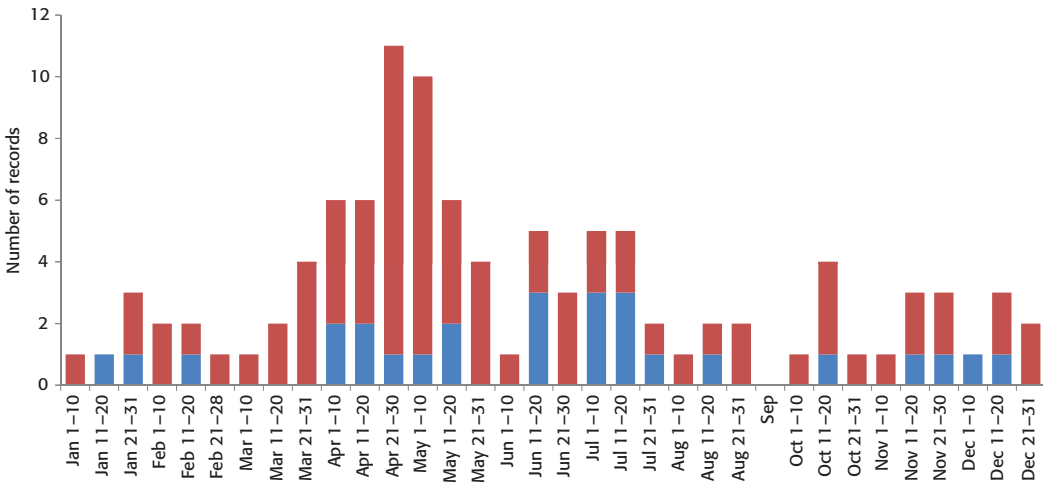


Figure 3. Seasonal occurrence of Hawfinch in Dumfries & Galloway 1832–2013. The historical period (1832–1959) is shown blue and the recent period (1960–2013) shown red. Histogram shows records per 10-day periods; records where only the month is known are plotted mid-month.

Flocks of Hawfinches have rarely been recorded in Dumfries and Galloway. With the exception of two June records in 1994 (eight birds) and 2011 (10 birds) all other flocks were observed between November and April. Largest flock size consisted of 25 birds observed during the winter of 1909/10. Four instances involving double-figure flocks have occurred since 1989.

Since breeding was first confirmed in 1906, the Hawfinch gradually expanded its breeding range westwards in Dumfries and Galloway (Figure 4). All breeding records relate to solitary pairs.

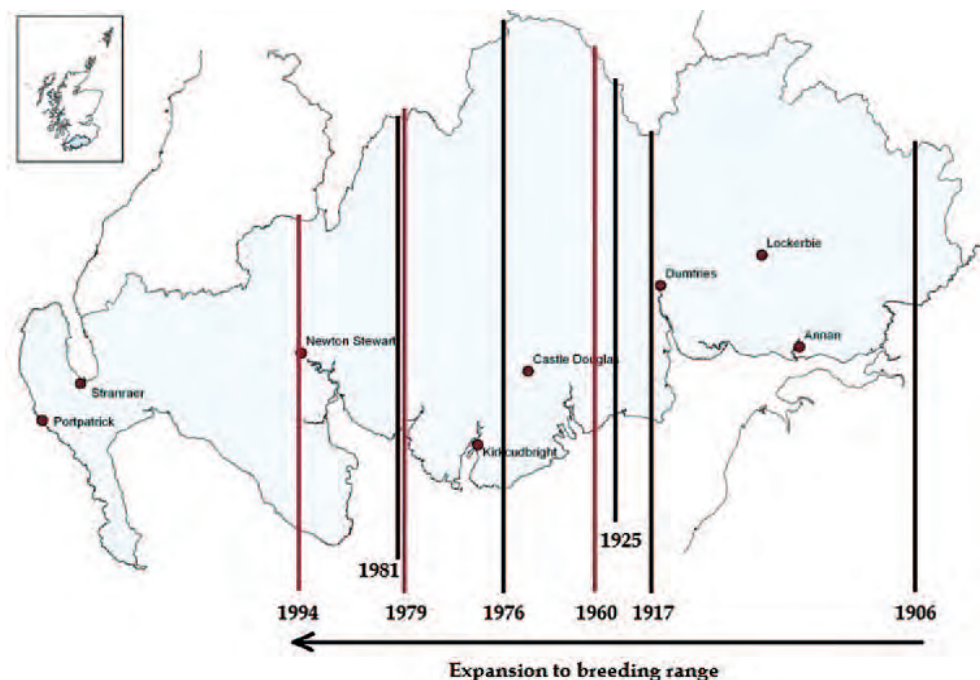


Figure 4. Westward expansion to breeding range of Hawfinch in Dumfries and Galloway 1906–94. The vertical lines are for illustrative purposes only i.e. showing longitudinal positioning of confirmed breeding (black) and suspected breeding (red) locations for dated years.

Sixteen confirmed breeding records occurred from 1906–2012 including a double brood during 1927. Two occurred during the 1980s. Following a further 26 years, the most recent breeding account took place during 2012 when a family group consisting two adults and three juveniles were observed (A. McFadyen pers. comm.). Six suspected/presumed breeding records also occurred between 1960 and 1996.

Discussion

The Hawfinch underwent a rapid range expansion from the mid-19th to the early 20th century culminating in the colonisation of almost all counties of England and occasional breeding in Scotland (Sharrock 1976, Holloway 1996). This range expansion almost certainly resulted in the Hawfinch colonising Dumfries and Galloway from bordering counties (Nelson *et al.* 1907). The 1832 Monreith record (Gordon c.1930) narrowly parallels the first Hawfinch record of Cumberland in 1833 (Macpherson 1892).

The apparent decline or absence of Hawfinches during the 1930s–1950s, especially the 1940s, may simply be explained by lack of observer coverage, especially during the war years. Depletion of suitable habitat due to land use change i.e. planting of non-native conifers and human disturbance resulted in the Hawfinch abandoning some traditional nesting sites, particularly at Dalskairth. The subsequent increase in records was in part attributed to a constant observer effort by local Hawfinch enthusiasts and to a genuine short-term increase in the local Hawfinch population; that echoed an increase in numbers at known concentrations elsewhere in the United Kingdom (Langston *et al.* 2002). However, a long-term decrease in the species range (from about 1970–90) has been documented (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

The New Atlas (Gibbons *et al.* 1993) showed a decrease in the number of occupied 10-km squares in Dumfries and Galloway from six during 1968–72 to one during 1988–91. However, for the period 1988–91, three 10-km squares: NX66, NX85 and NX98 were occupied. Records gained during this period continued into the 1990s, accounting for 10.3% of all sightings, the majority of which were from the Gatehouse of Fleet (NX65) 10-km square. Thereafter numbers declined considerably, for reasons largely unknown.

Although the Hawfinch breeding distribution map in the Atlas 2007–11 shows a total absence of records for Dumfries and Galloway (Balmer *et al.* 2013), the two adults and three juveniles reported in 2012 indicate that breeding is again occurring locally. In Scotland the Hawfinch has declined as a breeding species (Forrester *et al.* 2007) and it is on the 'red' list of 'Birds of Conservation Concern' due to a severe decline in the United Kingdom breeding population size, of more than 50% over 25 years (Eaton *et al.* 2009). The breeding population decline of the Hawfinch in Dumfries and Galloway has suggestively coincided with the spread of the Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*; which has steadily expanded its range westwards, encroaching into territories favourably occupied by Hawfinches, especially in western Dumfriesshire and southern and eastern Kirkcudbrightshire.



Plate 136. Hawfinch, Cally Drive, Cally Palace, Gatehouse of Fleet, Dumfries & Galloway, May 1997. @ John Massey



Plate 137. Hawfinch on peanut feeder, Fleet Oakwoods, Cally Palace, Gatehouse of Fleet, Dumfries & Galloway, April 1996. @ Roy White



Plate 138. Hawfinch (one of two, 10 days later 10 individuals visited the same garden), Shore Road, Auchencairn, Dumfries & Galloway, June 2011. @ *Hardie Carruthers*

The distribution of Hawfinch in Dumfries and Galloway is almost certainly correlated to habitat type: the majority of records were in or in close proximity to broadleaf woodlands. Over half of all records during 1961 involved birds feeding on the fruits of Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra* during April and May; Mountfort (1957) and Bryant (2011) also referred to Hawfinches eating the fruits of Wych Elm during this period. However, the Wych Elm, a relatively local and scarce tree in Dumfries and Galloway, was virtually wiped out by Dutch elm disease in the 1980s (Ratcliffe 2007). This may account for the declines in local Hawfinch populations at former strongholds such as Drumlanrig, Carronbridge and Thornhill. However, the Hawfinch can utilize a wide range of tree species in other habitat types and enjoys a great variety in its choice of habitat (Mountfort 1957). A significant proportion of the scattered records outwith the region's broadleaf woodland valleys were attributed to the localised distribution of tree species such as Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and Yew *Taxus baccata*; many of which are found in the policy woodlands of large managed estates such as Cally Palace (Gatehouse of Fleet), Crichton (Dumfries) and Drumlanrig Castle (Thornhill) as well as a number of smaller estates and large private gardens.

The double-brooding record of 1927 is noteworthy, but not unusual as Hawfinches occasionally double-brood (Newton 1972, Cramp & Perrins 1994).

Acknowledgements

R. Hawley, K. Kirk, D. Skilling, R.T. Smith and J.H. Swan are firstly thanked for providing significant numbers of historical records. F. Barclay, G. Chambers, the late D. Cliff-McCulloch, P. N. Collin, A. Corrie, H. Carruthers, M. Durham, the late T. Hastings, K. Jones, E. Lee, I. Livingston, A. McFadyen, R. & B. Mearns, R. Riley, A. Ritches, C. Rollie, D. Shackelton, G. Sparshott, the late G. Trafford, H. Traut and R. White are thanked for additional records or record details and for helping in other ways. C. Rollie kindly provided photocopies of the late A.D. Watson's Hawfinch notes. H. Stewart sourced records held at RSPB Crossmichael office. S.D. Cooper, H. Carruthers and G. Shaw provided scanned documents and/or photographs. Mark Pollitt produced the distribution map and provided records held by DGERC. R. Mearns commented on earlier drafts.

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Revised ms accepted April 2014

Honey-buzzard carrying a reptile during display flight

While watching a male Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* undergoing its display flight in Scotland during late August 2013, I was surprised to notice that it was carrying a reptile, either an Adder *Vipera berus* or a Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis*, in its talons. The bird underwent at least eight passes of the beautiful 'butterfly' display low over a wood, holding the reptile for the entire time. The behaviour was very reminiscent of that shown by Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* which have been observed regularly carrying fish items during display flights to attract potential mates (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001).

Though the grubs of wasps and to a lesser extent bees constitute the major part of Honey Buzzards' diet, it is known that they will consume amphibians and reptiles, and even birds, when insects are not available, particularly early and late in the year (Cramp & Simmons 1980, del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Appleby 2012). However, I believe that this is the first time it has been reported that a reptile can be used as a potential visual prey item during display flight by this species in Scotland.

Christopher J. McInerny, 10 Athole Gardens, Glasgow G12 9AZ.

Email: Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk

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Revised ms accepted March 2014

Brian Etheridge comments: *I have not witnessed this before, though I have watched this species display many times. Display in the late summer is quite frequent and appears to be made by non-breeding adults. It is often followed up the next year by a breeding attempt in the wood over which the display occurs.*

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Aberdeen, 22 March 2014



This year's conference was hosted by the BTO, SOC North-East Scotland branch and the University of Aberdeen. Thanks to the kind support and assistance of Jane Reid at the university, we secured the zoological building as the venue for the event, with all 200 seats in the auditorium filled. The university offered the added attraction of the adjacent natural history museum, which delegates were free to visit during break times and exhibitors also took advantage of this space to set up their stands.

Many delegates chose to make a weekend of it and a number of them joined conference organisers for a meal on the Friday evening at a very busy Dutch Mill Hotel in the city centre.

John Wills, chair of the SOC North-East Scotland branch, opened the conference with a warm welcome to attendees, noting that it was the first time that the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference had come to the region. John handed over to Chris Wernham, Head of BTO Scotland, to set the scene for the day's programme of talks, based loosely around the theme of 'Birds and people...a natural relationship'.

Climate change and waterfowl - dealing with an uncertain and changing future

- Tony Fox

Tony Fox, recently appointed Chairman of BTO Council and a professor at Aarhus University, Denmark, is well known for his work on Arctic

geese, the Greenland White-fronted in particular. Tony is also known for work on population dynamics and habitat ecology of other waterfowl especially plant/waterfowl interactions and peatland ecology.



Plate 139. Tony Fox. All photographs © David Palmer (www.photoscot.co.uk)

Tony began and ended his monumental, but fascinating, presentation by stressing the value of data gathered by professionals, enthusiastic birdwatchers, counters and ringers; without these data, scientists would have a much poorer idea of changes. He also highlighted how much we do NOT know, especially about wildlife communities from the top predators down to parasite level.

After putting global temperature change and CO₂ levels into perspective, he pointed out that the actual and predicted temperature increases are greatest in the Arctic, where there is high species richness in summer. Climate change affects not only snow and ice in boreal regions but also seasons in lower latitudes, especially notable in winter. Weather in all its forms is becoming more extreme and unpredictable and influences not only behaviour on the breeding grounds but also wind strength and direction on which migrants depend. We know many of the problems so must provide effective mitigating policies.

As birds are so mobile, alterations to migratory timing and distance lead to range changes. Additionally, modifications to the timing and success of breeding affect recruitment, while food availability is crucial to survival. Less clear, but equally vital, are changes to the communities in which they live, influencing predator-prey and parasite-host relationships. Interactions of birds with other taxa affect a whole range of demographics.

Tony then described more specific issues, notably concerning Greenland White-fronted Geese. Data show that the species is adapting to climate change by consuming earlier and more nutritious food on the wintering grounds in Ireland, enabling the accumulation of more fat reserves and allowing an earlier departure to Icelandic staging grounds. Here, they are able to rapidly replace reserves lost on passage but remain longer, since North Atlantic depression tracks now deposit more snow on the west Greenland breeding grounds; thus there is no motivation to perform the second migratory stage any earlier. This contrasts with Brent Geese, which still depart Denmark at the same time, migrate in one stage and arrive on

Svalbard where much earlier snow melt on the breeding grounds has resulted in adverse changes to their environment.

Many of our familiar ducks have become less common here and in south-west Europe because large new areas of open water in the Baltic Sea allow birds to feed much nearer to their breeding grounds. This has created the novel problem of consuming food that was formerly only available during spring staging and therefore could possibly transform the marine environment.

Tony finally explained that protection was vital, with declines much smaller in statutory protected areas than elsewhere. His last message was for us to continue the essential monitoring that we all love to undertake.

Norman Elkins

Managing an upland estate for wildlife

- Shaila Rao

Shaila's role with National Trust for Scotland (NTS) at Mar Lodge Estate is wide ranging but includes monitoring species and habitats of conservation importance, providing ecological advice for management and monitoring responses to management action.

The estate in the title is Mar Lodge in Upper Deeside, gifted to the National Trust for Scotland in 1995, with the proviso that it continued to be run as a highland sporting estate as well as for the environment.

Most of my acquaintance with the estate comes from a 'pre-birdy' life when I climbed and skied its hills for 20 years. The next appearance on my horizon was when Peter Holden gave a talk about the estate, and the proposed management of it, at an SOC conference in Newtonmore in 1996, shortly after NTS had acquired the site. More recently, it was promoted to a much wider audience by the BBC's Winter Watch and now the estate's ecologist, Shaila, updated us on progress since 1995 and the plans for the future.

In this talk we were informed that the estate covers 29,340 ha of typical highland landscape



Plate 140. Shaila Rao.

ranging from 350 m to 1,300 m, 83% of which is either designated as an SAC or SPA and of which 840 ha is covered in pine woodland. The management of the estate comprises three main objectives: conservation, open public access and serving as a traditional highland sporting estate (in harmony with the first two objectives). In general, the theme is one of landscape habitat restoration with minimal intervention rather than being species specific.

Priority is given to the regeneration of the pine woodland which is (slowly) being achieved by the reduction of the deer population from eight per ha in 2001 to just one now - at which level little browsing of emergent trees occurs. It has been found that this self-seeding is greatly enhanced by disturbing the ground (using inventive practices such as dragging logs) especially in areas of rank heather. Commercial conifer plantations on the estate are also being modified for both visual and environmental enhancement by 'ragging' the straight edges and creating dead wood and open spaces within by ringing the trees. Red Deer numbers have also been greatly reduced on the open moorland where traditional estate management techniques such as muirburn and *legal* predator control has been found to not only aid the Red Grouse population, but also other ground nesting birds.

