



# Scottish Birds

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# Scottish Birds

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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.

## Join us...

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

## Annual membership rates\*

Adult (aged 18 and over)	£ 32.00
Family (2 adults & all juniors at same address)	£ 43.00
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*\* Rates valid until August 2015, subject to change thereafter*

For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk) or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email [membership@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:membership@the-soc.org.uk)



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Plate 197. Chris McInerny, Loch Lomond, April 2014. © Trai Anfield

## President's Foreword

The Club has been involved in a number of ventures this year, to encourage more people to experience the pleasure and enjoyment of seeing, monitoring and understanding birds. Important amongst these was the launch of a joint project with the Isle of May Bird Observatory: the Young Birdwatchers' Training Course. This started on 5 July, when six young enthusiasts stayed on the island for a week learning ringing and other key skills under the expert guidance of Stuart Rivers and Mark Oksien, assisted by Pam Moncur, with support from partner

organisations on the island, CEH and SNH. The week went very well, with everyone enjoying a positive experience. We look forward to hearing about it at the upcoming autumn conference in Perth, when some of the students will give a presentation. For those not able to attend the conference, there will be a feature about the students' week spent on the island in the December issue of *Scottish Birds*.

The autumn conference is well in hand, with all of the speakers confirmed and just the final details to be sorted out. The theme for this year is 'A Sound Approach to Birdwatching' and to this end we have number of speakers who will be presenting an acoustic angle to ornithology. For example, Magnus Robb will relate how he used sound recording to identify a new owl species in the Middle East, and Peter Slater will bring us the songs made by the wrens of Central America. Closer to home we have Les Hatton talking about the Tay reed beds and Niel Bielby discussing the Clackmannanshire Atlas. Photographer Laurie Campbell will be taking us to Harris with tales of Golden Eagles, while Ospreys will be the focus for Keith Brockie's talk. Finally, we have Stuart Bearhop and Steve Votier from the University of Plymouth presenting their seabird monitoring techniques and research results; both Steve and Stuart have a strong Scottish connection. So, we believe we have achieved a wide range of topics that will appeal to a broad audience. This is the highlight of the Club year, when many of us come together to meet old friends. And remember, this is when the Club AGM occurs - an opportunity for members to add their 'tuppence worth'. The AGM agenda is published in the 2013/14 Annual Report, which is enclosed with this issue of *Scottish Birds*. Can I also ask members to look at the notice in the Annual Report describing the proposed SOC restructure. This important information relates to converting the status of the Club to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). If you have any questions about this, please contact me or Waterston House.

This summer, for the first time since 2007, the SOC has a stand at the British Birdwatchers' Fair in Rutland. The fair has become massive, with a huge attendance, and we are delighted that Ian Thomson, Jane Cleaver and Dave Allan will be representing the Club, to promote membership and showcase our work: many birders will not yet have seen the 'new-look' *Scottish Birds*, following its revamp in June 2009, or the digital version of *The Birds of Scotland*. This year, we also managed to secure two speaker slots at the event: artists Keith Brockie and Darren Woodhead.

We have had a hot and dry summer here in Clyde, with the hope that this means birds will have had a successful breeding year. Certainly at my Loch Lomond shore sites I have seen high numbers of forest birds such as a Tree Pipits, Wood Warblers and Redstarts. I hope you too have enjoyed a good summer's birding.

Best wishes and I look forward to seeing many of you at the autumn conference.  
Chris McInerny, SOC President

# Loch characteristics and waterbird numbers in the eastern Highlands during summer

R.W. Summers

*A survey of waterbirds was carried out at 384 lochs in eastern Inverness-shire, Nairn and Moray in summer 1992. Lochs ranged in size from 0.03 to 558 ha, and from altitudes of 5 to 795 m. The water chemistry of a subset of 50 lochs changed with increasing altitude; decreasing in pH, nutrients and turbidity. Only three lochs were regarded as acidic (pH <5.5). Aquatic invertebrates were more abundant at the low altitude lochs compared to those at higher altitude. 30% of lochs had one or more waterbirds. Lochs with birds were larger and at a lower altitude than those that had none. Of the 25 waterbird species recorded, the most abundant were the Black-headed Gull and Common Gull, both of which bred at some of the lochs. Ducks were the next most abundant group, with Mallards and Tufted Ducks the most numerous. Mallards were also the most widespread. There were more ducks on larger lochs but the density was greater on smaller lochs, perhaps because of the relatively longer margin where ducks often forage.*

## Introduction

There are good estimates of the national population sizes of wintering waterfowl in Scotland from Wetland Bird Surveys (e.g. Austin *et al.* 2008) but information on breeding numbers is patchy (Owen *et al.* 1986, Thom 1986, Forrester *et al.* 2007). There have been few surveys of breeding waterbirds, apart from colonial species (e.g. Grey Heron, Marquiss 1989), rare species (e.g. Red-throated Diver, Gibbons *et al.* 1997; Black-throated Diver, Campbell & Talbot 1987; Slavonian Grebe, Benn 2003 and Common Scoter, Underhill *et al.* 1998) and alleged pests (e.g. Red-breasted Merganser, Marquiss & Duncan 1993), or at important sites (e.g. the Flow Country, Fox *et al.* 1989). See Table 2 for scientific names. Information from Highland Scotland is poor, yet it is an important region because of the large number of lochs available (Lyle & Smith 1994).

In this study, a survey was made of lochs within the eastern Highlands to count all waterbirds. The lochs included lowland eutrophic sites, through to oligotrophic hill lochs. By most European standards, the fresh water in the Highlands is of high quality (Harriman & Pugh 1994). Nevertheless, there have been localised concerns of increased nutrient loading due to agricultural run-off and pollution from fish-farming and forestry (Francis 1988, Harriman & Pugh 1994). In addition, much of the Highlands is sensitive to acid rain due to the poor buffering effect of the underlying rocks and soil (Battarbee 1989), whilst afforestation may accelerate acidification by trapping air-borne acid in the foliage of conifers (Kreiser *et al.* 1990). Therefore, to assess the status of lochs in the study area, measures of water quality and invertebrate abundance were obtained from a subset of lochs.

## Methods

Three hundred and eighty four lochs within eastern Inverness-shire, Nairn and Moray (Figure 1) were visited once between mid-May and the beginning of June 1992. All lochs within a prescribed area around the Great Glen, Strathspey and lowland areas of Nairn and Moray were surveyed, though the largest lochs were omitted (e.g. Loch Ness). Waterbirds (divers, grebes, Cormorant, Grey Heron, Mute Swan, ducks, geese, Moorhen, Coot and gulls) were counted from the loch margins using binoculars and telescopes.

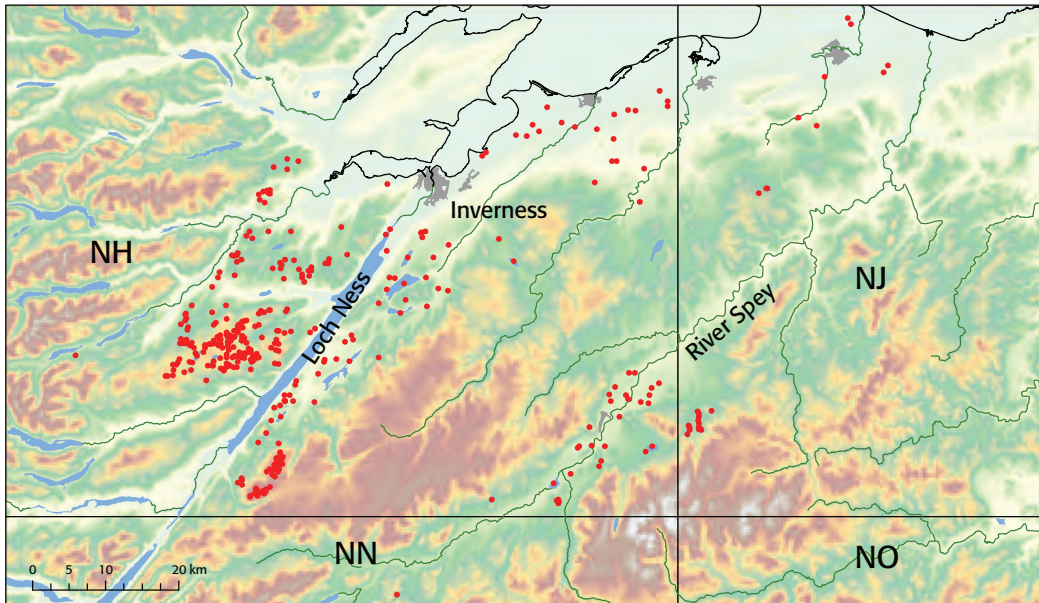


Figure 1. Locations of the surveyed lochs in the eastern Highlands, Scotland. A 100-km grid is shown.