Responsible access by visitors is encouraged by the ranger team with interpretive displays in the lower areas with the well-known Linn of Dee being particularly popular. In stark (and welcome) contrast to other Cairngorm estates, raptors are positively encouraged. Habitat work is continually evaluated to maximise the population of prey species while disturbance at nest sites is minimised. Golden Eagles have been monitored on the estate for the past 50 years and from only one pair pre-NTS, four pairs have fledged 17 young since 2007.

We were told that 118 species of bird had been recorded on the estate including such highland icons as Golden Eagle, Merlin, Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Dotterel and Scottish Crossbill. For the future, a 20-year forest plan is for a low deer population where the woodlands are unfenced and, once the NTS part-funding expires in 2020, the estate is financially sustainable - largely through its sporting revenue.

There are currently around 80 lekking Blackcock males on the estate, but numbers fluctuate and a maximum of 180 males were recorded in 2006–07. Shaila concluded her presentation with a short, but beautifully shot and entertaining, video clip, narrated by herself, of a Black Grouse lek.

Neil Bielby

Kites in the community - Jenny Lennon

After graduating from University of Aberdeen, Jenny became RSPB Red Kite Project Officer in 2007, overseeing the reintroduction of Red Kites to Aberdeen. She is now Conservation Officer with RSPB Scotland in Aberdeen, still working on kites, but also covering Aberdeenshire and Angus.

Jenny's talk described the reintroduction of Red Kites to the Aberdeen area of North-East Scotland between 2007 and 2009 to fill the geographical gap between the earlier kite reintroductions in the Black Isle (1989–93) and Stirling (1996–2001). The project was supported by Scottish Natural Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund, Aberdeen Greenspace and several local companies.

Over time, 101 ringed, wing-tagged birds complete with tail-attached radio transmitters have been released from VSA Easter Anguston Farm, a training centre for adults with learning difficulties, only eight miles from Aberdeen.

The first release was feted by the media and care has been taken to raise as much public awareness of the project as possible. Over 70 schools have been visited by project officers,

reaching over 6,000 pupils. The children have been encouraged to find names for individual birds, to follow their progress and draw life-size pictures of the birds. They have been shown pictures of the many strange objects found decorating kite nests. Jenny amused the conference audience by handing round a bag containing several such items and asking delegates to name each one. These included a sock, cuddly toy, tea-towel, ball, pants, tights, milk carton and even a lottery ticket.

To date, 101 birds have been released and 20 breeding pairs identified, with the hope that these numbers will soon increase. Up to 100 chicks have fledged. Live CCTV cameras on the sites have received over 30,000 hits. North East Open Studios have created a sculpture trail relating to the kites.

There has been little evidence of persecution to date. Jenny ended her talk by showing her short but excellent video of the released kites and described how one of the Aberdeen University lecturers told her he now looked forward to his drive to work as he could count on seeing a Red Kite en route.

Judy Greenwood



Plate 141. Jenny Lennon.

An upland update: Dotterel and Snow Bunting - Daniel Hayhow

Daniel Works for the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science focusing in particular on upland species and has organised national surveys on Hen Harriers, Dotterel and Snow Bunting. A lot of his work involves communicating the findings of these surveys and other national monitoring schemes, working with the media and partner organisations.

Daniel's presentation provided details of the 2011 RSPB/SNH national montane survey, a repeat survey of those carried out in 1987–88 and 1999. The primary aim of the 2011 exercise was to establish the number of breeding Dotterel in the UK and Scottish regions, and to compare these estimates with the previous national surveys. An additional aim was to determine whether there had been an altitude shift in Dotterel. This work also included the first systematic census of Snow Buntings and the second national survey of Ring Ouzel.

Surveys were carried out on a stratified random sample of montane sites and all SPAs/SSSIs (for which Dotterel are designated features) were covered between mid-June and mid-July. The

project revealed a 43% decline in the number of Dotterel breeding in the UK since the 1999 survey. The estimated population in 2011 of c.423 breeding males were found predominately in the Eastern Highlands and largely absent from the previously occupied sites in the North and West Highlands. No Dotterel were found in Wales or northern England. There has been a significant shift in the altitude of occupied Dotterel sites between 1987 and 2011, with higher sites being occupied in the recent survey.

A total of 35 territorial pairs of Snow Bunting were counted in 2011. However, it was reported that if all single males are included in the analysis, a total of 79 territorial pairs possibly occur in Scotland. The Ring Ouzel survey reported a 36% decline in numbers since 1999.

Research is currently underway to understand the drivers of the Dotterel population decline, particularly into the impacts of climate change on montane habitats and effects of habitat changes on Dotterel breeding in Scotland. Details of this research were provided in one of the talks in session three of the conference.

Mike Thornton

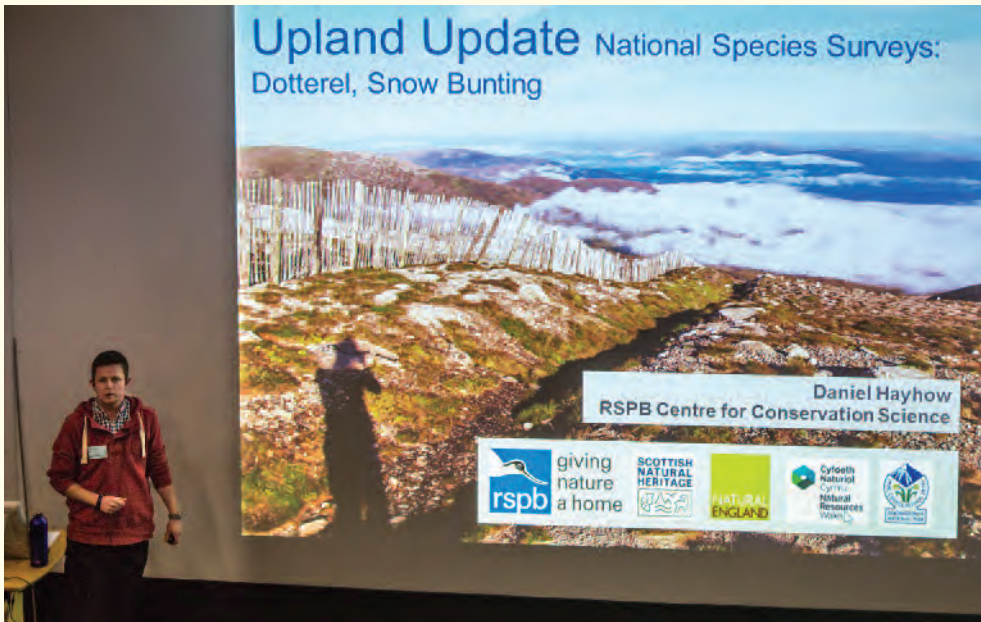


Plate 142. Daniel Hayhow.



Plate 143. (left to right) Sarah Hoy, Danny Heptinstall, Alistair Baxter, Amanda Trask and Beth Scott.

From seabirds to raptors, from genetics to ecology: ornithological research highlights - University of Aberdeen

A few months before the conference, I found myself in a small urban park near the centre of Aberdeen. I was emerging from under a tree where I'd taken shelter from a brief, but enthusiastic rain shower. Drying itself on a low fence a few feet away I noticed a Pied Wagtail. The ring on its leg looked untarnished. That weekend I remember seeing a small host of ringed birds around the city, some gulls, a Mistle Thrush, a Robin... The Granite City really puts in the hours when it comes to birds.

My opinion on this was reinforced during the conference. Just after lunch we were treated to a concise tour of current PhD and student research being undertaken at the University of Aberdeen. From traditional movement studies through genetics, to frontline computing science, this research group is doing it all.

Danny Heptinstall initiated the talks, combining our classic science with the apex of modern technology. The charismatic and iconic Red Kites, recently reintroduced to Scotland, are his model species. The birds have been fitted with satellite transmitters which fire locational information accurate to a few metres to a ground station in France, where it is forwarded to Aberdeen University, processed and automatically mapped. With four kites tagged, each providing six position fixes a day, and the addition of relevant environmental data from the underlying maps, such datasets become quickly

overwhelming. Natural Language Generation is Danny's way of managing and communicating such a massive dataset. Patterns in the numerical positional and environmental data, enriched by information regarding the animal's home range and social interactions, are recognised and converted to descriptive text. Effectively, the bird writes its own story as it moves around. This makes them pretty effective bloggers, keeping us regularly updated at redkite.abdn.ac.uk. It won't be long until these birds literally Tweet.

Clearly, new technologies can aid ornithological research. Dr Beth Scott's research is making use of some technological advances when studying the potential effects of underwater turbines on seabird ecology. As industry strives to find new sources of clean energy, Dr Scott's research is a pre-emptive strike allowing insight into the potential impacts of these turbines on seabirds before their development. Through the use of upward facing sonar technology and state-of-the-art EK60 fish finders, high quality data on fish movements and the dive depths of several seabirds can be collected. These can be related to the depths at which the turbines will be spinning. Other factors, such as the consequences of upwelling currents created by the turbines are also under investigation. With Puffins actively seeking out such areas of upwelling as the tide changes, the impacts the turbines will have is unclear. Dr Scott's research is essential in understanding the impacts of such large developments on the disturbance of seabirds and their movement ecology.

Sticking with movement, despite offering large individual based datasets, tech-heavy movement studies, such as satellite tagging schemes, can have relatively low sample sizes. Often to understand movement at a population level we want movements from many individuals at a lower resolution. Euan Ferguson, a student of history, offered a means of collecting such data from gulls using coloured and coded leg rings. These birds, despite being conspicuous, are difficult to catch using traditional mist netting methods, especially in urban areas. A video of Euan's capture technique: luring birds into enclosed areas with bread before running out and hand catching them, ended with enthusiastic applause. The coded rings have provided valuable information on the movement of several declining gull species throughout the UK. Perhaps most exciting is a Glaucous Gull captured in Peterhead during the project that has been sighted abroad since - not bad at all. Send any of your sightings to e.ferguson17@hotmail.co.uk.

These studies demonstrate the potential birds have to alter their distribution and movements as their environment changes. Such changes in distribution have been occurring in Kielder Forest, Northumberland, where Goshawks have increased from two pairs to 30 since the 1960s. Sarah Hoy is looking at the effects of this increase on smaller predator species. Goshawks can directly predate on Tawny Owls. Sarah wanted to understand the mechanisms underlying this interaction and gain real insight into how Goshawk increases might affect the overall numbers and structure of the Tawny population. When analysing prey remains, she noticed that 70% of predated owls were juveniles, far more than the expected proportion. The Goshawks also showed a preference for the oldest owls, suggesting these predators will have their strongest effect on extreme ends of the population. Sarah's research brings to light the major changes to trophic community structure that may occur as distributions of predators alter and overlap.

Inevitably, the final two student research projects concerned the most critical issue facing modern ornithology - many bird species are in serious decline. Valuable data from three national surveys since 1987 have shown that, many a

birdwatcher's favourite species, the Dotterel, has shown dramatic declines over the last 30 years, disappearing completely from England and Wales. Alistair Baxter is braving the Scottish highlands, bagging five Munros a week during fieldwork, to look at the drivers of these declines. With many potential contributing factors all interacting, this is a difficult task. Alistair's data on predation, invertebrate abundance, effects of moorland management and disturbance on breeding success will offer essential insight into the key factors influencing the declines and the best methods by which to conserve the Dotterel. With similar decreases noticeable in Scandinavian populations, this research will aid conservation at an international level.

Amanda Trask is looking at conservation from a more genetic perspective. Worryingly, over recent years, Cough populations on Islay and Colonsay have shown occasional cases of blindness. Affected chicks show abnormal, opaque corneas and often have differences in eye size. With clear fitness consequences for affected individuals, Amanda is studying the genetic drivers of blindness in Coughs. Observing the inheritance patterns within families, she is amassing evidence that the blindness trait is indeed genetic. Following the rules of Mendelian inheritance, 25% of offspring from pairs of parents carrying, but not showing the deleterious trait, would show blindness. Amanda's data have shown exactly this proportion. Translocation of individuals from more genetically distant populations may offer a solution by increasing diversity within populations.



Plate 144. Euan Ferguson.



Plate 145. Jane Reid.

Dr Jane Reid concluded the presentation with a brief update on her famous Shag study (in collaboration with colleagues from the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology). Having established an effective system to study the survival rates and breeding success of Shags on the Isle of May, the project aims to complete the picture by understanding the challenges faced by this species during their winter dispersal. On the Isle of May, almost all adults are individually ringed, allowing their identification from afar during winter fieldwork. The research has shown incredible variation in the rates and distances of winter dispersal in Shags. Variation that can be related to an individual's breeding history to look at the trade-offs between winter movement and reproductive fitness. In parallel, the winter fieldwork may also give important insight into the drivers of the mass Shag mortalities that have been so apparent over the last few years in eastern Scotland. We can help by reporting ringed Shag sightings, dead or alive, to shags@ceh.ac.uk.

From general chat around the conference, we learned that Aberdeen has many more bird projects to offer than could be fitted in the post-lunch hour slot, but what we saw was truly impressive. With pioneering research covering movement, ecology, species interactions and genetics, as well as inventive ways to communicate their findings, the University of Aberdeen's Ornithology Group are offering essential advances as we aim to truly understand the main theme of the conference, the interactions between people and birds.

Iain Malzer

A history of modern ornithology

- Tim Birkhead

Tim is Professor of Zoology at the University of Sheffield specialising in reproductive aspects of the behavioural ecology of birds, especially sperm competition in such diverse species as Vasa Parrots, Zebra Finches and Sand Martins. He has also worked extensively with seabirds, especially Guillemots.

The last speaker of the day, Tim delivered an energetic and interesting account of the history of ornithology, the subject of his new book *Ten Thousand Birds - Ornithology since Darwin*. He began his talk by playing a short video clip of a murmuration of Starlings which he had witnessed a crowd of people in his home town of Sheffield applauding. This highlighted an interaction between birds and people and Tim posed the question "what does it mean to be an ornithologist or a bird watcher?"

Views on who has been the most influential ornithologist can be quite subjective, so Tim began the research for his book by looking at citation reports for ornithologists. He interviewed 31 senior ornithologists to obtain an objective view of who they thought the ten most influential figures have been, as well as what they deemed the ten most influential books.



Plate 146. Tim Birkhead.

Based on the interviews, the three most influential ornithologists are, in third place, Niko Tinbergen, Ernst Mayr (2nd) and David Lack (1st). Meanwhile, the three most influential books are *The Natural Regulation of Animal Numbers* (3rd), *Population Studies of Birds* (2nd) and *Ecological Adaptations for Breeding Birds* (1st) - all three by David Lack. Although Tinbergen, Mayr and Lack were noted as the three most influential ornithologists, Tim explained that over 750 ornithologists are mentioned in his new book, including Aberdonian Bryan Nelson.

Tim explained that David Lack was so influential because he wrote with great clarity and enthusiasm and he wrote with no constraints and with free ideas. At Oxford, he started a student conference in 1947 and almost everyone who became notable as an ornithologist was involved in the event. Like Darwin, Lack had a steady and ardent love of natural science and a desire to understand and explain what he observed.

Another 20th century ornithologist, Eliot Howard, studied warblers and discovered the concept of 'territory'. However, he came to a completely different conclusion to Darwin because he missed the fact that males were fighting before females arrived because they were fighting for territory. Lack criticised Howard's book but later acknowledged that Howard had been correct in terms of his writing about territory.

Alison Creamer

A soup and sandwich lunch was served at The Hub, a short walk through the Botanical Gardens, which provided an excuse for delegates to grab some fresh air on what was a chilly but bright spring day. This year, to tie in with the conference theme, the usual raffle was replaced by a photo competition. A last-minute rush of entries brought the total number of images submitted to 37. These were displayed on a board in the coffee area throughout the day and delegates could vote for their top three. The activity proved a popular focal point, with around 120 delegates taking part in the vote. The winning snaps were taken by Harry Scott (3rd prize), Allan Templeton (2nd prize) and Ian Halliday (1st prize). Prizes included copies of Tim Birkhead's new book.

The conference ended with a few words from Sir Ian Diamond, the University Principal, followed by some closing remarks from SOC President, Chris McInerney, who thanked the speakers and all those involved in making the conference this year such a success.