Loch areas were obtained by laying a scaled grid over a 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map of the lochs and counting those squares with over 50% water. Loch altitudes were also taken from maps.

A 0.5 litre water sample was taken from 50 lochs at a range of altitudes to describe basic attributes of water quality. Samples were taken in early April 1993 before there had been uptake of nutrients by algae. Measurements included conductivity, nitrates, total organic matter (a measure of water turbidity) and pH (Harriman & Christie 1993). Water with pH <5.5 was regarded as acidic (Battarbee 1989).

Fresh-water invertebrates were trapped in May 1993 at 42 lochs using colonisation traps made from rolled strips of 'Astro-turf' measuring 10 x 25 cm, with the bristles (10 mm long and at a density of 25 per cm<sup>2</sup>) on the inside. Six traps were set per loch roughly equidistantly round the shore and were weighted so they lay on the bottom in about 1 m of water. They were left for three weeks, during which time they were colonised by invertebrates. During retrieval, the traps were scooped slowly into a hand-net so that any escaping invertebrates were trapped. In the laboratory, the traps were unrolled, shaken in a basin of water and remaining animals picked out from between the bristles and counted. Invertebrates were identified according to major groups.

### Statistics

Median values were calculated for environmental variables, along with the inter-quartile range (IQR) and range, because most frequency distributions were skewed. Medians were compared in Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests. Spearman rank correlation analysis was used to examine the correlation between pairs of variables. A Poisson regression analysis examined the effect of loch area and altitude on male duck density. The dependent variable was the number of ducks, with log-transformed loch area used as an offset variable, thereby expressing the dependent variable as ducks per hectare. A Poisson error distribution was assumed and a log link applied. Overdispersion was accounted for by adjusting the scale parameter.



Plate 198. One of the ponds at Cloddach Quarry, Moray & Nairn, with emergent water plants. Summer in the early 1990s. © R.W. Summers



Plate 199. Loch Duntelchaig, Highland, was one of the larger lochs surveyed. Summer in the early 1990s. © R.W. Summers



Plate 200. Loch na Ba Ruaidhe, Drumadrochit, Highland. Spring in the early 1990s. © R.W. Summers



Plate 201. Loch Ruthven from Stac Gorm, Highland. Summer in the early 1990s. © R.W. Summers



## Results

The median surface area of all the lochs was 1 ha (IQR 0.3–3.5, range 0.03–558 ha). The median altitude was 400 m (IQR 240–500, range 5–795 m). The chemical attributes (pH, conductivity, nitrates and total organic carbon) were lowest at the high altitude lochs and highest at the low altitude ones (Table 1). Only three lochs (6%) were regarded as being acidic, having a pH of <5.5 (Figure 2). These were Lochan na Curra (NH6032), Lochan Dubh (NH9216) and Loch na Faoileige (NH4327). The first two have no inflow or outflow streams and lie within peat bogs, so their acidic status can be accounted for by seepage from the surrounding soil. However, Loch na Faoileige has an outflow stream so may have been acidified by rainfall within the catchment.

The following aquatic invertebrate groups were trapped in the colonisation traps: molluscs (gastropods and bivalves), flatworms (Tricladida), leeches (Hirudinea), stonefly nymphs (Plecoptera), mayfly nymphs (Ephemeroptera), fresh-water crustaceans (Amphipoda), caddis fly larvae (Trichoptera), beetles (Coleoptera) and fly larvae (Diptera). The most abundant invertebrate trapped was *Gammarus lacustris* (an amphipod), particularly at lowland lochs. However, there was no significant difference among lochs at different altitude bands in their abundance (Kruskal-Wallis test = 3.0,  $P = 0.2$ ). Mayflies tended to be more abundant in lochs at 100–350 m, but again, there

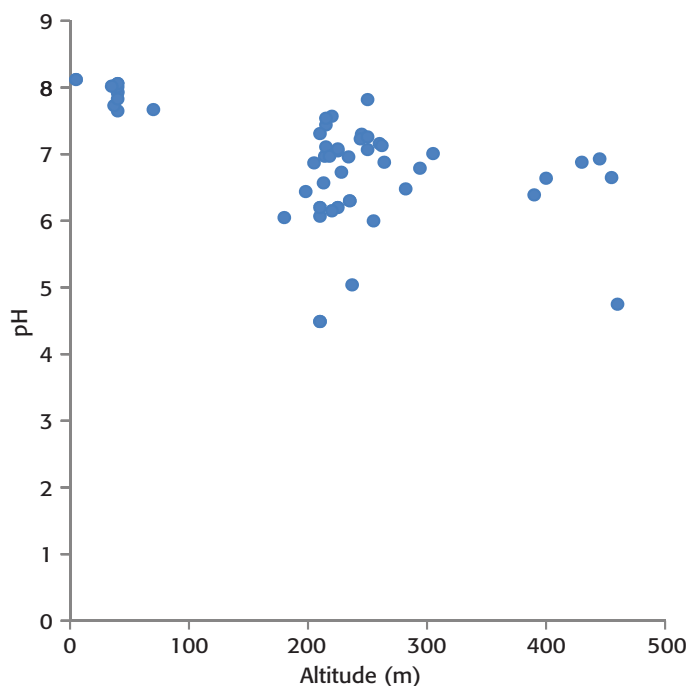


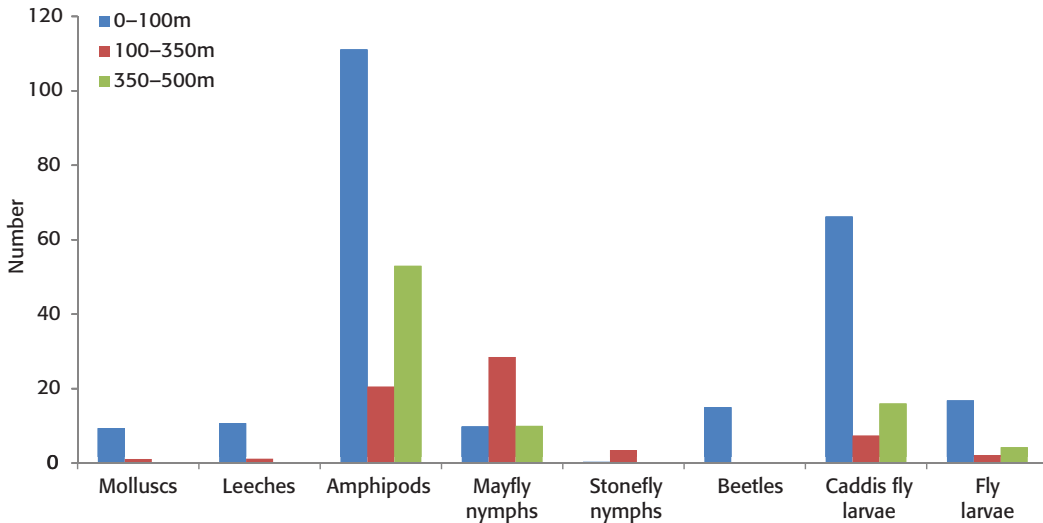
Figure 2. The relationship between pH and altitude for Highland lochs.

was no significant difference among lochs at different altitude bands (Kruskal-Wallis test = 5.1,  $P = 0.08$ ). However, there were more molluscs, leeches, beetles, caddis flies and flies at the lowland lochs compared to the upland ones (Figure 3), and when all invertebrates were combined. There was a significant negative relationship between invertebrate abundance and altitude ( $r_s = -0.31$ ,  $n = 42$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). There were more invertebrates at lowland lochs.