For BTO staff, SOC branch committee members and some delegates staying overnight, there were still more social activities to come in the form of dinner on Saturday evening at the Manchurian Chinese restaurant and a programme of guided walks to nearby sites Montrose Basin, Peterhead, Strathbeg and Ythan estuary. Unfortunately, the weather was not kind, but this didn't deter the groups - some of whom battled against fierce sand blizzards! - and highlights included two drake Long-tailed Duck, five Snow Buntings and an immature Iceland Gull at the Forvie side of the Ythan (Iceland Gull also found at Peterhead) - an outing led by Daryl Short - plus excellent Eider views and vocals, Red-breasted Merganser and around 100 Sanderling (plus around 300 Grey Seals!) on the southern Ythan trip led by Hywel Maggs. Anne Cotton (BTO Scotland) led the Montrose excursion where the highlight was two colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit, in addition to Scaup and 60 Pintail. Meanwhile, Anne's colleagues James Bray, Ben Davill and Lorna Oldershaw led a small group to the Loch of Strathbeg, which produced more Scaup and also Ruff, Greenshank and Barnacle Goose - invaluable records for BirdTrack www.birdtrack.com

All in all, it was a fine finish to an excellent conference weekend in the north-east!



Plate 147. Conference excursion to the Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, March 2014.

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC members

Ayrshire: Mr & Mrs R. Lunardi, **Borders:** Mr P. Budd & Ms J. Riegel, Mr R. Changleng, Mr D. Corrin, Mr C.B. Low, Mr M. Moncrieff, Mr G. Saunders, Mr R. Watterson, **Clyde:** Ms C. Monger, **Dumfries:** Dr A. Boyes, **England, Wales & NI:** J. Ferguson & M. Dixon, Mr S. Francis, Mr D.W. Hamilton, Mr K. Hodgson, Mr J. Latimer, Mr R. Platts, Mr G. Summers, Mr S. Warrillow, **Fife:** Mr J. Durkacz, **Highland:** Mr P. Dowling, Dr J. Mercer, Ms E. Owen, Ms S. Seright & Mr H. Fearn, Prof A. Templeton, **Lothian:** Ms S. Cook, Ms J. Dawson, Mr A. Farrell, Mrs K. Hansen, Miss N. Harmsworth, Mr S. Jeffray, Ms C. MacLaren, Mr & Mrs A. McCallum, Mr & Mrs J. McIntyre, Mr H.R. McIver, Mr N. Milton, Mr & Mrs M. Mitchell, Mr T. Plant, Ms E. Ryan, Mr J. Sohler, Mrs E.C. Walker, Mr A.R. White, Ms J. Will, Ms K. Wood, Mr P. Wright, Mr & Mrs R. Young, **Moray:** Mr S. Reed, Ms K. Sanderson, **North-East Scotland:** Dr W. Bodles, Mrs M. Knecht, Dr M. Oliver, Mr & Mrs J.L. Wilson, **Orkney:** Mr I.S. Robertson, **Overseas:** Mr T. Nordin, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr M. Chattwood, Ms A. Lavelle & Mr I. Sanderson, **Tayside:** Mr D. de Gemier, Mr C. McGuigan, Miss C. McInroy & Mr K. Carr.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are: **February: 1st** £50 Mrs Wheelans, **2nd** £30 D.B. McGinn, **3rd** £20 Dr R. Jenkins, **4th** £10 D. Merry. **March: 1st** £30 Miss J. Howie, **2nd** £20 P.W. Speak, **3rd** £10 R.S. Craig. **April: 1st** £30 Mike Martin, **2nd** £20 Mr Main, **3rd** £10 Mrs P. Black. Details on how to join can be obtained by writing to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

Merchandise

A new SOC pin badge (actual size c. 25 mm x 23 mm) is now available from HQ at £1 each (plus p&p if required). See plate 148.

Branch updates

Ayrshire branch, new chair: David Rackham, 18 Bathurst Drive, Alloway, Ayr KA7 4QN. Tel: 01292 441371, david.racks18@gmail.com. The Club thanks outgoing chair, Angus Hogg, for all his hard work over the years. Pat Gibbs replaces

David as Vice-chair. Secretary, Anne Dick, has a new email address: a_m_dick@btinternet.com

Borders branch, new secretary: Neil Stratton, Heiton Mains, Main Street, Heiton, Kelso TD5 8JR. Tel: 01573 450695, neilstratton@btinternet.com. The Club is grateful to outgoing secretary, Graham Pyatt, for his many years in the post.

Central branch, new secretary: Niel Bielby, 56 Ochiltree, Dunblane FK15 0DF. Tel: 01786 823830, n.bielby@sky.com. Former secretary, Roger Gooch, is now branch chair.

Events

- **SOC Annual Conference**, 31 October to 2 November 2014, Station Hotel, Perth. Programme and booking form enclosed with this issue. Or book your place online at <http://www.the-soc.org.uk/the-2014-annual-conference>
- **Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference**, Saturday 21 March 2015, Glasgow (venue to be announced)
- **Rutland Birdfair**, 15–17 August 2014. After an absence of several years, the SOC are delighted to be taking a stall at this year's Rutland Birdfair - do drop by the stand in marquee 1 if you're attending the event! See www.birdfair.org.uk for more details.



Plate 148. The new SOC pin badge.



Plate 149. (top left) Drake Tufted Duck by Robert Gillmor. (top right) Common Terns by Robert Greenhalf. (middle) Winter Fox by Andrew Haslen. (bottom left) Lekking Black Grouse by John Threlfall. (bottom right) Fieldfares, friends from the North by Lisa Hooper.

Waterston House**Art Exhibitions**

- Robert Gillmor, Robert Greenhalf & Andrew Haslen, showing until 23 July
- John Threlfall, 26 July to 17 September
- Lisa Hooper, 20 September to 12 November

Optics Demo Day

Sunday 12 October 2014, 10 am–4 pm. A wide range of binoculars and telescopes. Or just come along for some friendly expert advice!

SBRC - seeking a new committee member

SBRC is seeking a new member for the committee to replace Mark Chapman, who retires later this year. To maintain geographical representation across Scotland, SBRC would prefer a candidate from the Northern Isles (Orkney, Fair Isle or Shetland). Any potential candidates should send their name to the Secretary (Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk). If more than one name is put forward, a ballot will be instigated, with Local Recorders having one vote each.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC

Mallard nesting project funded by Fife branch

In a collaborative project, the Fife branch has funded the construction and siting of 16 Mallard nesting tubes at various sites on the Eden Estuary in Fife.

Due to noted decreases in the national population and breeding success of Mallard, the Eden Estuary Local Nature Reserve volunteer wildfowl warden came up with the idea of building and then placing Mallard nests on the reserve. He approached the Fife Coast and Countryside Trust Ranger, who in turn approached the Fife branch of the SOC to see if we would fund and support the project, which we agreed to do, donating £300.

Countryside Management students at Elmwood College, Cupar built the nesting tubes. Under supervision by the warden, the students then placed the nests at various locations on the Eden Estuary and at the area known as the Goosepools.

This is a great project involving bird watchers, conservationists, wildfowlers, land managers and students.

Corrections from the March issue

We apologise to Stuart Murray and his co-authors for adding a spurious “in 2013” to the title of his Rockall paper. The title should read “Gannet and Guillemot breeding on Rockall, North Atlantic”. The Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report for 2012 was co-edited by Gavin Chambers and Mike Youdale rather than Duncan Irving. We also take responsibility for a glitch in Chris McInerny’s Foreword - the missing words should be “conserving birds in **Scotland**” (first paragraph) and “the Royal Society in **London**” (second paragraph).

Gillnets - the sleeping giant of seabird bycatch?

R. CRAWFORD



Plate 150. Steller's Eider, entangled in a gillnet, Estonia. © Marcus Vetemaa

Most SOC members will be aware of the plight of the world's albatrosses - 15 of the 22 species are threatened with extinction (IUCN 2014). One of the major drivers behind this worrying state of affairs is the incidental capture (or 'bycatch') of these birds in fisheries across the world: most frequently caught as they try to scavenge baits from the hooks of longline vessels, or through collisions or entanglements with the fishing gear of trawlers. In global longline fisheries alone, it is estimated that in excess of 300,000 seabirds are killed as bycatch (Anderson *et al.* 2011).

Although this problem is far from solved, major steps in the right direction are emerging. There is now a substantial body of scientific evidence highlighting the often simple measures that fishermen can take to reduce bycatch, while maintaining target fish catch. On-board experts have helped to support fishermen in taking up these measures - the RSPB/BirdLife Albatross Task Force, which operates across eight countries

in South America and southern Africa, is probably the finest example of this. Several governments have developed National Plans of Action for dealing with seabird bycatch and the major fisheries management bodies whose jurisdictions overlap with albatross distribution have adopted regulations aimed at reducing bycatch.

Albatrosses and high seas tuna vessels probably seem a long way off for most Scottish birdwatchers - but there is a bycatch threat to seabirds looming much closer to home: gillnets. Gillnets are a globally common fishing gear - they are possibly the first thing that enters your mind when you hear the words 'fishing net'. They come in various forms, but the principle is generally the same: nets form a 'wall' in the water column, usually with floats along the top and weights along the bottom. Fish swim into the nets and are caught around the gills. Formerly, such nets were made of natural materials like hemp or cotton, but in time, monofilament nylon became the primary material, not only because it was a cheaper and more durable alternative, but also one which is likely to be far less visible to fish, resulting in increased catches (Munilla *et al.* 2007, Zydalis *et al.* 2013).



Plate 151. A standard monofilament nylon gillnet tied to a more visible section of white netting. © Shannon Moore

Table 1. Global gillnet bycatch estimates by region (from Zydalis *et al.* 2013).

Region	Estimated annual bycatch (number of birds)
North-east Atlantic sub-regions	
Iceland	100,000
Baltic Sea	76,000
Norwegian Sea	8,000
North Sea and Atlantic	>10,000
North-west Atlantic sub-regions	
West Greenland	10,000–20,000
Atlantic Canada	8,000–15,000
US NW Atlantic Coast	2,000
South-west Atlantic	>>1,000
North-west Pacific	140,000
North-east Pacific	20,000
South-west Pacific	Unknown
South-east Pacific	10,000

The impact of gillnets on birds

Unfortunately, such nets are also far less visible to birds, with devastating consequences. Last year, the journal *Biological Conservation* published a global review of seabird bycatch in gillnets (co-authored by RSPB staff), which estimated that 400,000 birds are killed each year in this gear (Zydalis *et al.* 2013). Compared to longliners and trawlers, a mostly distinct suite of species is susceptible to gillnet capture - primarily, it is pursuit-diving and bottom-feeding birds that are affected. In total, 148 species are considered susceptible - of which 49 are threatened with extinction, including Steller's Eider, Yellow-eyed Penguin, Velvet Scoter and Kittlitz's Murrelet (Zydalis *et al.* 2013). Alcids, penguins, cormorants, divers, seabirds and shearwaters have all been recorded as bycatch in gillnet fisheries - groups of birds for which the greatest species diversity is found in the temperate and sub-polar regions of the world (Zydalis *et al.* 2013).

Gillnetting is a relatively cheap fishing method, with lower fuel and gear costs than larger commercial fisheries. For this reason, it is favoured by small-scale fishers the world over. It is estimated that 50 million of the world's 51 million fishers are small-scale - engaged not on large pelagic vessels, but operating largely inshore, either from small boats or even from

land (Berkes *et al.* 2001). Not surprisingly, this vast fleet of fishers is exceedingly difficult to monitor; large in number and highly dispersed around the coasts of most countries that have an available patch of sea to fish in. This means there are major gaps in our knowledge of seabird bycatch - but sufficient information was available in the published literature for the global gillnet review to derive estimates of bycatch in many regions (Table 1).

Regions with high estimated bycatch

Baltic Sea - The Baltic is home to huge numbers of seabirds, particularly during the winter, when this unique brackish water environment is home to nearly three million, including Long-tailed Duck, Velvet Scoter, Eider, Common Scoter and Steller's Eider. The Baltic also supports auk populations during the breeding season (largely in the west) as well as divers, grebes and cormorants. All of these species groups are vulnerable to bycatch in gillnets, and the pattern of bycatch across the sea basin, not surprisingly, generally reflects bird distribution (lots of ducks in the east; more auk bycatch in the west). This bycatch, at an estimated 76,000 birds per year, is of serious concern, particularly as populations of the five wintering duck species noted above declined by around 60% between surveys conducted in 1992/93 and 2007–09 (Zydalis 2009, Skov *et al.* 2011).

Iceland - Famed for both its vast seabird colonies and the importance of fishing to its economy, it is perhaps not surprising that there are interactions here between seabirds and fishing gear. It is also no exception to the rule that data on bycatch in Icelandic gillnet fisheries are exceedingly thin on the ground. However, based on data collection spanning several years, in 2002 Aevor Petersen of the Icelandic Institute of Natural History estimated annual bycatch in Iceland's gillnet and longline fisheries at 100,000–200,000 birds (including auks, divers and seaduck). He based this on ringing recoveries, birds collected directly from fishermen and information on the sale of bycaught birds, and considers it likely that this estimate still stands (Petersen 2002, Zydalis *et al.* 2013, A. Petersen, pers. comm.).



Plate 152. Razorbills and Guillemots - two species that are particularly susceptible to gillnet bycatch. © *Rory Crawford*

North Sea and Atlantic - Closer to home, gillnet bycatch records are few and far between. Salmon net fisheries off north-east Scotland were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Razorbills and Guillemots in the early 1990s, but anglers bought up the fishing rights here and this pressure appears to have been completely removed (Murray *et al.* 1994). More recently, a number of bycatch episodes have been recorded in England, all of which have largely affected Razorbills and Guillemots. This has included incidents in Filey Bay, Yorkshire, during the breeding season and some other sporadically recorded incidents along the south coast (St. Ives, Portland, Falmouth Bay) (RSPB 2014, Cornwall IFCA 2014). Elsewhere in the Atlantic, the major decline of the so-called

Iberian Guillemot (now on the verge of extinction) has been linked to the replacement of traditional netting materials with nylon gillnets in the 1960s (Munilla *et al.* 2007).

North-west Pacific - The huge estimated bycatch for this region (140,000 birds per year) is largely from the salmon driftnet fisheries operating in Russian waters, generated by both Russian and Japanese vessels. This estimate comes from direct scientific observation of the fishery. Monitoring of the Japanese elements of the fishery revealed that 31 different species were recorded as bycatch - largely shearwaters and alcids, with Short-tailed Shearwaters and Brünnich's Guillemots being the most numerous victims. Alarmingly, several species in the Russian Red Data Book, including Kittlitz's and Long-billed Murrelets, White-billed Divers, Short-tailed Albatross and Red-legged Kittiwake, have all been recorded as bycatch (Artukhin *et al.* 2010). Although there is very little data from the salmon fisheries operating inshore around Hokkaido in northern Japan, anecdotally this is an area of concern. Observation of the aforementioned Russian fishery indicated that Tufted Puffins and Guillemots were very susceptible to salmon nets - in Japan, both are listed as 'National Endangered Species', having undergone marked population declines in the region (M. Sato, pers. comm.).

The way forward

Although the available information is patchy, the estimates presented in Table 1 (which are likely to be conservative estimates) give serious cause for concern. The total of 400,000 birds killed each year in gillnets eclipses the existing estimate for longline bycatch, which, relatively speaking, is a well-studied problem with a suite of well-developed and scientifically-tested solutions. As already noted, the nature of many gillnet fisheries is such that they do not lend themselves to data collection - this lack of information has almost certainly limited progress towards finding practical solutions to what is a major emerging conservation problem.

There are some tools available to mitigate seabird bycatch in gillnets. Spatial or temporal fisheries closures can be highly effective in cutting the number of deaths of non-target species.



Plate 153. Tufted Puffin. © Yuri Artukhin

However, they can be exceedingly difficult to enforce, requiring resource and investment by management authorities that may not be available. Not surprisingly, closures are also unpopular with fishermen, because of loss of income, regular fishing grounds or opportunities to fish. That's not to say this approach should be dismissed - it may be essential to implement closures in places where bycatch of threatened species is occurring, or where there are particularly high levels of bycatch of even common species. Closures can be designed to minimise the impact on fishers, particularly by operating at fine spatial or temporal scales (i.e. avoiding times of day of peak bird abundance, or well-defined critical habitats for seabirds). Special consideration should be given to exclude gillnets from Marine Protected Areas designated for bycatch-sensitive species (not just seabirds, but cetaceans, turtles and sharks too).

Saving birds - and money?

However, where successful mitigation measures have been developed for longline and trawl fisheries, one of the critical factors has been to ensure that such measures do not impact on target fish catch. Success in subtly modifying and adapting gillnets to reduce bycatch but maintain catch is thus the ultimate aim: attractive to fishers and conservationists alike. There has been a small amount of research effort in this regard: modifications to nets, incorporating higher-visibility panels, have shown promise, as well as the use of specially tuned 'pingers', which emit a sound that deters



Plate 154. Crested Auklets bycatch. © Victor Nikulin

birds (originally developed to reduce marine mammal bycatch) (Melvin *et al.* 1999). Fishers have developed their own modifications - the salmon netsmen of Filey Bay developed their own higher visibility nets, which may have helped reduce bycatch rates in the area. Lighting has been used to deter turtles from gillnet interactions in Mexico - it is certainly within the realms of possibility that it might have a similar effect on birds (Wang *et al.* 2013).