Of the 384 lochs surveyed, 117 (30%) had one or more waterbirds. Lochs with waterbirds had a larger surface area; median area of 2.5 ha (IQR 1–9 ha) compared with 0.8 ha (IQR 0.3–1.5 ha) for those that had none

Table 1. Median values for loch chemistry at different altitudes. Ranges are given in brackets.

	Altitude band			Kruskal-Wallis test
	0–100 m	100–350 m	350–500 m	
Sample size	10	34	6	
pH	7.93 (7.65–8.12)	6.97 (4.49–7.82)	6.65 (4.75–6.93)	24.1 ( $P < 0.001$ )
Conductivity ( $\mu\text{S per cm}$ )	404 (210–491)	64 (35–164)	50 (45–60)	28.2 ( $P < 0.001$ )
Nitrates ( $\mu\text{equiv per litre}$ )	92 (0–759)	0 (0–30)	0 (0–0)	17.0 ( $P < 0.001$ )
Total organic carbon (mg per litre)	6.3 (4.7–7.8)	4.2 (2.3–13.4)	3.5 (2.3–5.7)	12.7 ( $P = 0.002$ )



**Figure 3.** Mean numbers of the main aquatic invertebrate groups trapped in colonisation traps at lochs at three altitude bands. There were significant differences among lochs at different altitude bands for molluscs (Kruskal-Wallis test = 14.7,  $P = 0.001$ ), leeches ( $K-W = 22.8$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), stonefly nymphs ( $K-W = 7.9$ ,  $P = 0.02$ ), beetles ( $K-W = 25$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), caddis fly larvae ( $K-W = 10.6$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ) and fly larvae ( $K-W = 18.3$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2.** Number of waterbirds and occupied lochs in the eastern Highlands during May and June 1992. Median loch areas and altitudes are given where there were over three occupied lochs for a given species. Both males and female numbers are given in brackets for the ducks.

Species	Total number	Number of lochs occupied	Median area (ha)	Median altitude (m)
Red-throated Diver <i>Gavia stellata</i>	9	4	15.3	265
Black-throated Diver <i>Gavia arctica</i>	7	4	64.4	257
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	2	1		
Slavonian Grebe <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	145	31	4.0	230
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	39	18	5.1	217
Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	3	1		
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	27	16	9.8	214
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>	24	9	16	70
Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i>	9	4	14.6	265
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	2	1		
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	318 (210, 108)	98	3.0	234
Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	61 (42, 19)	38	2.0	325
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	14 (10, 4)	6	64.8	229
Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>	232 (136, 96)	29	5.5	70
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	2 (2, 0)	2		
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	79 (19, 60)	19	6.9	235
Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i>	9 (5, 4)	3		
Red breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>	14 (7, 7)	8	28.4	219
Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i>	34 (22, 12)	8	50.1	223
Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	90	20	3.8	55
Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	11	8	0.9	60
Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i>	975	27	4.8	220
Common Gull <i>Larus canus</i>	542	34	8.9	248
Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>	101	2		
Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	13	2		

**Table 3.** *The relationship between male duck density, loch area and loch altitude. Sample size = 384.*

	Estimate	Standard error	$X^2$ (P)
Intercept	0.490	0.272	3.3 (0.07)
Altitude	-0.0059	0.0011	30.7 (<0.001)
Area	-0.0126	0.0037	11.8 (<0.001)

(Mann-Whitney  $U = 8601.5$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). In addition, lochs with birds were at a lower altitude; 260 m (IQR 210–381 m) compared with 488 m (IQR 355–528 m) for those that had none (Mann-Whitney  $U = 26921.5$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).

A total of 2,762 waterbirds comprising 25 species was counted (Table 2). The most numerous species were the Black-headed Gull and Common Gull, followed by Mallard and Tufted Duck. The Mallard was the most widespread, occurring on 98 lochs. For most of the ducks, more males were counted than females. It is likely that many of the females were incubating, so the number of males probably gave a better measure of the size of the breeding population. The Goldeneye was the only duck where more females were counted. This is an early nesting species, so males had probably already departed the breeding lochs.

Divers occurred on large mid-altitude lochs (Table 2). Slavonian and Little Grebes occurred on small lochs. The ducks were mainly on small lochs, apart from Wigeon and Goosander. Tufted Ducks were on low-altitude lochs whilst Teal were generally at high altitude. Goldeneyes were on small lochs in the mid range of altitudes. Coot and Moorhen were also on small lochs but at low altitudes. Black-headed Gulls and Common Gulls occurred at 27 and 34 lochs, respectively, mainly in the mid altitudes.

Combining the numbers of male ducks (except Goldeneye, where female numbers were used), it was found that duck numbers were greater on larger lochs than smaller lochs ( $r_s = 0.32$ ,  $n = 115$ ,  $P < 0.05$ , ignoring lochs with no ducks;  $r_s = 0.40$ ,  $n = 384$ ,  $P < 0.005$  for all lochs). In addition, there were more ducks at low altitude lochs compared to high altitude ones ( $r_s = -0.47$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , for lochs with ducks;  $r_s = -0.51$ ,  $P < 0.001$  for all lochs). An analysis of the relationship between duck density, loch area and altitude found that both area and altitude were negatively related to duck density (Table 3). Density was greater on small lochs at low altitude.

## Discussion

The lochs in the eastern Highlands comprise a wide range of aquatic habitats for waterbirds, from nutrient-rich sites in lowland farmland to nutrient-poor lochs in upland moorland. Lochs ranged in size from ponds to large, deep lochs in glacially-scoured glens. The nutrient status of the lochs followed an expected pattern with altitude (Harriman & Pugh 1994). The upland lochs were more acidic than the lowland sites. However, there was little indication that the pH of most sites was un-naturally low. This contrasts with lochs elsewhere in Scotland, particularly in Galloway, that have been affected by acid rain (Battarbee 1989, 1990). Only one site in this study (Loch na Faoileige) may have been acidified by rainfall within the catchment. On-going reductions of sulphur emissions from coal-fired power stations have now greatly reduced the threat of acid rain that once damaged lochs in Scotland, including some in the Cairngorm Mountains (Jones *et al.* 1993). Continued monitoring by the Acid Waters Monitoring Network will ensure that the chemical status of the water continues to improve (Shilland *et al.* 2012). However, it will take longer for plant and animal communities to be fully restored.