Undoubtedly, though, efforts need to be stepped up. BirdLife International's Marine Programme (hosted by the RSPB), has, in partnership with the scientific community, governments, NGOs and the fishing industry, succeeded in driving major reductions in the bycatch of seabirds in longline and trawl fisheries. Now, resources are being invested in developing similar collaborations to find solutions to gillnet bycatch. The global review was just the beginning; a new BirdLife project was launched last year, working with small-scale fishermen along the Humboldt Current to look at the scale of bycatch and potential solutions. In Lithuania, pilot work has commenced, testing modified nets with gillnet fishers on the Baltic Sea. However, the extent of this problem in Europe and beyond demands that such projects be scaled up, and this will require a major boost in funding from governments and management agencies. This is undoubtedly difficult given the economic climate - but with 400,000 birds dying in gillnets every year, the question is surely: can we afford not to?



Plate 155 (left). Modified nets drying in Filey Bay - the black sections of netting are high visibility. © *Rory Crawford* **Plate 156 (right).** LOD (Birdlife Partner in Lithuania) staff discuss modified gillnets with local fishers. © *Rory Crawford*



With thanks to the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for supporting BirdLife's emerging work in small-scale fisheries.

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Plate 157. A Jay at the nest with both adult Ospreys present, and with a scrap of fish in its beak, 16 May 2012. © CCTV

Visits to an Osprey nest by Jays and 12 other species over ten years

J. SAVORY, D. BENNETT & T. LIGHTLEY

As part of the Tweed Valley Osprey Project (TVOP), volunteers at dedicated visitor centres at Glentress and Kailzie Gardens near Peebles (Borders) have been monitoring the breeding activity of a single pair of Ospreys every year since a camera link to their nest was installed in early 2004. It is known they are the same pair because the unringed female has a distinctive dark patch on her head which makes her recognisable, and the male has a conspicuous darvic leg ring ("SS") which shows he was hatched near Aberfoyle in 1999. They have consistently reared either two or three chicks successfully each year, and this is one of ten monitored nest sites (in 2013) in an expanding Osprey population along the Tweed valley. The project is a partnership between Forestry Commission Scotland, Kailzie Gardens and RSPB, with support from Scottish Natural Heritage, and is aimed at improving people's knowledge and appreciation of this species.

Individual volunteers from a team of about 40 have manned the centres (mainly Glentress to start with and mainly Kailzie thereafter) in morning (10:00–13:30 hrs) and afternoon (13:30–17:00 hrs) sessions every day from around the end of March, when the adult Ospreys arrive from their wintering area (presumably in West Africa), until the end of August, when they and their young depart. As well as regularly recording in logbooks dates of arrival, egg-laying, hatching, fledging etc., from the CCTV coverage volunteers have also noted behaviour of adults and young, deliveries of fish, and visits to the nest by other species. In Roy Dennis's *A Life of Ospreys* (Whittles Publishing, 2008), there is only a single reference to the presence of other species - *"There are usually scavengers around osprey nests and a pair of crows will nearly always be nesting nearby, the first to come and search for scraps. During the night, a local fox will often explore the ground*

under the eyrie looking for leftovers, however small." It seems surprising that book did not contain more information on this topic, given the fact that breeding Ospreys at Loch Garten and certain other eyries have been monitored by volunteers for many more years than the TVOP pair. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to provide more detail on scavenging by other species at an Osprey nest.

It must be emphasised that the observations reported here were incidental and were not collected in a systematic way. Not all the TVOP volunteers may have recorded the presence of other species, not all of them may have identified other species correctly, they were sometimes busy attending to visitors and they were sometimes absent. The link to the Osprey

nest camera was sometimes not working, the camera image was sometimes poor, and the field of view was not always the same because the camera was sometimes zoomed in and sometimes zoomed out. On some days there were several observed visits by either the same species or different species.

Over the ten years from 2004 to 2013, there were 1,220 days when information was recorded in Logbooks by observing volunteers, and 119 days (9.8% of total) when the presence of another species at the Osprey nest was noted. This percentage varied from 5% in 2010 to 23% in 2011 (Table 1).

Of the 11 other bird species and two mammal species that were recorded visiting the Osprey nest, Jays were the most frequent in every month from early April until the end of August (Table 2). Of the 119 days when another species was noted, 76% were Jays and 55% were in August. Fewest visits by other species were in April, when there would have been fewest fish scraps at the nest to scavenge. The only observations of Carrion Crows, either flying over or perched nearby, were in April or May when the Osprey eggs were still being incubated. On one occasion in May two Crows perched next to the nest for about an hour while both adult Ospreys were seen clearly defending their eggs. The two species queried in Table 2 are because we considered female Sparrowhawk and Pied Wagtail (both of which

Table 1. Numbers of days when the Osprey nest was observed, and when other species were recorded, in each year from 2004 to 2013.

Year	Total days observed	Total days with other species	% days with other species
2004	91	6	7
2005	100	13	13
2006	112	11	10
2007	127	7	6
2008	153	9	6
2009	126	8	6
2010	129	6	5
2011	133	30	23
2012	126	17	13
2013	123	12	10
Total	1220	119	9.8

Table 2. Numbers of days in each month from early April to the end of August when specified other species were observed visiting the Osprey nest, 2004–13.

Species	April	May	June	July	August	Total
Sparrowhawk (?)					1	1
Kestrel					3	3
Woodpigeon					1	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker					3	3
Pied Wagtail (?)				1		1
Wren	1					1
Coal Tit		1		1	1	3
Nuthatch		1				1
Jay	4	10	12	12	53	91
Carrion Crow	2	1				3
Chaffinch	2	3	2		1	8
Red Squirrel		1			1	2
Grey Squirrel					1	1
Total	9	17	14	14	65	119



Plate 158. Two young Jays scavenging at the empty nest on 28 July 2012. © CCTV



Plate 159. A Great Spotted Woodpecker inspecting the empty nest on 4 August 2012. © CCTV

have been seen near the Osprey nest by Forest Enterprise Scotland Environment Officer Tony Lightley) were more likely than the “juvenile Goshawk” and “Pied Flycatcher” that were suggested in the logbooks by volunteers who did not seem confident in their identifications.

Visits to the Osprey nest by other species were often brief (less than 5 minutes), and from April to July they usually seemed to be tolerated by Osprey adults and young. Apart from the Carrion Crows mentioned above, only occasionally were Jays seen to be chased away by an Osprey, and they tended to return soon after and there was sometimes a ‘face-off’. It is presumed that most visits by other species were individuals looking for an opportunity to scavenge bits of fish and/or insects attracted to the fish. Via Google it can be seen that every species in Table 2, including Red and Grey Squirrels, has been reported to eat at least some animal food in the form of invertebrates. Actual consumption of fish scraps, however, was only recorded with Jays, which were the most frequent and persistent visitors. There were four records of twigs being taken from the nest by Jays (in June and August) and a Woodpigeon (in August), and of feathers being taken by a female Chaffinch (in May), presumably for its own nest. There was no recorded evidence suggesting that small species like Wren, Coal Tit and Chaffinch were either mobbing the Ospreys or prospecting to build their own nest within the structure of the larger nest. Conceivably, however, simple curiosity could have been a motive in this behaviour.

Most visits to the nest by other species occurred in August, when five species were present that were not seen at other times (Table 2). From fledging of the Osprey chicks, usually in mid-

July, until the Ospreys’ departure at the end of August, the nest is used as a food dump where adults leave fish and the young come to feed. It is frequently unattended then for several hours at a time, so scavengers can come to feed undisturbed on bits of fish or even nearly whole fish. There were several records of both adult and young Jays doing this and of sometimes flying off with quite large pieces. Images of adult and young Jays, and of a Great Spotted Woodpecker, at the nest are shown in Plates 1–3, respectively. These were all ‘captured’ from the CCTV viewing screen in 2012 by a computerised photo-taking facility.

In conclusion, these are records of visits by 13 other species to just one Osprey nest in the Tweed valley. They no doubt reflect the variety of species present in the vicinity and what could be seen by volunteers from the CCTV link during daylight hours. There could have been other scavengers out of the camera’s view and/or which were nocturnal, like Foxes (as mentioned in Roy Dennis’s book) and Badgers, and Tony Lightley reports having also seen Buzzards, Blackbird, Song Thrush, and Goldcrest nearby. Of course Osprey nests elsewhere may well be visited by other species.

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NOTES AND COMMENT

White sparrow

This House Sparrow was photographed by Peter Leach in North Berwick on 3rd and again on 23 September 2013. It became whiter after moult. Birds often develop more white feathers with age. The dark eyes show that it is an example of leucism due to reduction in dark pigment rather than true albinism which is rarer, as albinos tend to be weaker and less likely to survive. Any unusually obvious bird is more vulnerable to predators which may be one reason why white birds are often seen in gardens where they may benefit from being fed by humans who may also deter some natural predators. Blackbird is the species most often seen with white feathers. The British Trust for Ornithology is running an abnormal plumage survey, so anyone with relevant records should contact the BTO via their website. They also welcome photos and this pair has already been forwarded to BTO.

Stan da Prato



Plate 160. Leucistic House Sparrow, North Berwick, 3 September 2013. © Peter Leach



Plate 161. Leucistic House Sparrow after moult, North Berwick, 23 September 2013. © Peter Leach

Dalzell Nuthatches increase

At Dalzell Woods, Motherwell, there are now eight pairs of Nuthatches with active nest sites - this since 2005, when the first pair arrived there. As of now (12 April), the five pairs from last year have started incubation, with the females being fed tit-bits by their males between bouts of loud hooting. The three other pairs are less well advanced, with the females still layering the holes with mud and bringing in flakes of pine bark.

It is interesting to note that in two instances pairs are well within hearing distance of one another and the males of these nests are constantly in loud territorial conversation. Considering the area of the woodlands is only 32 ha, the concentration of active Nuthatch nest-sites seems very high; perhaps due to the number of Oak trees with suitable holes (five out of eight pairs use this species of tree). Other probable contributing features could be the abundance of Yew trees for winter feeding and the three garden nut feeders within the area.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 162. Male Nuthatch in attendance. © Lang Stewart

Gandalf, a Rüppell's Griffon Vulture, visits Islay

M. OGILVIE



Plate 163. Gandalf, the Rüppell's Griffon Vulture at full stretch. © Fiona Brims

It was late morning on 1 April 2014 when I had a phone call from a farmer friend, Brian Abbott at Duich, to tell me that he had just been to see a vulture on his farm that John Woodrow, who works for him, had spotted sitting on some open moorland close to a farm track. Hmm, nice April Fool, was my initial thought! But Brian was insistent and added details such as that he got within 20 m of it without it flying away, actually making him think it might be injured (there were power cables quite close by following the line of the track). He also added that he used to live in Kenya and so knew a vulture when he saw one.

Having convinced me that the bird existed, I recalled a lot of press and TV coverage in the past eight or nine days concerning a Rüppell's Griffon Vulture which had flown off during a flying display at the falconry centre 'World of Wings' at Cumbernauld on 23 March. Thinking it unlikely that there were two vultures flying around Scotland at the same time, I looked up the phone number of the falconry centre, just in

case. I then called my good friend and neighbour, Peter Roberts, who is an expert birder with worldwide experience, and asked him to join me in a vulture hunt.

So off we set and drove the dozen miles to the farm track and headed down it to where some scrubby woodland ended and open moorland began. However, although we spent a lot of time looking, climbing vantage points and scanning both the moorland and the adjacent farmland, there was no sign of the vulture. Disappointedly, we headed back along the track and, as we entered the belt of scrubby woodland, I said to Peter that there was no chance of finding it if it had flown and landed amongst the scrub. And then, moments later, we drew abreast of a clearing containing a large Pheasant pen, perhaps 20 m x 10 m, and there, sitting inside, was a very obvious vulture! Peter quickly identified it as the correct species, and couldn't help saying that the last Rüppell's he had seen, just a few weeks earlier, had been eating a Wildebeest in the Serengeti!

The vulture was only about 30 m from us, sitting on the tussocky grass close to the wire netting. There were no Pheasants present at this time of year. I therefore phoned World of Wings and said to the person who answered the phone that I believed he had lost a Rüppell's vulture. He rather cautiously said that that was the case. His caution was understandable, both because of the date and, as he told me later, there had been a great many sightings phoned in that all turned out to be Herons or Buzzards. I assured him that the identification was correct and he volunteered the information that the bird was hand-tame. I then said that both Peter and I were experienced bird handlers, if not actually of vultures, and he said we ought to be able to walk right up to it and suggested throwing something over it. Peter had an elderly coat with him so, armed with that, we climbed over the wire netting and slowly approached the bird. I plucked a handful of grass and held it out (the owner had said that the bird would probably be starving hungry) and the vulture started walking towards us. As Peter got his jacket ready, I moved in and put both my hands over its wings and pressed gently downwards to stop it flapping. Then the jacket was quickly thrown and Peter was able to gather up jacket and bird and lift the bundle into his arms. We

both wondered whether the bird had landed in the pheasant pen because it reminded it of its aviary back home.

We made our way back to the car, and while Peter (and the vulture, whose name we had been told was Gandalf, even though it was a female!) settled in the passenger seat, I phoned the owner, David Ritchie, again to tell him we had caught the bird. I don't think I have ever heard someone on the phone who was so ecstatically happy/over-the-moon/laughing with joy as David. Let's just say he sounded quite pleased.

Because David has told me that the bird would be very hungry, I asked him what we should feed it. He advised chicken pieces so, on the way back through Bowmore, we stopped while I went into the Co-op and purchased two packets of chicken breasts. When we got home, we put the bird in the back of my car (which has a dog guard), and I fed the eight pieces of chicken from the back seat, dropping them through the bars of the guard and keeping my fingers well away from its massive flesh-tearing beak. I've not seen anything eat a kilo of chicken as quickly as Gandalf. I was wondering whether I shouldn't have bought more, when she put her head under her wing and went to sleep!



Plate 164. Gandalf inside Pheasant pen. © Malcolm Ogilvie



Plate 165. Gandalf in overnight dog crate. © Malcolm Ogilvie

Peter had a spare dog crate at home, so he went and collected that and we set it up in my garage, with a sheet over the top, and transferred Gandalf into it, this being the best we could offer in the way of overnight accommodation. By happy coincidence, I was booked on the ferry to the mainland the next morning, and so told David Ritchie that I would bring the bird with me, saving him a long journey over to Islay to collect her. We agreed a meeting place just off the A82 near Balloch and turned up at about the same time, quickly followed by a presenter and cameraman from BBC Scotland. The handover went well. I suspect the BBC wanted the bird brought out of the tea-chest it was travelling in, but David very wisely told them that there was no way he was going to risk that, and that if they wanted to see the whole bird, rather than just its head poking out of a hole in the side of the tea-chest, then they would have to follow him back to World of Wings, which they duly did. As you can imagine, my meeting with David and his wife, and David's meeting with Gandalf, were both very happy affairs.

The press and media had been very good at alerting the public to the missing vulture and David was naturally keen to involve them in its return. So, a short piece appeared that evening on the BBC Scotland News, and various items in many Scottish newspapers. I was variously described as a retired ornithologist or a retired naturalist, but, as a friend pointed out, do you really retire from either of those occupations?

My overall feeling has been one of immense satisfaction. Peter and I had retrieved a bird which had been brought by days of strong easterlies over 160 km from Cumbernauld to Islay, and then been able to return it to its home. Furthermore, as I pointed out to a journalist, if it hadn't landed where it did on Islay and been spotted by someone who both realised what it was and thought to phone me, the continuing easterly winds could have driven it onwards, towards the next land to the west, i.e. Canada!

I am claiming this as the first record of a vulture of any species for Islay.

Malcolm Ogilvie, Islay

FIELD NOTE



Plate 166. Velvet Scoters, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014. This small group of males silently encircled a single female, with their necks stretched up and crowns alert. All photographs © Ian Andrews

A close encounter with Velvet Scoters

Distant views are the norm, or so it seemed during my repeated search for the Stejneger's Scoter at Musselburgh in early 2014. On 8 February 2014, the opposite was the case, allowing my closest encounter with Velvet Scoter in 33 years of patch birding. Luckily, I had the camera, the light was perfect and the birds performed.

At its height, the group consisted of 11 males and a single female, and a frenzy of activity ensued, oblivious to us watching from 15–20 m away, looking down from the seawall.

BWP describes 'communal courtship' with small groups of males forming round a single female. This was the situation here, but one male appeared to be more 'accepted' by the female, with the others being repeatedly chased away by her. As she did this, time after time she stretched her neck forward, opened her bill and appeared to peck at the rival males. The males took on an upright posture appearing more round-headed than usual. They repeatedly rushed across the water directly away from the female, with much flapping and flashing of the white secondaries and spraying of water. The



Plate 167. Velvet Scoters, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014. The webs and entire undersides of the feet are black, with the pinkish red only showing on the upper surface.



Plate 168. Velvet Scoters, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014. Not only are the secondaries of both sexes completely white, but the greater coverts also have broad white tips which enlarge the patch considerably.



Plate 169. Velvet Scoters, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014. With much splashing, the males were keen to show off their white secondaries as they rushed across the surface, often directly away from the female.



Plate 170. Velvet Scoters, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014. The female is an adult based on the poorly-marked ear-coverts. Such details on the orange, pinkish-red and black patterning on the male's bill and the prominent nostrils is not often seen.



Plate 171. Velvet Scoter, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014. This male is also an adult based on its jet black underparts. Also note the pale-edged underwing coverts.



Plate 172. Velvet Scoters, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014.



Plate 173. Velvet Scoters, Musselburgh, Lothian, February 2014. Differences in the patterning of the males' bills are evident, as are the lamellae on the sides of the mandibles (not quite as serrated as in the sawbills).

group was almost totally silent, bar a rare short grunt. The birds moved as a group and after 3–4 minutes (and 270 photos), they moved off. Remarkably, on our return an hour later, they were still there! This time, we watched and photographed for a more relaxed 15 minutes.

With the birds so close, it was possible to see more detail on the males' bills than usual. Indeed, the pattern of the black markings, shape of the orange sides and amount of reddish-orange on the tip varied in detail, allowing individuals to be recognised within the group. The white crescent beneath the eye also varied in shape and extent between individuals.

Alas, still no Stejneger's!

*Ian & Jill Andrews, Musselburgh, Lothian.
Email: ijandrews@live.com*

BOOK REVIEWS

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

Penguins, their World, their Ways. Tui De Roy, Mark Jones & Julie Cornthwaite, 2013. Christopher Helm/Bloomsbury, ISBN 978-1-4081-5212-6, hardback, 240 pages, £35.00.

This book describes all 18 penguin species in its 240 large-size pages. The three principal authors appear to be mainly photographers, but their text is supplemented by short contributions from 14 others, all but one being established scientists. The varied, well-chosen photographs occupy more space than the concise text, which is quite detailed as far as it goes, and concentrates on behaviour, distributions, populations, and recent changes. This is not just a photographic, coffee table book. The intended readership is not quite clear, but those going on Antarctic cruises might find it worth checking in advance though at 1.78 kg they might not want to take it with them. At £35 the price is not unreasonable.

John Law

Bird Atlas 2007–11: the breeding and wintering birds of Britain and Ireland. Dawn Balmer, Simon Gillings, Brian Caffrey, Bob Swann, Iain Downie & Rob Fuller, 2013. BTO Books, Thetford, ISBN: 978-1-908581-28-0, hardback, 720 pages, £69.99.

This impressive volume is the fruit of over a decade's work, including four years of fieldwork when SOC members contributed to a database of 19 million observations. Significantly, this is the first national atlas to cover both

the winter and breeding periods, allowing comparison with two previous breeding atlases (1968–72 and 1988–91) and one winter atlas (1981–84).

The first section of the book comprises seven chapters. These detail the history and objectives of the atlas, its survey methods, data analysis and presentation, and some broad observations on changes since the previous atlases. There's even an interesting - for geeks like me at least - chapter on IT work undertaken for the project. It quickly becomes apparent just how complex an enterprise this was to plan and execute.

The main section features individual accounts of 296 of the 502 species recorded during the survey period. Each includes a small photo and a textual summary of the species' status in Britain and Ireland. However the emphasis is firmly on maps showing distribution and relative abundance. Each species features breeding and/or winter distribution maps, augmented in most cases by change maps showing losses and gains since the previous atlases. Relative abundance maps are also included for selected species (sometimes with associated change maps); these provide detail not evident from distribution alone. The maps - with up to seven per species - are inevitably quite small, and will have many readers reaching for a magnifying glass. The breeding maps use a red palette and the

winter maps use blue, making them easy to distinguish. However, the limited colour schemes can sometimes make the maps (in particular the Winter Distribution Change and Breeding Relative Abundance Change) difficult to interpret. It's a nice touch that no page-turning is required within a single species account.

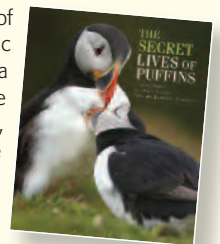
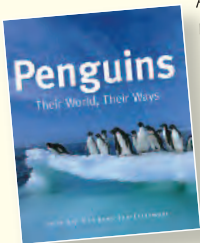
The authors have managed to squeeze a massive amount of useful information into *Bird Atlas 2007–11*. It provides a fascinating picture of the state of our birdlife, and will undoubtedly inspire further research in the years to come. Most birdwatchers will want a copy of the Atlas, which for readers north of the border is a perfect complement to the more text-based *Birds of Scotland*.

Stephen Hunter

The Secret Lives of Puffins. Dominic Couzens, 2013. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, ISBN 978-1408186671, hardback, 176 pages, £20.00.

Puffins are one of our most iconic seabirds and a firm favourite among visitors, but many have little knowledge of the life of the Puffin.

In this book leading wildlife writer Dominic Couzens uncovers the birds' life cycle, behaviour and habitats, along with many fascinating facts and anecdotes. Why can weather conditions affect attendance at a colony? What is 'comfort behaviour'? What do the visual displays communicate to



neighbours, and why an increase in numbers as the season unfolds? From the excavation and nest lining of their burrow, through to the emergence of the puffling, and finally with the season over they depart, to winter where? This book enlightens the reader. A very accessible and enjoyable read complemented with stunning shots from award-winning wildlife photographer Mark Sisson. Each captivating image is accompanied by informative captions.

This is a delightful book, beautifully encapsulating the charm and visual appeal of this iconic bird. It will appeal to all Puffin lovers. This is definitely one for the coffee table.

Maggie Sheddan

The Birds of Clackmannanshire. Neil Bielby, Keith Broomfield & John Grainger, 2013. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Stirling, ISBN: 978-0992692704, hardback, 236 pages, £15.00. Available from SOC HQ Aberlady or n.bielby@sky.com

methodology and a description of the county's characteristics in terms of geography, habitats and climate, the 'meat' of the book divides the birds into breeding species, winter visitors and other species reported during the survey period. The page-length species accounts typically have an attractive breeding and winter map (for residents) incorporating a graphically simple background based on the geographical structure of the area and using a pleasing mix of dots and squares that are well keyed in a small text box. The text comprises four paragraphs: an introduction, a descriptive account of the distribution shown in both summer and winter; and a reflective assessment of local population trends against the national background. Each text also has a vignette by one of almost a dozen artists, all well-known. Some, especially the charcoal sketches, are quite stunningly attractive. As a bonus there is also an account, with maps, of mammals reported during the survey and a number of interesting appendices, including a 'Where to bird-watch' section.

As Ken Shaw says in the foreword, this local atlas is a testament to the folk who get involved with birds, their hard work in both doing the fieldwork and their tenaciousness in following through with what is a fine and stylish example of a local avifauna.

Ray Murray

Migration Hotspots. Tim Harris, 2013. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN: 978-1-4081-7117-2, hardback £25.00. Also available as an e-book.

With a newly published book, the first question is always "what is the target readership?" Having read it, I am not really sure of the answer. There is not enough about migration *per se* for the aficionado,

nor about individual sites for the travelling birder.

The meat of this book is an account of 29 different migration watching places on six continents. Each site gets from four to ten pages, with sections setting out the migration route upon which it lies, migration highlights and mention of the best watch points. These vary somewhat in their depth of coverage. None really provides enough information to enable a visitor to make the best of any of the sites. The only maps are small location maps at the head of each site account.

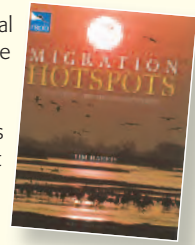
The book is lavishly illustrated throughout with well reproduced colour photographs. Most of these are of a very high standard, which only serves to make the poor ones stand out. For example, there is a fuzzy Buff-breasted Sandpiper on page 44 and a beautiful example of the same species on page 105. It would have been better to use the space for a sharp picture of something not illustrated.

Perhaps the answer to my question is that this is a book for the armchair birding traveller. If that is so, then the book succeeds, as it enables one to get a feel for the places mentioned without having to leave one's favourite reading chair.

Peter M. Macdonald

The Natural Eye, Art Book One. Society of Wildlife Artists, 2013. Red Hare Publishing Ltd, Cley, ISBN 978-0-9569976-7-8, hardback, 120 pages, £20.00.

If, like me, you are a wildlife art fan, you will no doubt know of The Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA).



Local bird atlases tend to be fairly substantial publications, in a large A4 format and sometimes numbering many hundreds of pages. Well it seems appropriate that the 'Wee County' of Clackmannanshire should have produced a 'wee atlas', something much more manageable and easier to handle. The mapping survey work was conducted between 2002 and 2007. Unusually, the basic recording unit for the breeding atlas was the 1-km square (209 were surveyed), with tetrads used for winter distributions.

Following a comprehensive and interesting introduction to the

Its mainly UK membership produces some of the best work in that genre and it holds an annual exhibition called The Natural Eye in London. This delightful book celebrates the 50th anniversary of SWLA by displaying a collection of paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures by 55 of its current members.

A foreword by Chris Packham is followed by introductory sections on SWLA's past, present and future by Robert Gillmor, Harriet Mead and Bruce Pearson, respectively. Then there are one or two pages with illustrations and captions by each of the artists, in alphabetical order. The illustrations, in a wide range of traditional and modern styles, are relatively unfussy, small-scale (although no dimensions are given) and consistently good. Subject matter is varied, with mammals, fish, insects and landscape as well as plenty of birds, and the quality of the paper and reproduction is excellent.



The thing I like best about compilations such as this is discovering exciting artists whose work I was not aware of. Thus, as well as old favourites like John Busby, Robert Greenhalf and Darren Woodhead, it was a real pleasure to find superb work by the likes of Rachel Lockwood, Julia Manning, Barry Sutton and Matt Underwood. The *Art Book One* in the title implies there will be more to come in future years. To me this book represents good value for money and as the proceeds will go towards the SWLA bursary scheme I recommend it for your coffee table!

John Savory

Owls. Mike Toms, 2014. New Naturalist 125, Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-742555-6, 419 pages, hardback, £55, paperback £35.00.

Again we see another gem added to the New Naturalist library with the release of the much-anticipated *Owls*, written by the man who set up the first national survey of the UK's Barn Owl population.



Who doesn't love owls? That floating ghostly shape flying over a field at dusk or the *keewik* of a Tawny often heard whilst in bed with the window open. *Owls* covers the natural history of our five main species found in Britain and Ireland and also doesn't forget the likes of the Snowy and Eagle Owl. The first chapter covers all features of these delightful species from the positioning of the ears, silent flight and why they are nocturnal. Everything is covered in an easy to follow format with lovely flowing text. Often subjects relating to physiology can be quite clunky but not when written by this author. Other chapters cover Foods and Feeding, Breeding Ecology, Movements (a must for anyone who rings owls) and Mortality. The final two chapters were favourites with me. *Owls* and *Humans* covers our relationships with owls through the ages, cultures, literature and more and is followed by the final chapter which is a Guide to the British Species.

Hard-core *New Naturalist* collectors will have already purchased this book, but for those of you out there who like to pick and choose titles from this series, this is one not to be missed. Enjoy.

Hayley Anne Douglas

Enter the Realm of the Golden Eagle. David H. Ellis, 2013. Hancock House Publishers, BC, Canada and WA, USA, ISBN 978-0-88839-704-1 trade edition hardback \$60, ISBN 978-0-88839-705-8 special collectors' edition. 496 pages.

Any ornithologist keen on Golden Eagles will want this mammoth and remarkable book. It includes magnificent photographs and drawings of Golden Eagles, eagle prey, eagle country, eagle enthusiasts. Author and editor David Ellis, a US biologist, studied the bird for a lifetime and wrote many scientific papers. Also he travelled the bird's vast world range and worked with many abroad and at home. His book is not a monograph. It is an extravaganza about and celebration for the bird and its wild haunts, and a fervent plea for better treatment by mankind. Man has often been a ruthless enemy, as on our grouse-moors, much to Scotland's shame. Many authors in different countries contributed their experiences under their names, collated and edited by Ellis. Scientific studies of Golden Eagles began in a tiny part of the bird's vast world range, the Scottish Highlands. Ellis salutes the pioneers, starting with Seton Gordon. There are reminiscences of Seton, Leslie Brown, Charles Palmer, Pat Sandeman and Jeff Watson. Drawings and paintings by Keith Brockie add another Scottish touch to this sumptuous book.



Adam Watson

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.

North Ronaldsay

The Bird Observatory continues to improve both for birds and guests, as our 'Friends' membership picks up pace. Finances for the North Ronaldsay Bird Report have enabled professional printing for the first time in its short existence and our shop produce is growing by the day, improving self-catering options. Two of hopefully four fields within the 35 acre croft land surrounding the Observatory have been sown with various wild seed mixes providing autumn food and cover for birds and finally, a proposed new Heligoland Trap over the West Dyke is an exciting prospect with huge catching potential.

Unfortunately, hopes of seeing the Short-billed Dowitcher and Blue-winged Teal remain and moult into their summer finery were short lived, only the former lingering into January, leaving just the drake Green-winged Teal to remain by spring.

Southerly winds in late February kick-started spring movements with double figures of Skylarks passing through on most days while a few sightings of Little Gulls and Stonechats were notable. February's Glossy Ibis was finally relocated on 2 March and Black-headed Gulls and Meadow Pipits began flooding through as well as Rook on the 5th, Chaffinch on the 6th and the first Siskins, Goldcrest and Sparrowhawk on the 12th. A static period followed as westerly winds set in, but Skylarks continuously flew south with 121 on 22 March, as did one of the observatory staff, leaving just a single observer with occasional help with coverage. A build up of 140 Meadow Pipits on 26 March also saw the arrival of the first three Dunnocks and a White Wagtail. What increasingly looked like fall conditions came to fruition on 30 March with fog grounding many migrants, most notably a Hawfinch, Grey Wagtail, Black Redstart, Mistle Thrush and large numbers of Robins. A text reading "I'm having 30 plus Robins in just a single census..." was strangely gripping despite

being in Israel, as I know there are six census areas on North Ronaldsay and just over one of these is reflected in the published totals. However, the fog and light easterly wind lingered and common migrant totals continued to rise with 53 Robins and 24 Dunnocks on 31 March, while ringing efforts proved a continuous turnover and revealed hidden gems such as a Great Grey Shrike on 2 April. This arrival continued as April progressed and more species were involved, with increasing numbers of Ring Ouzels amongst hundreds of thrushes, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and now Wheatears with 26 on 7 April when coverage returned to normal.

Two smart Ruffs on 8 April were the first of a few spring records and though things slowed, both Sand and House Martin were seen on 11 April and another surge of 91 Skylarks headed south. Many migrants lingered but new for the year were a Short-eared Owl on the 14th, three Dotterels, a Pectoral Sandpiper and Goosander on the 15th and Willow Warbler on the 16th. Spring was speeding up with four Pochard, Pale-bellied Brent Goose and five Lapland Buntings on the 17th, the second island record of Red Kite on 19 April along with a locally rare Stock Dove and another raptor on the 20th, this time a Marsh Harrier. The annual Black Guillemot count totaled 551 individuals and a summer-



Plate 174. Red Kite, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 19 April 2014. © Rael Butcher



Plate 175. Robin, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 23 April 2014. © Rael Butcher

plumaged Slavonian Grebe was in Linklet Bay on the 21st. The 22nd saw the return of fog and light easterlies and with it a second arrival of spring migrants: Wryneck, Pied Flycatcher, Redstart and Tree Pipit were all seen. On 23 April totals included seven Swallows, 37 Robins, 71 Wheatears, three Redstarts, seven Ring Ouzels, ten Blackcaps, Lesser Whitethroat, 13 Chiffchaffs, three Willow Warblers and two Pied Flycatchers. New on the 24th were a pair of Garganey, a Kestrel and two Whimbrels, then on the 26th migrants poured in again with 67 new birds trapped and ringed at Holland House. Two Wood Warblers and a Garden Warbler along the west side were the earliest records of both species and a Hawfinch and four Lesser Redpolls were the pick amongst swelling migrant totals. Blue-headed Wagtail was new on the 26th with another Wryneck and 22 Blackcaps, 28 Chiffchaffs, 18 Willow Warblers, eight Ring Ouzels, 170 Fieldfares, 18 Song Thrushes and seven Tree Pipits. Another Wryneck was trapped and ringed on the 27th. Two Goldfinches, a Common Sandpiper and another Wryneck were trapped and ringed on the 28th which also saw the first Garganey of the spring, a drake on Bridesness Loch. The final day of April produced the first Lapwing chicks of the year, two Barnacle Geese, a Grasshopper Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Black Redstart and single Kestrel and Sparrowhawk.