The study showed that the Black-headed Gull and Common Gull were the most numerous waterbirds on lochs during the breeding season. At several lochs, they either bred on small islands in the lochs or in sedge beds at the loch margins. Both of these nesting habitats would be difficult for land-based

mammalian predators to reach. Thus, gulls primarily use lochs as safe nesting places, rather than for food, which they obtain from nearby farmland (arable fields and fields cut for silage). Other waterbirds, however, are dependent on the food supply within the lochs. Not only were there more ducks on lowland lochs, the duck density was greater on lowland lochs, reflecting the higher nutrient status (nitrates) and invertebrate abundance. Unsurprisingly, there were more ducks on the larger lochs, but there was a higher density on smaller lochs. It is likely that for large lochs, the central portion is too deep to be profitable for ducks to forage. Rather, ducks, especially dabbling ducks, tend to feed more in shallow water at the margins whilst diving ducks also have depth limits (Cramp & Simmons 1977). This would lead to large lochs having a low density. In addition, those lochs (usually large lochs) that have been dammed for hydro-electricity generation often experience large fluctuations in water level, thereby eliminating macrophytes and associated aquatic life from the littoral zone at the margins (Langford 1983, Smith *et al.* 1987).

There is a network of Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites conserving the key fresh water sites in Scotland, including some within the present study area (Minns *et al.* 1994). No additional important sites were identified during the survey. Since this survey in the 1990s, there have been notable changes in some waterbird populations in the Highlands. These include a decline in the number of Slavonian Grebes (from a maximum of 80 pairs in 1984 to 21 pairs in 2010; Ewing *et al.* 2013), range contractions in Black-headed Gulls and Common Gulls, and a range increase in Tufted Ducks (Balmer *et al.* 2013). There have also been environmental changes, some of which may have been responsible for the altered status of waterbirds. These include the spread of the introduced American Mink *Mustela vison* (Birks 1990) and the return of Otter *Lutra lutra* and Pine Marten *Martes martes* to former ranges (Birks 2002). Mustelids are known to depredate waterbirds (*e.g.* Otters on Slavonian Grebe adults, chicks and eggs; Hancock *et al.* 2002, Perkins *et al.* 2005). Recreation, including water based activities, such as boating, canoeing and fishing, are also increasing in the Highlands (Warren 2002). Therefore, human disturbance could become a factor affecting waterbird numbers. Further surveys could provide a check on changes in waterbird numbers.

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*Revised ms accepted April 2014*

# Wetland Bird Survey counts in the Firth of Tay in winter 2012/13

N. Elkins

## Introduction

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) Low Tide Count scheme, managed by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), is carried out on the UK's estuaries in a rolling programme approximately every six years. Unlike the WeBS Core Counts, during which monthly high tide counts are made each winter on most UK estuaries, low tide counts demand more challenging logistics and are therefore less frequent. In the Firth of Tay, the number of high tide wader roosts allows no more than six counters to monitor the whole firth, whereas low tide counts demand many more.

Coastal core counts are aimed at quantifying non-breeding birds present at high tide roosts and are ideally co-ordinated monthly on the same date across the country. Low tide counts complement core counts by determining the relative importance of intertidal feeding areas, thus allowing assessment of a sector's significance in relation to any potential threats or development. Therefore co-ordination within an estuary is less important, as birds may move between sectors to feed and can be counted more than once. This paper describes the results of the latest low tide counts in the Firth of Tay and places them in context with previous counts and wider local populations.

## Methods

The latest Firth of Tay low tide counts were carried out monthly between November 2012 and February 2013 along a tidal estuary approximately 35 km in length and 4 km at its widest. Descriptions of the estuary and its habitats, together with past summaries, can be found elsewhere (Elkins & Lynch 1997, Elkins 2006, 2007). The extensive intertidal flats between the confluence of the Rivers Tay and Earn (2 km west of Mugdrum Island) and the mouth of the Tay were divided into 68 sectors (see Figure 1). Birds were counted monthly during the winter by volunteers, each monitoring one or more sectors. Counts were made around the same weekend in mid-month coincident with, and within two hours of, suitable low tides, and most sectors were surveyed within 3–4 days of each other. The centre of the river channel in the outer firth was not counted.

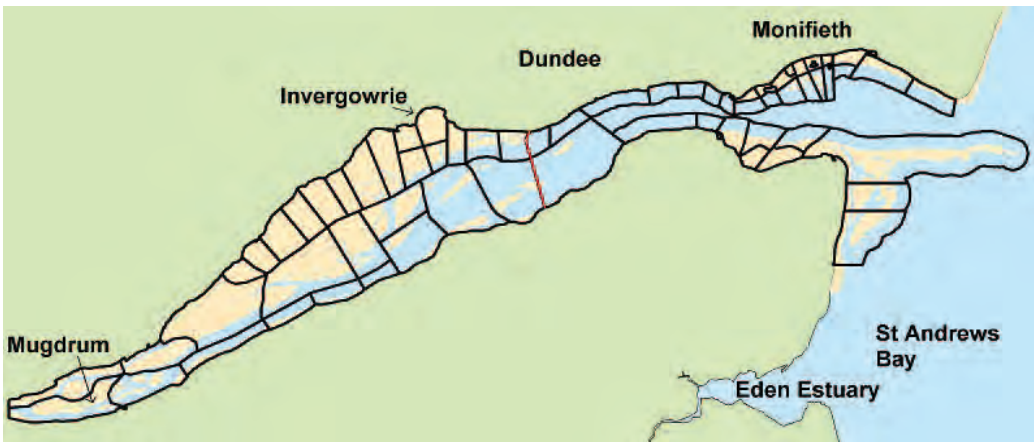


Figure 1. The Firth of Tay, showing WeBS Low Tide sectors and intertidal zones (in yellow). The red line represents the Tay Rail Bridge.

For the purposes of this paper, the firth is divided into inner and outer sections, the boundary being the Tay Rail Bridge (see Figure 1).

All waterfowl and waders were counted but monitoring gulls was optional and therefore partial. Counting the huge Eider flock is a challenging undertaking, only successful in the right conditions of wind and weather, although somewhat easier at low tide when the river channel is at its narrowest. Counts of divers, grebes and gulls are not included here.

Previous low tide counts have been made in the winters of 1993/94, 1996/97 and 2006/07 (Elkins 2007). The period used in the comparisons between winters includes only the months of December, January and February, as a November count was not made in 1996/97. Furthermore, counts in 1993/94 omitted a few of the sectors at the eastern and western extremities of the firth, so do not allow for a strict comparison. Scientific names of species mentioned in the text are shown in the Appendix.

## Results

During the winter of 2012/13, all sectors were covered, although two only partially so. Counts on another ten sectors were missed in certain months. Only 8% of the 272 potential counts were missed, all in the inner firth where the density of birds is low. All counts were deemed satisfactory, although there were a few cases when weather and wind marginally reduced accuracy. Because of limited co-ordination and movements of feeding birds, totalling all counts may include some small degree of duplication. Even so, comparing mid-winter counts reveals some interesting patterns (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Peak counts of main species at low tide in the Firth of Tay, December to February. \*suspected partial count.

	1993/94	1996/97	2006/07	2012/13
Mute Swan	14	16	29	31
Whooper Swan	4	54	7	3
Pink-footed Goose	2	93	42	585
Greylag Goose	150	84	910	455
grey geese	0	0	700	0
Shelduck	80	56	129	205
Wigeon	122	339	133	78
Teal	4	48	82	462
Mallard	729	988	424	633
Pochard	0	32	0	0
Tufted Duck	17	174	0	0
Long-tailed Duck	0	15	8	102
Common Scoter	0	0	15	350
Eider	no counts	12,255	4,563*	12,669
Goldeneye	191	260	68	79
Red-breasted Merganser	55	114	57	62
Cormorant	237	200	168	105
Grey Heron	11	no counts	25	28
Oystercatcher	2,264	2,252	1,616	1,695
Ringed Plover	51	188	36	27
Golden Plover	350	775	44	105
Grey Plover	275	159	180	111
Lapwing	687	675	78	69
Knot	84	305	42	52
Sanderling	44	113	150	70
Dunlin	3,769	5,189	980	569
Bar-tailed Godwit	755	2,237	1,002	788
Curlew	430	747	504	589
Redshank	889	1,213	442	430
Turnstone	49	28	36	126

The majority of waders feed in the outer firth, where extensive littoral mussel beds and a sand and mud intertidal zone create rich food sources along both shores. Although the inner firth has extensive mudflats, various factors such as salinity changes and instability of the substrate result in an impoverished variety of invertebrate fauna (JNCC 1994). However, large numbers of waders fed in the eastern sectors of the inner firth where a more abundant food source was considered to be available until local raw sewage outfalls were cleaned up after 2001. Wader counts in the inner firth have been made since 1989 and changes are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Peak counts of waders at low tide in the inner firth only, December to February. Note: only one count, in January, was made in 1989.