For bookings & enquiries contact us on: 01857 633200 or Alison@nrbo.prestel.co.uk. You can also visit our website at www.nrbo.co.uk and why not check out our Facebook and Twitter pages?

Rael Butcher

Email: raelbutcher@aol.com

Isle of May

Redevelopment & official re-opening

The redevelopment of the observatory buildings is substantially complete, with the most recent work on the site being directed at external tasks. A substantial amount of the rocks next to the west side of the building has been removed to provide a decent walkway on that side, and the septic tank has been walled-in and the area re-landscaped. The next major task is the installation of solar panels.



Plate 176. Observatory landscaping work, Isle of May, March 2014. © Mark Oksien

The official re-opening of the observatory will take place on Saturday 5 July 2014. The *May Princess* (which provides the regular boat for day visitors to the May) will sail from Anstruther at 11:00 that day, and arrive back around 16:00, with about three hours spent on the island. There will be a brief formal opening ceremony at the Low Light shortly after arrival on the island, to which Trust members have been invited, and members of the public are welcome to come and view the upgraded facilities after that.

Young Birders' Training Course

Once the visitors to the observatory on 5 July have departed for the mainland, the first occupants of the Low Light will be the participants in this new joint venture between the SOC and the IoMBO Trust. The week-long course is specifically directed at younger persons, and is a fitting way to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the observatory, and is one of a number of new activities we will be undertaking as we establish the future direction for the observatory's work.

A total of 37 applications were received by the closing date for the course, including ones from Germany and Finland, illustrating the reach of 'social media' and e-mails in the current birding era. The high quality of submissions made the selection process quite difficult, but it was encouraging to see the level of interest generated and the range of activities already undertaken by the applicants.

Recent sightings

Visits to the Isle of May in the first three months of the year are always sporadic, but usually rewarding, and this year was no exception. A couple of days on the island from 13 January yielded the first winter record of Black Redstart for the May, while two Red-necked Grebes were the first record since 2002. Other good records were Long-tailed Duck and Buzzard, however, the mild winter meant a dearth of passerines escaping the usual sub-zero mainland temperatures. A totally unexpected find on 7 February was the island's first Egyptian Goose. It remained until 24 February and although hardly top of any list of predicted isle firsts, it does follow hot on the heels of Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, White-billed Diver and Bridled Tern in recent years, so anything is indeed possible.

Snow Bunting on 14th, Whooper Swan on 24th and a Black Redstart on 28th. A Ring Ouzel on 31 March remained until at least 3 April. A Brambling on 1st heralded the start of April, while a decent fall on 2nd included a Short-eared Owl, two Black Redstarts, 25 Chiffchaffs, a Willow Warbler, 15 Goldcrests, a Mistle Thrush and a Goosander flying offshore. A Bonxie flew past on 10th, with another on 19th. The first Swallow was on 11th and House Martin on 14th, although both had been seen just off Fife on the crossing on 8th. A pair of Shovelers on 19th was a notable island record, while another Black Redstart was present on 20th. Good conditions on 21 April brought three Lesser Whitethroats, a White Wagtail, Whinchat, a Whimbrel and up to 30 Chiffchaffs amongst other migrants.

Mark Newell & Stuart Rivers

Fair Isle

The year 2013 proved to be a very good one for the Observatory, with record visitor numbers combined with a great run of rare birds. The Fair Isle list rose to 381 species with the addition of Swinhoe's Petrel and Red-eyed Vireo, whilst an outstanding list of vagrants through the year also included: White's Thrush, Grey-cheeked Thrush, Collared Flycatcher, Sykes Warbler, four Lanceolated, River, four Blyth's Reed, two Paddyfield, Booted, two or three Dusky, four Arctic, two Greenish, Melodious and five Subalpine Warblers, nine Two-barred Crossbills, four Thrush Nightingales, three Citrine Wagtails, Red-throated and four Olive-backed Pipits, Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll, two Ortolan, two Rustic and ten Little Buntings, Pallid Harrier, Upland Sandpiper, American Golden Plover, Buff-breasted and two Pectoral Sandpipers, Temminck's Stint, Ring-billed Gull, Roseate Tern, Honey-buzzard, Hobby, Nightjar and two Grey Phalaropes. There were also record ringing totals achieved for Yellow-browed Warbler and Great Spotted Woodpecker as large autumn influxes of these species occurred, whilst both spring and autumn produced some good spells of common and scarce passage migrants. Sadly, another year of poor productivity for several of the isle's breeding seabirds included total failures for Arctic Skua, Kittiwake, Arctic Tern, Common Tern and Guillemot.



Plate 177. Egyptian Goose, Isle of May, 7 February 2014. © David Pickett

The final renovations on the Bird Observatory meant that there was a presence on the isle throughout March, although the observers were restricted in their coverage beyond the Observatory itself. The March highlights were a Short-eared Owl on 3rd, Grey Wagtail on 10th,



Plate 178. The Fair Isle wardening team; Ciaran Hatsell (left), David Parnaby (centre) and Richard Cope (right), Fair Isle, April 2014. © Tommy Hyndman

A series of storms at the start of 2014 saw the year get off to an inauspicious start, with the Good Shepherd being prevented from sailing for almost a month (the longest spell of disruption for the ferry in living memory) and, whilst some food supplies were able to make it in on the plane, supplies of bulky items such as fuel and animal feed were running rather low by the time the sea finally settled. The weather was also at least partially responsible for larger than usual numbers of dead Guillemots being washed up on Fair Isle's beaches and from further south, we have heard the potentially ominous news that three Fair Isle ringed Puffins were found dead on French beaches amongst large numbers of other birds. Our usual work on the breeding seabirds as part of the JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme will help us to gauge what effects these wrecks may have had on our auk populations. We're pleased to have the RSPB STAR (Seabird Tracking and Research) team back on Fair Isle, adding to our knowledge of the habits of our seabirds with their work tracking the feeding trips of various species; with the amount of work from various conservation organisations currently being carried out on the UK's seabirds there is perhaps some hope that we may be able to turn around the fortunes of this beleaguered group.

More positive news from the start of 2014 has been the recruitment of an excellent team. Ciaran Hatsell has joined Richard Cope as Assistant Warden for the season (Plate 178) and

Angela and Alice, both residents of Fair Isle, joining the domestic team along with Kharis (from just slightly further afield, coming from Lerwick), Trixie and Shaun. Ciaran started his first season on Fair Isle well, by finding a Red-flanked Bluetail on his fifth day on the island, whilst an exciting start to the spring migration peaked on 27 April when a Cretzschmar's Bunting was joined by a 'Caspian Stonechat' (the distinctive *variegatus* subspecies of Siberian Stonechat); both fifth records for Britain! The back-up cast that day included Eastern Subalpine Warbler, three Short-toed Larks, seven Wrynecks, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Great Grey Shrike, Blue-headed Wagtail, Kumlien's Gull and a host of common migrants; a reminder that Fair Isle is not just about the autumn! With south-easterly winds continuing as this article is written, there may well be more headline birds to come.

Also of interest was the appearance of Fair Isle on the BBC crime drama 'Shetland', starring Dougie Henshall, earlier this spring. Although only the exterior of the Obs was used, and almost all the other buildings featured weren't actually on Fair Isle, a lot of fun was had trying to spot friends and familiar scenery in the background!

And finally, a reminder that you can keep in touch with all the goings-on of FIBO via the Warden's Blog <http://fibowarden.blogspot.co.uk/> or by following us on Twitter and Facebook.

David Parnaby



Plate 179. American Coot, Loch Flemington, Highland/Moray & Nairn, January 2014. © Simon Eaves

American Coot on Loch Flemington, January–April 2014 - first record for Highland and Moray & Nairn

S.J. EAVES

I've always enjoyed doing some birding at New Year to kick off my year list, so I was pleased when 2014 arrived and a couple of Iceland Gulls were present on 1 January close to where I live near Nethybridge. This was a nice start, but with the weather being so good I vowed to go out again when the weekend came around.

I've lived in Speyside for nearly 18 years now and it has proved a great place to live, but the birding in mid-winter can be really quiet, apart from the resident specialities like Crested Tit, Capercaillie etc. So, when Saturday arrived, I drove up to the Black Isle and the Inverness area. I started by dipping the long-staying Ring-billed Gull in Dingwall, which I have missed on countless occasions now. I then went looking for Golden Eagles up a nearby glen, but I had no luck here either. The day wasn't going great.

My main aim for the day was to see the Lesser Scaup at Alturlie, close to Inverness on the Moray Firth, which had been reported several times over the last few days. However, with the high tide not till mid-afternoon I had left my visit until late in the day to increase my chances of seeing it close up. My fortunes turned, and the Lesser Scaup showed quite well on very calm seas swimming with a small flock of Scaup and so I ran down my camera battery trying to take a few digiscope shots of it. There's some good birding here on the inner firth and I added Slavonian Grebe, Long-tailed Duck, Pintail and that great Highland rarity - Great Crested Grebe!

With a flat camera battery and little light left in the short winter day, I decided to drive home via Loch Flemington (on the Highland/Moray & Nairn boundary), which is only a few miles

away, to maybe get a few more year ticks before it got dark. I've seen some good birds here in the past including American Wigeon and Smew so it's always worth a look. In Speyside, Moorhen and Coot are both really quite scarce, so I hadn't seen either yet this year. Loch Flemington being shallow and weedy is a good site for both, and I had these two species on my mind as I drove there.

The best layby to view the loch is at the far end, so I stopped here where loads of Whooper Swans were incredibly close to the shore which was nice and there were several Moorhens for my year list. I just needed a Coot now! Only 20 m or so away I noticed something a bit odd, white undertail coverts on a bird swimming directly away from me that looked like a Coot, but I couldn't see its face. When it turned its head to the side and I saw its bill, I could see a bill-band and a straight feather edge at the base of the bill. I immediately thought that it looked very 'American'. I had seen American Coot a couple of times before over in the USA and Canada, but knowing its rarity here I was still thinking "no it can't be". The next thing that went through my head was my flat camera battery, however somehow the camera switched on and I managed to get a couple of record shots in the failing light before the camera shut down again. There was still a slight niggly of doubt in my mind, I'd had poor views in bad light and wasn't sure what a potential hybrid Coot x Moorhen would look like, as I had read that hybrids of the two could happen.

Since I was unable to review my photos and with the light almost gone, I drove home to view the photos and sent them to a friend Dave Pullan and he was in agreement that from the photos it looked like an American Coot. Knowing that birders would travel a long way to see an American Coot in mainland Britain, the two of us drove back the following morning to get sufficient views to be one hundred percent sure of the identification and to confirm it was still present before putting the news out.

A heavy frost had frozen most of the Loch and initially there was no sign of the bird. When we finally relocated the American Coot, but it was quite obscured at first, spending a lot of time on some water hidden near some overhanging trees which was free of ice. It then flew onto a small overgrown island, where it stayed out of sight for some time. However, we eventually had good enough views to see all the identification features and put the news out. Within half-an-hour local birders started to arrive and fortunately the bird spent more time in the open feeding in a small weedy bay. It was an amazing way to start the year and a friend who arrived to twitch the American Coot even pointed out a Common Coot to me for my year list!

Several people saw the bird by the end of the first afternoon, but it then proceeded to remain at this site for over four months, giving many more from all over the country a chance to see it. The bird was last seen on 14 April.

Simon Eaves, Highland

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Plate 180. American Coot, Loch Flemington, Highland/Moray & Nairn, January 2014. © Marcus Conway



Plate 181. American Coot, Loch Fleminton, Highland/Moray & Nairn, February 2014. © *Darren Robson*



Plate 182. American Coot with Moorhen, Loch Flemington, Highland/Moray & Nairn, January 2014. © *Ewan Urquhart*



Plate 183. American Coot, Loch Fleminton, Highland/Moray & Nairn, February 2014. © *Dave Pullan*

American Coot status in Scotland

This species breeds in North America from southernmost Yukon Territory and Northern Territories south to California into Central and northern South America, and south-eastwards across Canada to just east of the Great Lakes and eastwards across the USA to Indiana south to Louisiana, and in Florida. Canadian populations and those in central USA migrate for the winter, retreating south of a line from southern Alberta south-east to southern Colorado and east from there to the Atlantic states and north along the Eastern Seaboard to Massachusetts.

There have been six accepted records of American Coot in Britain to the end of 2012, with four of these in Scotland, and a further record from 2012 is still in circulation with BBRC:

- 1996 Kent, one, Stodmarsh, 16–19 April
- 1999 Cumbria, one, South Walney, 17 April
- 2003 Shetland, one, Loch of Clickimin, Lerwick, 30 November to 5 April 2004
- 2004 Outer Hebrides, one, West Loch Ollay, South Uist, 25 January to 7 April
- 2004 Dumfries & Galloway, one, Castle Loch, Lochmaben, 11–17 February
- 2004 Shetland, presumed same individual as 2003, Loch of Benston, Mainland, 13 November to 28 March 2005
- 2005 Shetland, presumed same as 2003 & 2004, Loch of Benston, Mainland, 24 September to 1 October
- 2005 Outer Hebrides, one, Coot Loch, Linidate, South Uist, 25 February to 25 March
- [2012 Outer Hebrides, Eilean nan Ramh, South Uist, 26 December]



Plate 184. American Coot, Loch Flemington, Highland/Moray & Nairn, February 2014. © Dave Hutton

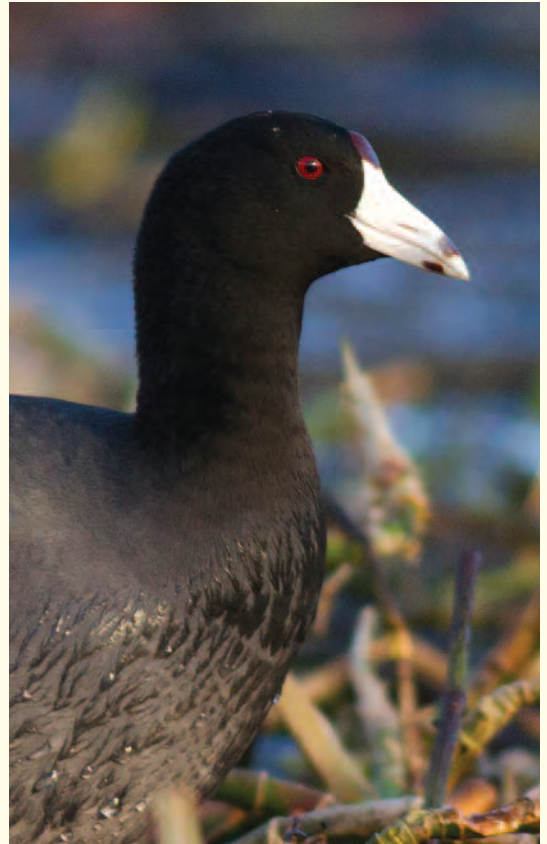


Plate 185. American Coot, Loch Flemington, Highland/Moray & Nairn, ebruary 2014. © Jacob Everitt

Note that the 2005 Outer Hebrides individual is not considered a returning bird by BBRC (contra comments in Forrester et al. 2007). The pattern of find dates and duration of stays is consistent with birds being displaced across the Atlantic in autumn or early winter, and possibly filtering south within the UK or even Europe, then moving north again in spring. The Scottish records all come from relatively small lochs. This species is relatively inconspicuous and could easily be overlooked on larger water bodies among large gatherings of Common Coots and as such is probably under-recorded.

Reference

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



Plate 186. American Robin, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, November 2013. © Ian Thompson

American Robin on South Uist, 21–28 November 2013 - second record for the Outer Hebrides

I. THOMPSON

With my wife and I being long standing members of the BTO, and Yvonne their Region Rep here in the Uists, neither of us are strangers to surveys. It was during one such survey, The 2007–11 Bird Atlas, when we were covering the “unloved and unwanted” tetrads, that we discovered South Locheynort. Just across the water from the well-known hotspot to the north, the area had a variety of habitats including young trees and shrubs - which made it particularly interesting, a road passing through the centre giving easy access by foot, plus it was not frequented by other birders. We both agreed at the time that it would be worth ‘birding’ and should be considered for future surveys. With this in mind, when the BTO Winter Thrush Survey was announced, we decided to cover two squares at South Locheynort in addition to the ones we normally cover at North Locheynort.

November had been a particularly blustery month with northerly winds gusting to over 50 mph and rain most days, so when Thursday 21st dawned and it was calm, I felt I had to take advantage of the moment. Unfortunately, Yvonne could not join me on that particular day, so I was to go alone. I decided that the best use of the break in the weather would be survey the four squares at North and South Locheynort as they could be covered during the morning and there may well be some good opportunities to photograph the Otters and seals that are regularly seen there.