	1989	1993/94	1996/97	2006/07	2012/13
Oystercatcher	210	743	1,263	822	241
Golden Plover	134	189	0	0	68
Lapwing	579	597	585	77	9
Dunlin	3,058	3,543	4,792	165	320
Bar-tailed Godwit	0	236	0	48	31
Curlew	220	258	420	483	331
Redshank	706	773	626	359	265

High and low tide counts are normally made within a week of each other. Table 3 compares peak counts at low and high tide in the outer firth in winter 2012/13. These results are restricted to the outer firth as core counts in the inner firth have been less regular since 2011. The movements of feeding birds from the inner firth to roosts in the outer firth is unknown and may obscure the true relationship in Table 3. With this caveat in mind, the comparison suggests that numbers of most species remain similar over the tidal cycle.

**Table 3.** Comparison of low (LTC) and core high tide (CC) counts in winter 2012/13 for the outer Firth of Tay only. Species in bold do not enter the inner firth. \*incomplete count.

	LTC peaks	CC peaks		LTC peaks	CC peaks
Mute Swan	23	21	Golden Plover	37	0
Shelduck	108	124	<b>Grey Plover</b>	111	45
Wigeon	78	150	Lapwing	60	0
Mallard	251	465	<b>Knot</b>	52	458
<b>Long-tailed Duck</b>	102	4	<b>Sanderling</b>	70	79
<b>Common Scoter</b>	350	0	Dunlin	249	241
<b>Eider</b>	12,669	5,900*	Bar-tailed Godwit	788	602
Red-breasted Merganser	58	10	Curlew	258	317
Cormorant	39	40	Redshank	144	150
Oystercatcher	1,454	1,614	<b>Turnstone</b>	123	60
<b>Ringed Plover</b>	27	60			

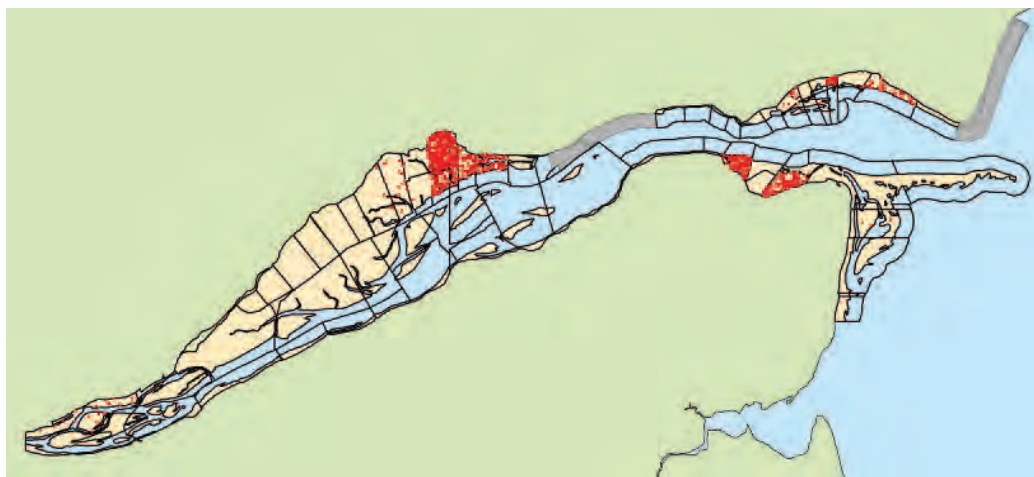
## Discussion

It is clear from Table 1 that several wader species, particularly Grey Plover, Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwit and Dunlin, have declined. Conversely, gains are shown for Shelduck, Teal and Turnstone. The enormous Eider flock seems to be holding its own, although sporadic counts prior to 1991 exceeded 20,000.

Some low tide count changes reflect those occurring on core counts. For example, throughout the tidal cycle, many fewer Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit and Redshank now use the firth. This is particularly true in Invergowrie Bay. Land reclamation and changes in exposed substrate at high tide have reduced the number and quality of roost sites, in which the development of Dundee airport, industrial and amenity sites has played a significant role. The former large Dunlin roost was abandoned after 2005, while the Redshank roost declined markedly after 2010. Both species still



feed in the inner firth at low tide but in noticeably lower numbers (Table 2, Figure 2). Disturbance at the outer Tay roosts also affects wader numbers and loss of roost sites may be implicated in wader declines on the Firth of Forth (L.J. Andrews pers. comm.). Neither Golden Plover nor Lapwing are now found in large numbers at any state of the tide.



**Figure 2.** Extent of Dunlin population at low tide on the Firth of Tay, winter 2012/13. Each red dot refers to one bird, randomly plotted in each sector.

Although there has been a dramatic increase in wintering Teal in the inner firth in recent years (see Table 1), many dabbling ducks resort to estuarine habitats when inland waters are frozen, so that numbers may vary from month to month. This may also apply to Goldeneye and Tufted Duck, although the latter virtually disappeared from the firth after 2001. Shelduck have also increased, so that mid-winter numbers exceeded 100 in 2012 for the first time since 1981, while Wigeon have fluctuated around a mean of 200.

Sea ducks (except Eider) are mostly confined to St Andrews Bay, where there has been a significant decline in wintering Common Scoter and Red-breasted Merganser during the past decade (Elkins 2011). The Eider flock is not counted regularly at high tide. Most birds feed along the outer shores at low tide on sub-littoral mussel beds (Figure 3) and totals are considered representative. However, some may remain uncounted out of range to the east as there is considerable tidal movement in the outer firth. The low count in 2006/07 (Table 1) is thought to be unrepresentative, with north shore counts omitting offshore Eiders in the outer firth, since occasional counts in 2006 indicated numbers in excess of 10,000. Random counts over the years still exceed the current threshold of 10,300 for international importance (Holt *et al.* 2012) and the highest recent count was an approximate 13,600 at high tide in November 2011. The Eider wintering population of the Tay/Eden complex is estimated to be in the order of 14,000–15,000 and therefore currently remains one of the largest assemblages of the species in Britain.

The decreases in some migratory species, e.g. Grey Plover, Dunlin and Bar-tailed Godwit, have been partly attributed to climate change (e.g. Maclean *et al.* 2008) and this may apply on the Tay. However, there is a possible interchange of species between the Firth of Tay and other east coast sites, especially the Eden estuary 10km to the south (Figure 1). Although movements between these estuaries cannot be quantified, one can speculate that some waders may be relocating from the Tay to the Eden. For example, Figure 4 shows WeBS core count peaks of Dunlin for the past 28 winters. Numbers of Dunlin on the Eden estuary in recent winters appear to be at the expense of those on the Tay.