North Locheynort was quieter than I had expected, with just a few more Blackbirds and Song Thrush than usual, but no Redwings. Though very much in evidence around the island over the previous days, they had probably taken advantage of the overnight conditions to move on.

The situation was similar at South Locheynort but there were a few Redwings to be seen. By the time I finished the survey, I had a few shots of the seals loafing on the rocks, good views of a sub-adult White-tailed Eagle and an adult Golden Eagle being mobbed by a male Hen Harrier. Not unusual sights around Locheynort, but a good day's birding just the same.

Just as I was returning to the car, I heard the "tut,tut,tut" of a thrush. The bird then flew from right to left in front of me and landed on a rock some 60 yards away in a rough pasture. I may well not have taken any notice on another day, but having seen so few thrushes I thought I might include it on the survey. I could see that it had the size and build of a *Turdus* thrush. To my naked eye it appeared to be more erect and robust, but even so, when raising my binoculars to view the bird, my thoughts were more on what square to place it in rather than "this is different".

What I saw was very familiar to me having birded and ringed in North America on many occasions, but I was very much surprised to see it now. A large thrush with a black head, orange breast and belly, and a grey back - it was an American Robin.

The bird then flew to the road some 200 yards ahead of me and spent some time foraging in the rough pasture and along the grass verge beside the road. I watched and photographed it for some 15 minutes, during which time it allowed me to approach within 50 yards before it flew up to sit on the fence and subsequently moved some 10 to 20 yards further away. Eventually, however, it flew east and out of sight.

Having no mobile telephone with me, I returned home to inform some of the local birders. I returned later that afternoon when the bird was relocated on a large vegetable patch covered in seaweed, some 100 yards from the road and close to one of the few houses in South Locheynort, where it stayed until dusk. It was subsequently revealed that the bird had been seen some four days previously, but the landowners did not want the news to be made public.

The bird showed a particular liking for the seaweed-strewn vegetable plot, but also frequented other areas near the house and in the surrounding rough pastures. This gave those people who had travelled an opportunity to see the bird at closer quarters. It was last seen there



Plate 187. American Robin, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, November 2013. © Ian Thompson

on 16 December; again by me and as I was conducting the same Winter Thrushes survey. Subsequently, there was a tentative report from Balivanich, Benbecula just before Christmas.

Is it just me, but after seeing such birds, I can't stop wondering "where is it now?"

Ian Thompson, Askernish, South Uist

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American Robin status in Scotland

This species breeds widely across North America from northernmost Alaska south to northern California and into Mexico, and eastwards across sub-Arctic Canada to Newfoundland, and the USA to Georgia. The vast majority of the Alaskan and Canadian breeding populations migrate to wintering areas south of a line from southernmost Alberta across to the southern Great Lakes area and coastal New England, with birds wintering throughout the USA and Central America as far south as Guatemala.

There have been 25 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2012 (all singles), with eight of these in Scotland - the first a bird at Grimsetter,

Mainland Orkney in 1961, and the last a bird at Glenmore Forest Park, Speyside in May 2006 (Forrester et al. 2007). As would be expected for a Nearctic vagrant, the majority of British records are from western areas, notably south-west England and the Isles of Scilly. The Scottish records are mostly distributed in northern and western areas: Shetland (1967, 1982), Orkney (1961), Outer Hebrides (1975), Caithness (1981), Speyside (2006), North-east Scotland (1988) and Dumfries & Galloway (1966).

Find dates for birds recorded in Britain are distributed from 10 October (Tresco, Isles of Scilly 2006) through the autumn, winter and spring to 27 May (Orkney 1961), markedly different to the pattern of occurrence of the other Nearctic thrush species which have been recorded in Britain. Ten American Robins have been recorded in Ireland, and these fit within the same pattern of occurrence except for one present at Edenderry, Co. Offaly from 8 June to the end of July 1983.

Reference

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

Plate 188. American Robin, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, November 2013. © Ian Thompson



Marsh Sandpiper on North Uist, December 2013–March 2014 - second record for the Outer Hebrides and the first overwintering record for Britain

S. DUFFIELD



Plate 189. Marsh Sandpiper, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, January 2014. © *John Kemp*

Some rare birds are almost expected to turn up given particular conditions at certain times of year and in key locations. Even so, finding such rarities involves a certain amount of skill and a degree of luck. Then there are the big rarities, those that are not seen every year such as an eye-watering American warbler or skulking chat from the Far East. These not only induce feelings of euphoria for the finder/s but may also create panic, uncontrollable shaking and even self-doubt. Although the following account is not of a huge rarity, the unprecedented nature of the occurrence induced similar disbelief and eye-rubbing from the original observers.

30 December 2013 dawned a decent day on the Uists which was certainly not the norm in a month filled with gales and rain; and so it seemed just the right sort of day to head out birding. It just so happened, that John Kemp was on the same line of thought. The temptation of some good birds around North Uist saw John heading north from his base in South Uist, picking me up en route for a quick tour of the west side of the island. After a successful visit to Balranald where we got reasonable views of the Pied-billed Grebe and a

Glossy Ibis we moved on to the Kyles Paible / Rubh' Arnal area. A few days prior to our visit I'd seen both Glaucous and Iceland Gulls feeding in the area, so we parked at Kyles Paible (not my normal parking spot) and walked along the shore.

After an hour, four white-winged gulls and 50 Snow Buntings later, we were heading back satisfied with our day when I happened to notice a small to medium sized wader standing in a flood pool nearby. It wasn't possible to see its legs as the water was deep enough to totally conceal them, but the relatively long, fine, pointed bill, long neck and small head made John and I think of Lesser Yellowlegs.

It and we stood motionless looking at each other until a Redshank called the alarm and sent the mystery wader and a small group of 'shanks heading off into the distance. As the un-identified wader headed away we instinctively searched for the square, white rump of a yellowlegs but instead saw a long, white triangular patch extending up towards the mantle. This really threw me and although a fleeting thought of Marsh Sandpiper had

crossed my mind I had been expecting the bird so much to be a Lesser Yellowlegs that I had hit an identification impasse. What would a Marsh Sandpiper be doing in the far north-west of the UK in winter anyway?

The party of waders regrouped and flew off to further flood pools to the west at which point you could clearly see that the other bird amongst the Redshanks was smaller and had incredibly long legs in proportion to its overall length. John was sharper off the mark than I and suggested that the bird was a Marsh Sandpiper. A sense of disbelief crept over me as it dawned on me that John had to be right; what else could it be with the large, white flash on the upper parts; the long, thin beak and the long legs.

We decided to try and get better views and maybe some shots instead of returning to the car for a scope and approached the flock once more. Even at a distance of around 200 metres you could pick the sandpiper out from the Redshanks by its much whiter appearance and slightly smaller and more elegant shape. The Redshanks, as usual, were jumpy and noisily lifted as we attempted to approach within a reasonable range, taking the sandpiper with them, although

each time it just cemented our belief that we were looking at a Marsh Sandpiper.

Being the middle of winter, the days were short and light was already beginning to fade at 14:30 so I returned to the car for my scope whilst John hoped for better shots. We watched the bird alongside the Redshanks for a further 20 minutes before heading back as the sun was heading for the horizon. In a further lucky break the sandpiper flew past us and landed on a pile of seaweed along the shore. Here it became separated from the Redshanks and allowed a much closer approach and us to attain some much better shots as the sun was setting.

On returning home I had to steady myself with a strong drink as I waited for the photos to download and the sandpiper became "national news". The bird hung around the Kyles Paible area until 19 January 2014 and was subsequentially reported from Loch nam Feithean, Balranald on 3rd, 9th and 10 March.

*Steve Duffield (Western Isles Wildlife),
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Plate 190. Marsh Sandpiper, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, January 2014. © Steve Duffield (Western Isles Wildlife)



Plate 191. Marsh Sandpiper, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, January 2014. © Steve Duffield (*Western Isles Wildlife*)

Marsh Sandpiper status in Scotland

This main breeding range for this species extends from Belarus and the Ukraine eastwards through central Russia between 48° and 58° N to northernmost NE China, with isolated populations in Finland and easternmost Europe. Eastern populations are entirely migratory and winter in Africa south of the Sahara.

There have been 10 previous accepted records in Scotland out of a total of 138 in Britain up to the end of 2012, with just five records in Ireland in this period. The majority of British records are from coastal counties in south-east England, and the species shows a preference for freshwater bodies rather than saltwater or brackish habitats.

The most recent accepted record in Scotland was an individual found at Pool of Virkie, and then seen at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland Shetland on 7 July 2012. The nine records prior to that involve four in spring seen between 20 April and 19 May, one on 29 July, and four in 'autumn' between 23 August and 9 October (Forrester et al. 2007). Elsewhere in Britain, the earliest record is of one on 17 April (Suffolk 2003) and the latest was one present on 3–12 October (Somerset 1982).

There has been one previous record from the Outer Hebrides - an adult at Loch Sandary, North Uist on 8–9 October 1994. This was the latest find date for a Marsh Sandpiper in Britain prior to the 2013/14 bird, with the second latest a first-winter present at Dingwall Bay, Ross & Cromarty, Highland on 4–5 October 2000, perhaps hinting at the possibility of future late records in Scotland. Only the Chew Valley/Blagdon Lake bird in Somerset 1982 had lingered to a later date.

Reference

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



Plate 192. Marsh Sandpiper, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, January 2014. © Steve Duffield (*Western Isles Wildlife*)

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 January to 31 March 2014

S.L. RIVERS

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

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ays; 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 weather continued to be mild into January, with only limited snowfall away from upland areas, but plenty of rain until wintry gales, snow and rain arrived from the north on 25th. The unprecedented over-wintering of the Short-billed Dowitcher and Marsh Sandpiper was also mirrored at regional level with other species. A succession of SW gales swept across the country throughout February, but the Jet Stream moved north in early March to allow warmer temperatures and sunnier conditions to take hold.

Bewick's Swan: two were with a group of 10 Whooper Swans that flew past Pathead, Kirkcaldy, Fife on 14 March; one was with Whooper Swans at Loch of Skene (NES) on 25 March. **Taiga Bean Goose:** the regular wintering flock on the Slamannan Plateau (Clyde/UF) held 211 birds on 9 January, but counts dropped to 84 by 30 January. **Snow Goose:** an intermediate and a white-morph were still at Tayinloan (Arg) from 2013 to end March; a white-morph

was still at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) to 20 January, and then at Rattray Head (NES) from 21 January to 4 February, with two noted there from 7 February to end March, with both at Strathbeg on 16–17 February. Two white-morph birds were in the Boisdale/Garrynamonie area, South Uist from 14 January to 28 February. Two blue morphs near Forth, Clyde on 13 January, were presumably the same birds seen at Skinflats (UF) on 16–19th, and Braehead, and Carnwath, both Clyde on 28 January to 16 February, nearby at Netherton, Clyde on 21–29 March, and then back at Braehead. A white-morph was at Crieff (P&K) on 3 February; one at Muthil (P&K) on 10 February to 5 March; a blue-morph was at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 16 February to 31 March; two white-morph birds were on the Isle of Muck (High) on 10 March; and two on Isle of Iona (Arg) on about 14–25 March (like the OH birds, one bore a metal ring); a blue-morph was at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 25 March, and it or another at Leys of Crossen/Linross (A&D) on 26–27th. **Vagrant Canada/Cackling Geese:** a Richardson's CG (form *hutchinsii*) was at Uskentule, Islay (Arg) on 1 January; two were at Malacleit, North Uist (OH) on 11 January. February sightings were all from Islay with one at Eorrabus on 8th; one at Port Akaig and two near Bridgend on 9th; at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve on 15th; Bridgend again on 16th; with two still on the island until 11 March at least, and one still on 26th. A Todd's Canada Goose (race *interior*) was at just west of Campbeltown, Kintyre

(Arg) on 18 February to 5th and 18 March. **Red-breasted Goose:** an unringed individual was in the Southerness area (D&G) on 11 March (possibly a returning bird from 2012 & 2013), though another present before and during this bird's occurrence bore a plastic-ring and was presumably an escaped captive bird. Both birds were nearby at Mersehead RSPB Reserve on 15 March, with the unringed bird back at Southerness later that day, and present at one or other location to 28th at least.

American Black Duck: the presumed returning drake [first seen 2007] was at Strontian (High) from 5 February to 25 March.

American Wigeon: one was still at Loch Saintear, Westray (Ork) on 1–8 January and 9 February; a drake at Udale Bay (High) from 2013 to 30 March, and one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) to 10 January. A drake was at Loch Bornish, South Uist (OH) from 9 February to 12 March, with it or another at Loch Bee, South Uist on 28 February; one was at Foulden (Bord) in March. **Green-winged Teal** [all records refer to drakes]: on Shetland one was at Loch of Flugarth/North Roe, Mainland (Shet) to 24 January and again on 22 February. One was on Fair Isle on 18–22 March. On Orkney one remained on North Ronaldsay (Ork) to 28 January, with one again on 21–25 February and 1–11 March; one was at Loch of Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 18 January and again on 14 February; one was at Loch of Clumly, Mainland (Ork) on 1 March; one was at Graemeshall, Mainland (Ork) on 24 March. Singles were at Coot

Loch, Benbecula (OH) on 10 January, and Loch Mor, Benbecula (OH) on 9 February. One was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from 10 January to 4 February, with it or another at Rattray Head (NES) on 27 February, and one at Port Allen (P&K) on 23 January. In Argyll one was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) to 21 January, and one at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 25–31 March. In Ayrshire one was at Broadwood Flash on 5th and 30 January, 18–23 February and 2 March, with it or another at Martnaham Loch on 12 January, and Mossblown on 13 March. The drake at Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) stayed from 2013 to end March, with two on 24 February, and one nearby at Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 2 January. **Blue-winged Teal:** one was at Loch of Busquoy, Mainland (Ork) on 18 January, and an elusive, presumed returning, drake was at Threave (D&G) from 15 February into March. **Ring-necked Duck:** a drake was at Broadwood Flash (Ayr) on 5 January, with presumably the same at Traboch Loch on 18 January to 11 February, and Martnaham Loch (both Ayr) on 19 January; a female was again at Loch Scaraidh, North Uist (OH) from 1 February to end March; one was at Mickle Loch (NES) on 8th and 20 January, and 2nd and 7 February, and nearby at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve on 10–17 February. A drake was at Lugar (Ayr) on 28 February, and it or another at Loch o' the Lowes (Ayr) on 12 March. A drake was on Loch Ballygrant, Islay (Arg) on 19–26 March. **Lesser Scaup:** a female was at Alturlie Point, near Inverness (High) from December 2013 to 14 January, and again on 24–30 March; a female at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 8 January to 9 February; a drake was at Loch Watten, near Thurso (Caith) again on 2 January to 4 March, and one at St John's Loch (Caith) on 24 February to 1 March.

King Eider: a female remained off Fidra/Yellowcraig, (Loth) to 24 January, with two there from 25 January to 16 February, venturing as far as Gullane Point, and one again from 27 February to 29 March. A female was noted intermittently at Ruddons Point, Fife from 16 January to 18 March. Adult drakes were in Bluemull Sound (Shet) on 10 January, off Nairn (M&N) still on 15th and 26th, and two off Hopeman Point (M&N) on 28th; with a drake still at Burghead (M&N) on 30 January. A first-winter drake was off Musselburgh (Loth) on 11 January. The drake remained at Bluemull Sound throughout February, with a female there on 10–17 February; a drake was again off Nairn on 12 February. A drake was at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 15–22 March. **Surf Scoter:** a drake was off Ruddons Point/Largo Bay, Fife from 2013 into February, and again through March to 27th, with it or another off Buckhaven, Fife on 23rd; a drake was between Musselburgh and Portobello (Loth) from December 2013 to end March, with it or another nearby off Prestonpans on 19 February. A first-winter female was off Peninerine/Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 18 January to 9 February, and a female was on Campbeltown Loch, Kintyre (Arg) on 28 March into April. **Stejneger's (White-winged) Scoter:** an adult drake at Musselburgh (Loth) on 26 December 2013 was retrospectively identified from photographs: it constitutes the first record for Britain. **Smew:** up to 20 possibly wintered, including: a drake at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 2013 to end March; a redhead still at Loch na Bo (M&N) from 2013 to 29 March; a redhead at Loch Gelly, Fife still from 2013, with two on 6 January, and a drake and two redheads on 20th, two redheads from 21 January and one still on 17 February to 31 March. A redhead was at Loch Drummond (UF) from 2013 to 22 February; a redhead was still at Loch Leven

(P&K) from 2013, with two on 20 January, and four on 30th, and one still on 18 February, and a redhead was at Port Allen (P&K) from 6 January to end March. A drake and a redhead were at Lochore, Fife on 7–11 January, with the drake still present to 19 January; a drake was at Loch of Snarravoe/Stourhall, Unst (Shet) from 10 Jan to 29 March; a drake at Loch of Lintrathen (A&D) on 12 January; a redhead at Loch o' the Lowes (Ayr) on 22 January to 16 March; a redhead at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve from 31 Jan to end March; a redhead on Carlingwark Loch (D&G) on 11 February to 9 March, with a drake at Souleseat Loch, near Stranraer (D&G) on 10–17 March; a redhead was at Meikle Loch (NES) on 19 February; a redhead was at Tomdow (M&N) on 20 February; a drake was at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve, Clyde from 21 February to end March, and another at Loch Pabil, West Burra, Mainland (Shet) on 25–28 February. **Wood Duck:** a splendid drake was on Loch a' Mhuilinn, Stoneybridge, South Uist (OH) on 27–30 March.

White-billed Diver: one was off Kirkabister, Bressay (Shet) on 5 January; one was seen again off St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11–14 January; one was off Roseheartly (NES) from 30 January to 1 February. One flew past Burghead (M&N) on 2 February; one was off Loch of Snarravoe, Unst (Shet) on 7 February and intermittently in Bluemull Sound during the month; one was off Tiumpian Head, Lewis (OH) on 7 February; one at Reay/Sandside Bay (High) on 7–10 February, and further singles were noted from Belmont, Unst and Sound Gruney, Fetlar (both Shet) on 10 February, and still at latter site on 17 February, with three in Scapa Flow and one still off St. Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay (both Ork) the same day, the latter still present to 8 March. Two were in Gruinard Bay

(High) on 24 February. In March one was in Water Sound off South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2–8th, and one off Belmont, Unst again on 7th, but as in 2013, Portsoy (NES) proved to be the main hotspot, with up to 10 off there on 26th and 14 on 29th. Singles were off Herston, South Ronaldsay (Ork) and at Lochinver and Brae of Achnahaird (both High) on 30th, and two at Skigersta, Lewis (OH) on 31st. **Leach's Petrel:** a notable sighting was of one in Bluemull Sound (Shet) on 20 January.

Bittern: singles were at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) throughout January into April; at Castle Loch, near Lochmaben (D&G) from 2013 to 27 February; at Crook of Baldoon RSPB Reserve, near Wigtown (D&G) on 17 January; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 19th, and at Northmavine, Mainland (Shet) on 29 January. **Little Egret:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 19–22 February, and one in North Ford, off Grimsay (OH) on 17 March. One was at Loch Flemington (High/M&N) on 11–12 January; one near Inverness Airport (High) on 2 February, and one at Kingsteps (M&N) on 6–26 February. One was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve (NES) from 14 January throughout February, and one frequented the Angle Park/Mountcastle area, Fife on 23–26 March. In Upper Forth, one was in the Skinflats area from 2–19 January at least, with one at Powfoulis on 1 February, and Skinflats on 2nd and 20th; two between the Kincardine and Clackmannanshire Bridges on 21 February, two off Clackmannanshire Bridge on 3 March, and one again at Skinflats on 9th. In Lothian one was at Belhaven Bay on 12th & 19 January, and at Tynninghame to the end of March, with one at Aberlady Bay on 8 February at least. One was at Paxton House (Bord) throughout January, and one at

Coldstream (Bord) on 12 March. In Clyde singles were at Carbars and Barons Haugh RSPB Reserve on 11 January. In Ayrshire, one was still at near Irvine on 9 January, and again on 12 February; one still in the Loans area on 13th, one at Pow Burn, north of Prestwick on 17 February to 4 March, and one intermittently at Ardeer Quarry, near Stevenston in March. In Dumfries & Galloway, there were up to 13 in January, with numbers seemingly reduced in February and March, though nine were present in Wigtown Bay on 6 March, and one was present at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve most of the month.

Great White Egret: one was noted intermittently in the Loch Kinnord/Tarland area (NES) from 2013 through to 18 March. One was at Keir Mill (D&G) on 7 January; one at Brow Well (D&G) on 15 February, and one near Kirkcudbright (D&G) on 30 March. **Glossy Ibis:** on Shetland one was at Ungirsta, Unst (Shet) on 6–9 January, then at Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 10–11th and Baltasound, Unst on 12 January. On Orkney one was at Tankerness/Langskail, Mainland from 2013 to 8 January, with one on Papa Westray on 1st, and presumed same was then on Westray on 17 January to 3 February. One was on North Ronaldsay on 21 February and 2–27 March. On the Outer Hebrides at least nine were present in January including three at Balivanich, Benbecula on 1–6 January, two at Daliburgh, South Uist until 12 January, and one in the Balranald area, North Uist to 10 February. Elsewhere singles were near Loch Watten (Caith) on 1–4 January, with it or another at Loch Heilen (Caith) on 7 January; at Broadford, Isle of Skye (High) on 11 January; at Kirkapoll, Tiree (Arg) on 13 January; at Ballencrieff, near Aberlady (Loth) on 16 January, and just south of Kinross (P&K) on 6–27 March.

Black-necked Grebe: one was noted off Gullane Point (Loth) from 5 January, from Kilspondie/Aberlady Bay on 9 February, and Gullane again to 9 March at least. **Pied-billed Grebe:** one (present since 2013) remained at Loch nam Feithean/Loch Scaraidh, near Balranald, North Uist (OH) throughout. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** two were near Camster (Caith) on 28 January. **Gyrfalcon:** a white-morph bird was near Poolewe (High) on 1 January; one at Black Craig, Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 2nd; one at Reiss Golf Course/Loch of Wester, near Wick (Caith) on 22 January, and presumably the same just south of Wick on 5 February. A white-morph was at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 27 February, and another at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 28 March. **Crane:** one flew over Ballygrant/Loch Skerrols, Islay (Arg) on 14 January; two were seen near Castleton of Essie/Glamis (A&D) on 20–24 Jan, and these may account for two seen at Meigle (P&K) on 25th; two were near Burghead (M&N) on 26th, two at Dingwall (High) on 27th, two near Burghead (M&N) on 28th, and also two at Finavon (A&D) on 29 January. Two were at Meigle again on 9–10th and 20 February, two at Castleton of Eassie (A&D) on 11 February, and at Uddingston, Clyde on 13 February; one flew over Carnoustie (A&D) on 18 February, one was at Bridge of Cally (P&K) on 6 March, and four reported flying over Archerfield (Loth) on 25 March. **American Coot:** one was at Loch Flemington (High/M&N) from 4 January to the end of March.

Ruff: one frequenting Loch a' Phuill, Islay (Arg) was the first overwintering bird for the island. **Short-billed Dowitcher:** the first-winter found on North Ronaldsay (Ork) in December 2013 was seen there again on 7th and 10 January. **Marsh Sandpiper:** one was near Kyles Paible, North Uist (OH) from 30 December 2013 to 19 January

2014, and seen again there on 3rd and 9–10 March - the latest one has ever been found in Britain and the first to overwinter. **Grey Phalarope:** one was seen off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13 January; one was at Peninerine, South Uist (OH) on 17–19 January, one at Ardivachar, South Uist on 22nd; one at Baleshare, North Uist on 27th; one at Nairn (M&N) on 30 January; one at Stevenston (Ayr) on 11 February, and one at Donmouth, Aberdeen (NES) on 27 February. **Great Skua:** sightings on Orkney in mid to late January were the first ever there "in winter". **Pomarine Skua:** one was off Ardrishaig (Arg) on 3 January.

Sabine's Gull: one was seen at Kennedy's Pass (Ayr) on 5 January. **Mediterranean Gull:** over a dozen reported from regular sites in southern Scotland in January and February, elsewhere a juvenile was at Loch of Skene (NES) on 2–4 January; an adult at Fraserburgh (NES) on 10 January. A first-winter was in the Rerwick Head/Inganess Bay area, Mainland (Ork) on 12 February, and an adult was at the Stobbie Ponds, Dundee (A&D) on 22 February. One at Rosebery Reservoir (Loth on 15 March was a good inland record, and one was at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 31 March. **Bonaparte's Gull:** a first-winter was at Loch Gilp (Arg) on 5 January; a presumed returning bird was at Scrabster/Thurso (Caith) from 25 February to 11 March; one was at Loch Caolisport/Ormsary (Arg) on 2–11 March, and one at Castletown (Caith) on 26 March. **Franklin's Gull:** one was on Canna (High) from late January to 10 March. **Ring-billed Gull:** the adult remained at Dingwall (High) from 2013 to 28 March at least; a first-winter was at Loch of Skene, (NES) on 11 January; an adult was at Newburgh, Fife from 28 February to 23 March. **Thayer's Gull:** a juvenile was at Bruichladdich, Islay (Arg) from 2 March into April (possibly present since 27

February). **American Herring Gull:** a first-winter was in the Campbeltown area (Arg) from 6 February to 15 March at least.

Iceland Gull: relatively low numbers in January, with about five on both Shetland and Orkney, and around 10 on the Hebrides. Highest counts were four at Rubh' Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 9th, and four at Stornoway Harbour, Lewis (OH) on 18th. Elsewhere there were two Collieston (NES) on 1–2nd; two at Nethybridge (High) on 1st and two at Loch Oire (M&N) on 9th and into February. Slightly more in February with about eight on Shetland, five on Orkney, and seven in Highland, and a peak elsewhere of four at Stornoway Harbour, Lewis on 23 February. In March largest counts were of four at Campbeltown, Kintyre (Arg) on 5–18th, with five there on 15th, four at Balranald, North Uist on 4–11th and 30th, four still at Stornoway on 10–13th, and three on Fair Isle on 28th. **Kumlien's Gull:** a juvenile was on Fair Isle from 12 February to 28 March. On the Outer Hebrides a third-winter was in the Rubh' Arnal to Hougharry area, North Uist (OH) from 9 January to 23 March; with an adult joining it at Balranald/Traigh Iar on 3 March, and both plus a juvenile there on 6th. A juvenile was at Kildonan, South Uist on 29 January to 1 February, and a juvenile at Stornoway on 9–15 March at least. Two juveniles were at Thurso/Scrabster (Caith) on 20 January to 2 March, with possibly another at Thurso on 25 February, a third-winter on 27 February, and a juvenile still to 10 March. A juvenile was at Mallaig (High) on 16 February and 6–25 March, with another at Achnahaird/Enard Bay (High) on 25 March. A juvenile was at Loch Oire (M&N) from 11 February to 1 March; one flew past Barns Ness (Loth) on 23 February, with one at White Sands (Loth) on 26–28 February. In Argyll, two

juveniles were at Machrihanish, Kintyre on 20 January, nearby at Drumlemble on 21–22nd, and at Machrihanish again on 26–27 January and a third-winter was there on 19 March. A juvenile was at Loch Melfort on 13 February; a third-winter at Stewarton/Campbeltown from 18 February to at least 18 March, a juvenile was at Bowmore, Islay on 27 February, and a juvenile at Traigh nan Gilean, Tiree on 10 March. A second-winter was at Bishopburn, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 8–14 March. **Glaucous Gull:** moderate numbers in north and NW locations in January, including up to 20 on Shetland, with a few elsewhere - best counts were: 11 at Kildonan, South Uist (OH) on 27th, with 10 there on 29th, and at least 10 elsewhere on OH; seven on Foula (Shet) on 6th; up to six on Tiree on 4–26th. Slightly more in February with around 10 on Shetland and at least 21 still on the Outer Hebrides, with highest counts of eight at Aird an Runair, North Uist on 1st, with seven there on 23rd, and seven at Kildonan also on 1st. Eleven were between Sandaig and Hough Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 21 February. In March highest totals came from Argyll and Shetland, both with at least eight, and the Outer Hebrides, with the latter hosting 10 at Balranald and five elsewhere on North Uist (alone) on 6th, and three still near Kyles Paible/Balranald on 28th.

Brünnich's Guillemot: one was found dead at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 28 December. **Little Auk:** relatively few reported in January - mostly scattered singles, with peak counts of three off Fair Isle on 1st; Tarbat Ness (High) on 29th; Bluemull Sound, Unst (Shet) on 30th, and Nairn (M&N) and Wick (Caith) on 31 January. In February three were off Findhorn (M&N) on 1st; 35 at Tentsmuir, Fife on 3rd; four off Minard, Loch Fyne (Arg) on 6th, and five off Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 14th. In March



Plate 193. Hoopoe, Leswalt, Dumfries & Galloway, April 2014. © Peter Garrity

there was one in the Narrows of Raasay, Isle of Skye (High) on 21st. **Snowy Owl:** one was seen at Exnaboe, South Mainland (Shet) on 14 February. **Hoopoe:** one reported at Leswalt, near Stranraer (D&G) from 14 March into April transpired to have overwintered in the area since November 2013.

Great Grey Shrike: singles were at Auchlossan (NES) on 1 January; at Forest of Ae (D&G) on 8 January, and at New Galloway (D&G) on 21–23 March. **Firecrest:** one was seen at Dalgety Bay, Fife from 18–31 January at least, and one was at Mountcastle, Fife from 25 February to 15 March. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** an exceptional record was of one over-wintering at Loch Flemington, near Inverness (High) on 30 January to 4 February, with another noted on Bressay (Shet) on 11 March. **Waxwing:** noted in only a few locations and in small numbers, with peak January counts of 70 in Aberdeen (NES) on 9th, and 120 at Bridge of Don, Aberdeen on 23rd. In February highest counts were 11 in Forfar (A&D) on 5th; 50 at Westhill, near

Aberdeen (NES) on 19–21 February, and 40 in Aberdeen from 28th to 4 March. In March highest counts were 42 in Buckie (M&N) on 3rd; at least 30 at Inverkeilor (A&D) on 5th, with 12 in Forfar (A&D) the same day; 150+ at Cove Bay (NES) on 14th, and 30 in Dundee (A&D) on 31st. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** one was on Fair Isle on 30 March - the first spring record for the island (three before in Scotland).

Richard's Pipit: two flew over Eyebroughy (Loth) on 4 January.

Water Pipit: one near Gullane Point (Loth) lingered from 2013 to 3 March at least; one was near Dunglass (Loth) on 15 February.

Hawfinch: the highest counts at the Scone Palace (P&K) stronghold were of 40 birds on 5 January, and 30 on 10 February. **Snow Bunting:** fairly dispersed in fairly moderate numbers, with high counts in January of 200 at Glen Esk (A&D) on 4th; 350 at Grenitote, North Uist (OH) on 8th; with 66 still at Kinshaldy Beach, Fife; 57 on North Ronaldsay on 20th, and 300 on Berneray on 29 January. In early February there were up to 57 at

Bornish, North Uist; with 65 at Kinshaldy/ Tentsmuiron 8–10th, and 28 at Glenshee (A&D) on 7th, and in March there were 90 on Berneray (OH) on 3rd, at least 50 on Mainland Orkney, and 10 were still at Belhaven Bay, Dunbar (Loth) on 12th. **Lapland Bunting:** few reported: one was at Bornish, North Uist in January, with two there through February to 12 March at least. One was at Crail Airfield, Fife on 9 January; two near Coldingham (Bord) on 11th; one at Tugnet, Spey Bay (M&N) on 14th; one at The Reef, Tiree (Arg) on 20th, and one at Wester Balgeddie, near Loch Leven (P&K) on 26 January - an excellent inland record. Two were at Burghead (M&N) on 1 March; one was found dead on Fair Isle on 12th; one was at Turnberry (Ayr) on 19–20 March; three at Portnahaven, Islay (Arg) and one at Skateraw (Loth) on 25th; three at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 28th, and one at Fidden, Isle of Mull (Arg) on 30 March.

For arrival dates of summer migrants see the Birdline Scotland tables on the SOC website (www.the-soc.org.uk).

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PhotoSPOT

Plates 194–196. 23 January 2014 was a bright and dry day, for a change, so I was out birding an area near Lochgelly Loch in Fife. I had already seen a juvenile Kestrel hovering over a stubble field next to a farm track and enjoyed watching it for several minutes.

A few hours later I walked back up the track and saw a movement below the Hawthorn hedge that lined the track. I could see it was a very scruffy looking Sparrowhawk and it appeared to be struggling. I thought perhaps it had flown into the fence and was injured, but when I approached closer I realised it was on a kill. It was fearless (a juvenile female) and although it attempted to fly away with its kill, it could not manage, so instead started to drag its prey. It was at this point that I could see it had killed a Kestrel, almost certainly the one I had been watching earlier. The Sparrowhawk pulled its prey into the stubble field and once satisfied I was no threat, it dragged the dead Kestrel back under the hedge to feed safely out of sight. I took several quick pictures of the event before leaving it in peace; the Sparrowhawk was clearly very tired and hungry.

Equipment used: Canon Powershot SX50HS (bridge camera) at 50x zoom, aperture priority, shutter speed 1/160 sec at f5.6 and ISO 200.

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