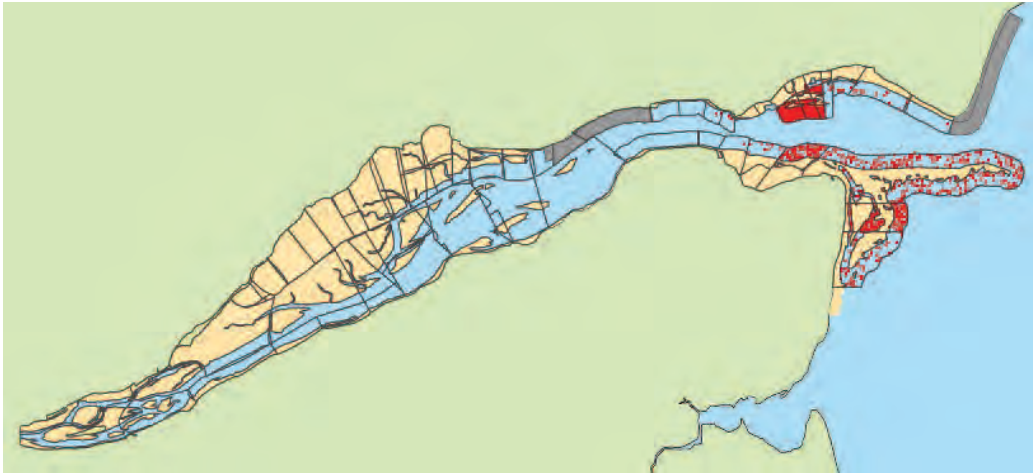


Figure 3. Extent of Eider population at low tide on the Firth of Tay, winter 2012/13. Each red dot refers to 10 birds, randomly plotted offshore in each sector

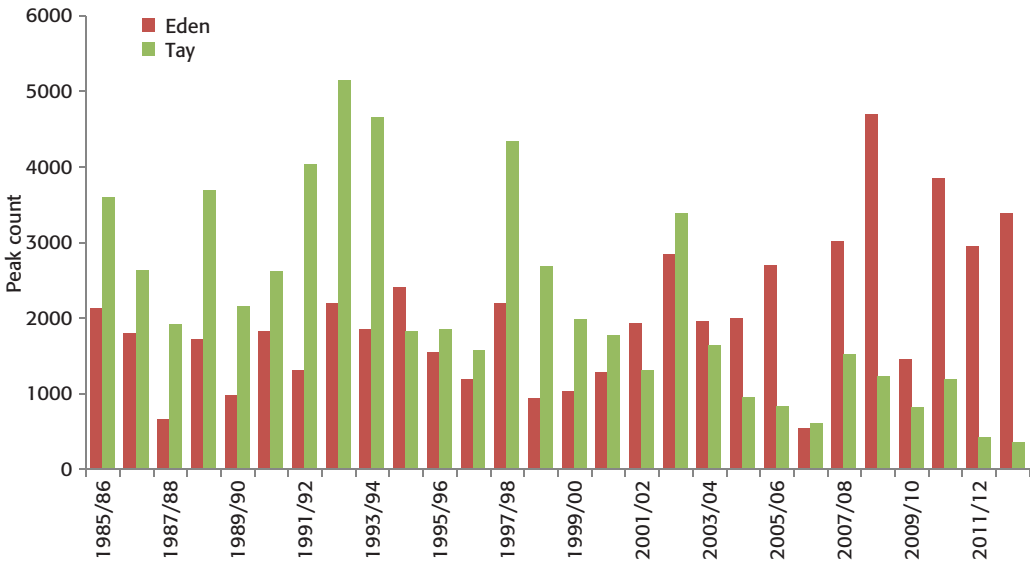


Figure 4. Peak core high tide counts of Dunlin in winter in the Tay and Eden estuaries, 1985/86 to 2012/13.

Several international natural heritage designations are in force for the Firth of Tay and the Eden estuary. The whole complex forms a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), while much of this is a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Ramsar site. The Eden estuary is also a managed Local Nature Reserve, with limited, controlled wildfowling, and there is a busy military airfield along its northern shore (soon to be closed). In contrast, the Firth of Tay is unmanaged, has a busy port at Dundee with a deep water channel, and is subject to water sports at the mouth. The disturbance by shipping and water sports to diving ducks appears to be tolerable, since it is at an acceptable level in winter, but the intertidal flats in the outer firth are subject to variable levels of disturbance by walkers and shellfish collectors at both low and high tides. These and other factors, such as the impoverished food resource in the inner Tay, make the Eden estuary a much more attractive location for waders, borne out by the much higher densities of many species. This is despite the Eden having an intertidal area only 15% of that of the Firth of Tay (Musgrove *et al.* 2003)

The proportion of waders on the Eden has grown in relation to those on the Tay, such that the average number on Eden core counts during the most recent winters is more than twice that on the Tay (see Figure 5). Indeed, the core count peak wintering wader population on the Tay has declined steadily from 12,000 in 1985/86 to only 4,000 in 2012/13. On the Eden, despite fluctuations in a few species, the total wader assemblage has remained between 9,000 and 10,000 for the whole period. Some wintering populations on the Tay, e.g. Bar-tailed Godwit and Redshank, now no longer meet the qualifications for which the SPA was originally designated. The latest WeBS alerts for the SPA (Cook *et al.* 2013), particularly with respect to Shelduck, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Redshank, suggest that declines may also be driven by site-specific pressures.

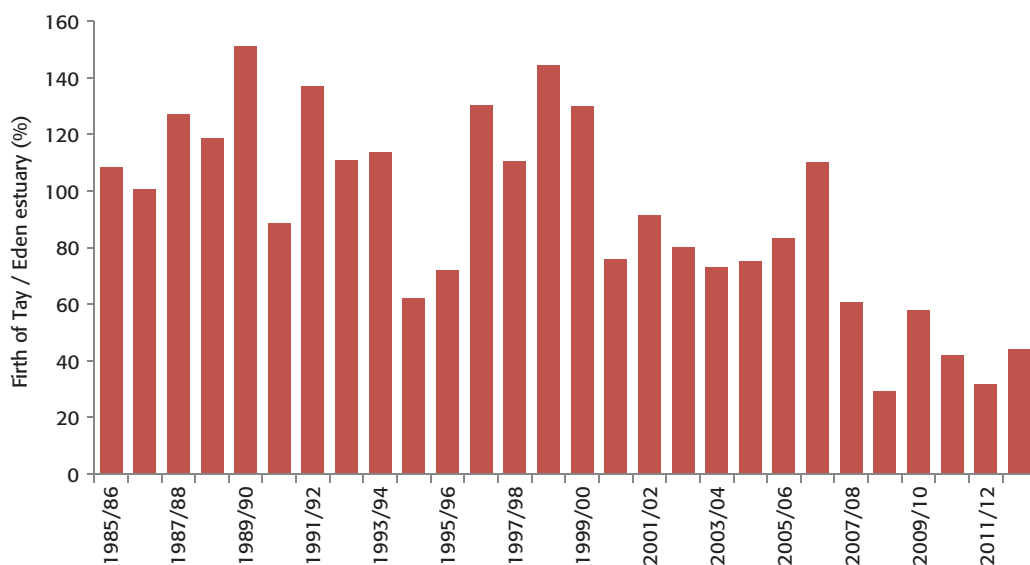


Figure 5. The ratio of the total wintering wader population on the Tay to that of the Eden, based on core high tide counts from 1985/86 to 2012/13.

## Conclusions

WeBS counts on the Firth of Tay, at both high and low tides, have highlighted a significant decrease in many wintering wader populations but an increase in a few wildfowl species. The reasons for these changes are unclear but declines may reflect the loss of suitable wader roost sites and deterioration in food resources, perhaps leading to the re-location to adjacent estuaries such as the Eden. Subjective assessment of disturbance suggests that it is not a significant factor in the declines although roosts on the outer Tay can be subjected to a variable degree of disruption.

## Acknowledgements

WeBS counts rely on the collaboration of dedicated volunteers in all forms of wintry weather. Recent low tide and high tide counts on the Tay have involved many such people. I would especially like to thank Bruce Lynch for his assistance, not only in counting, but also organising a Low Tide count team for the north shore. Both he and David Bell made useful comments on the draft. Apart from the author, Bruce and David, individuals contributing these valuable counts were: George Adam, Paul Blackburn, Howard Chapman, David Hill, Garden Johnston, Ron Lawie, Mike Nicoll, Anne Reid, David Shepherd, Claire Smith, Jean Stewart, Paul Taylor and Andre Theil. I thank them all most sincerely and also the landowners who, in some instances, gave permission to approach difficult parts of the inner firth. Neil Calbrade, the LTC Organiser at the BTO, kindly answered questions and supplied the maps. Thanks are also due to the WeBS partners (BTO, RSPB and JNCC, in association with WWT) for devising this exhilarating exercise, even if some of us found very few birds to count!

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## Appendix

Scientific names of species mentioned in the text;

Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>	Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Whooper Swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i>	Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i>
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>
Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>
Eider <i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Long-tailed Duck <i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>
Common Scoter <i>Melanitta nigra</i>	Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>	

# Amendments to the *Scottish List*: species and subspecies

## THE SCOTTISH BIRDS RECORDS COMMITTEE

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

The *Scottish List* was most recently published in full in 2011 (Forrester 2011b), with a detailed explanation of the procedure for maintaining the list. This is the second update to appear since the first in 2013 (Forrester 2013).

SBRC established several principles for the original version of the *Scottish List*, which are still followed. The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) has maintained the official *British List* since 1883 and SBRC adopts its taxonomy, sequence, scientific and English names for the *Scottish List*. Similarly, species categorization follows BOU.

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

Since the previous update to the *Scottish List* was published there have been several publications that affect the *Scottish List*. BOURC has published the 8th edition of its checklist of 'Birds of Britain' (BOU 2013) and its 42nd Report (BOU 2014). The Taxonomic Sub-Committee of BOURC (BOURC-TSC) has published its 9th report (Sangster *et al.* 2013), resulting in several groups of species now having new sequences. Also, BBRC has produced the report on rare birds for 2012 (Hudson *et al.* 2013), and SBRC has produced the reports for 2011 and 2012 (McGowan *et al.* 2013, 2014).

Abbreviated status codes have been used for the status of each subspecies on the *Scottish List*. The codes used by BOU in *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland* (1971) and in the *Checklist of Birds of Britain and Ireland* (1992) were adopted for the *Scottish List*, however the status codes were revised in the 7th edition (BOU 2006). SBRC adopted new codes for the *Scottish List* as follows:

RB	Resident breeder	FB	Former breeder
MB	Migrant breeder	WM	Winter migrant
CB	Casual breeder	PM	Passage migrant
NB	Naturalized breeder	SM	Scarce migrant
HB	Hybrid breeder	V	Vagrant

### **BOURC 8th edition of the *British List* decisions which affect the *Scottish List***

The 8th edition of the *British List* (BOU 2013) contains changes to both vernacular English names and the International Ornithological Union (IOU) English names. These changes can be summarised:

#### **English vernacular name**

<b>Old name</b>	<b>new name</b>
Canada Goose	Greater Canada Goose
Zino's Petrel	Madeira Petrel
White-faced Petrel	Frigate Petrel
Sora	Sora Rail
Guillemot	Common Guillemot
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Rock Dove
Mealy Redpoll	Common Redpoll
Common Crossbill	Crossbill

#### **Category D**

Great White Pelican	White Pelican
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#### **IOU International name**

<b>Old name</b>	<b>new name</b>
Black Scoter	Common Scoter
American Scoter	Black Scoter
Macaronesian Shearwater	Barolo Shearwater
Cattle Egret	Western Cattle Egret
Northern Harrier	Hen Harrier
Roughleg	Rough-legged Buzzard (same as vernacular name)
Osprey	Western Osprey
Common Coot	Eurasian Coot
Hudsonian Whimbrel	Whimbrel*
Pomarine Jaeger	Pomarine Skua (same as vernacular name)
Little Tern	Little Tern and Least Tern
Herring Gull	European Herring Gull
Common Pigeon	Rock Dove (same as vernacular name)
Barn Owl	Western Barn Owl
Northern Hawk-owl	Northern Hawk-Owl
Firecrest	Common Firecrest
Blue Tit	Eurasian Blue Tit
Wood Lark	Woodlark (same as vernacular name)
Sky Lark	Eurasian Skylark
Long-tailed Bushtit	Long-tailed Tit (same as vernacular name)
Winter Wren	Eurasian Wren
Eurasian Pied Flycatcher	European Pied Flycatcher
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush	Common Rock Thrush
Eurasian Stonechat	European Stonechat
Yellow Wagtail	Western Yellow Wagtail
Chaffinch	Common Chaffinch
Lesser Redpoll	Common Redpoll*

\* BOU has made a split, which is not currently recognised by IOU.

### BOURC Taxonomic Sub-committee 9th Report decisions which affect the *Scottish List*

The following recommendations in the BOURC Taxonomic Sub-committee 9th Report (*Ibis* 155: 898–907) are hereby promulgated.

#### Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*

Previously considered polytypic, the species is now split into two monotypic species, Black-browed Albatross *T. melanophris* and Campbell Albatross *T. impavida*. Black-browed Albatross remains on the *Scottish List*, as a monotypic species.

#### Taxonomic position of falcons

Falconiformes are moved to immediately before the Passeriformes. The nine species of falcons on the *Scottish List* being positioned between the woodpeckers and Red-eyed Vireo.

#### Coraciiformes

Coraciiformes has been split into Bucerotiformes (Upupidae) and Coraciiformes (Meropidae, Coraciidae and Alcedinidae). Species occurring on the *Scottish List* now appear in the following sequence:

Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>

#### Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis*

Orphean Warbler is now treated as two species:

Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis* (polytypic with subspecies *hortensis* and *cyrenaicae*).

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris* (polytypic with subspecies *crassirostris* and *jerdoni*).

BOURC has so far been able to determine the subspecies of only one of the six British records of Orphean Warbler. DNA from the Portland bird showed it to be race *hortensis* and thus Western Orphean Warbler has been added to the *British List*.

There is only one Scottish record of Orphean Warbler:

1982 North-east Scotland Seaton Park, Aberdeen, trapped, 10 October. This, with the other British records, was designated 'subspecies undetermined'. Whilst a review of the Aberdeen record might take place, in the meantime Orphean Warbler is removed from the *Scottish List*. Remove from Category A of the *Scottish List*.

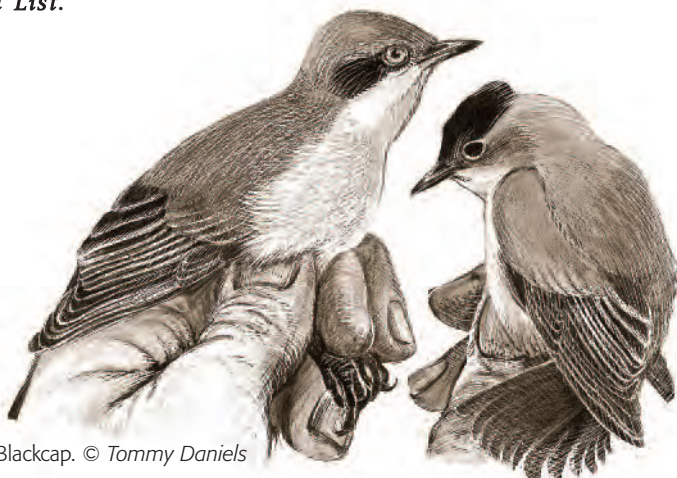


Plate 202. Orphean Warbler and Blackcap. © Tommy Daniels

### Taxonomic sequence of wheatears

Species appearing on the *Scottish List* are listed in the following sequence:

Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>
Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>

### Generic arrangement of Fringillidae

The revised scientific names and taxonomic sequence of the finches on the *Scottish List* are as follows:

Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Evening Grosbeak	<i>Hesperiphona vespertina</i>
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Common Rosefinch	<i>Erythrura erythrura</i>
Pine Grosbeak	<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>
Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>
Arctic Redpoll	<i>Acanthis hornemanni</i>
Two-barred Crossbill	<i>Loxia leucoptera</i>
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
Scottish Crossbill	<i>Loxia scotica</i>
Parrot Crossbill	<i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Citrel Finch	<i>Carduelis citrinella</i>
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>

### BOURC 42nd Report decisions which affect the *Scottish List*

#### White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*

2011 North-east Scotland Murcar, first-summer male, 14 June–6 July (*British Birds* 106: 578, photo 106: 579; *Scottish Birds* 31: 269–275; *Birding World* 24: 239–245). First British record. White-winged Scoter has two subspecies, *deglandi* which breeds in North America and *stejnegeri* which breeds in central and eastern Siberia. This record has been accepted as belonging to the nominate subspecies. Status code V. Place between Velvet Scoter and Bufflehead. 1st Scottish record. Add to Category A.

#### Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

East Asian subspecies 'Asian Red-rumped Swallow' *C. d. daurica/japonica*

2011 Orkney Nearhouse, Sanday, adult, 9 June (*British Birds* 106: 607, Thorne & Thorne 2014).  
2011 Highland Talisker Bay, Skye, adult, 17 June, presumably same 29 June (*British Birds* 106: 607, photos 105: 477; *Scottish Birds* photos 33: 99; *Birding World* 24: 327–341; Thorne & Thorne 2014). Assigned by BOURC to one of the eastern subspecies *C. d. daurica* or *japonica* ('Asian Red-rumped Swallow'). Photographs showed that these two sightings were of the same individual, but the bird could not be identified to subspecies. Previously the only subspecies recorded in Scotland was *rufula*. Add *daurica/japonica* to subspecies recorded in Scotland. Status code V.



**Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans***

Plumage and genetic analysis of the first British record from St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, 13 June 1894, male, specimen at Natural History Museum (BMNH 1901.1.4.1), previously accepted as nominate *cantillans*, showed that it was a 'Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. moltonii* (Svensson 2013).

The second British record, from Fair Isle on 6 May 1908, male, specimen at National Museums of Scotland (NMS.Z 1908.94.17) was similarly re-evaluated. Previously assigned to nominate *cantillans* was now found to belong to subspecies *albistriata* 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler'. It therefore becomes the first Scottish record of *albistriata*.

The third British record, from the Isle of May, 30 May 1924, male, specimen at National Museums of Scotland (NMS.Z 1925:35) was also examined and found to be assignable to one of the 'Western' Subalpine Warbler taxa, *S. c. cantillans* (France, Spain) or *S. c. inornata* (North Africa). It could not be assigned to a specific subspecies.

See Collinson *et al.* (2014) for further details. Add subspecies *moltonii* to subspecies recorded in Scotland.

**BBRC decision which affects the Scottish List****Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus***

2012 Outer Hebrides South Glendale, South Uist, juvenile, 7–11 September, photo (*British Birds* 106: 591). Status code V, Monotypic. Place between Ringed Plover and Killdeer. 1st Scottish record. Add to Category A.

**Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia***

2012 Fair Isle Lerness, male, 23 September, photo (*British Birds* 105: plate 409, 106: 635, plate 378; Moss & Miles 2012; *Birding World* 25: 379). Status code V, Monotypic. Place between Northern Parula and Blackburnian Warbler. 1st Scottish record. Add to Category A.

**SBRC decisions which affect the Scottish List****Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca***

2007 Dumfries & Galloway Dalswinton Loch, 13 September (*Scottish Birds* 34: 102, corrected)  
2008 Orkney Little Green Holm, 30 June (*Scottish Birds* 33: 102).

These records predate the previously accepted Scottish record, one present in Shetland in February and March 2010 (*Scottish Birds* 33: 23), and become the 1st and 2nd Scottish records.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor***

2012 Shetland Scalloway, Mainland, 15–19 October, photo (Fray 2013, McGowan *et al.* 2014). Following a previous deletion of this species (Forrester 2013), this becomes the 1st Scottish record. It seems likely that this bird may have emanated from the continent rather than England, therefore it may belong to a subspecies not previously recorded in Britain. The racial identification is currently under assessment, so it appears on the *Scottish List* as 'subspecies undetermined'. Status code V. Place after Great Spotted Woodpecker. 1st Scottish record. Add to Category A.



Plate 203. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Scalloway, Shetland, October 2012. © Hugh Harrop

## Addendum

### Little Auk *Alle alle*

Subspecies *polaris* was originally listed in Category D3 of the British and Scottish Lists, as all records referred to tideline corpses. The subspecies was inadvertently transferred to Category A when Category D3 was abolished and this error was later rectified (BOU 2009). Subspecies *polaris* is now removed from the *Scottish List*, which no longer includes Category D subspecies.

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

Category A	508
Category B	6
Category C	8
	522

Category D	10
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The current version of the *Scottish List* can be viewed on the SOC's website at [www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/the-scottish-list](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/the-scottish-list), though a number of records remain pending.

## Errata

*Scottish Birds* 33: 24. The 2010 Shetland record of 'Continental Cormorant' *P. c. sinensis* should read: 2010 Shetland Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, adult, 24 April (*Scottish Birds* 32:112).

*Scottish Birds* 33: 26. Dornoch Point (Greater Sand Plover) and Loch Fleet (Greater Yellowlegs) are both in Sutherland and not Ross & Cromarty as stated.

*Scottish Birds* 33: 29. The 2010 Orkney Pied Wheatear is the 21st Scottish record.

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

A published list of all records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions covered the period to the end of 2001 (Andrews & Naylor 2002). Since then there have been five updates (Forrester 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2013) and further evaluation of old records (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

In future this list will be maintained on the SOC's website and updated annually ([www.the-soc.org.uk/up-to-20-occasions](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/up-to-20-occasions)).

For the sake of completeness, four additional records, omitted in error from earlier reports, are noted below.

### Black Duck *Anas rubripes*

2009 Shetland Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, two, male and female, 9 May, same Scatness, Mainland, 11 May (*British Birds* 103: 568). 14th Scottish record of 15 birds.

### Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*

2011 Outer Hebrides Brèibhig, Barra, first-winter, 20–30 September (*British Birds* 105: 592). 12th Scottish record of 13 birds.

### Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida*

2009 Fair Isle Plantation, 21 June, trapped, photo (*British Birds* 104: 602). 8th Scottish record.

### Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*

2007 Fair Isle Hill Dyke, first-winter, 30 September, photo (*British Birds* 101: 561, 100: plate 327). 11th Scottish Record.

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*ms accepted June 2014*



Plate 204. Willow Tit, Ken/Dee Marshes RSPB, Dumfries & Galloway, April 2013. © Gordon McCall

## The former distribution of Marsh and Willow Tits in Scotland

I.J. Andrews

*In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, Willow Tits occurred, albeit in small numbers, across a wide area of central, western and southern Scotland, with an isolated population in Strathspey (Highland). Although originally listed under the name 'Marsh Tit', they were assigned to the Willow Tit around 1911. The Willow Tit was never common in Scotland and typically regarded as 'thinly distributed' throughout its range, except perhaps in the Clyde basin. Local population changes were documented in the literature and it is probable that during the 1950s and 1960s numbers were at a high before a subsequent decline to its current relict population.*

*The Marsh Tit was not added to the Scottish List until 1921 and a small population was confirmed in the south-east of the country. It is possible that some of the pre-1911 'Marsh Tits' were in fact true Marsh Tits.*

### Introduction

The Willow Tit's historical range in Scotland covered much of the central, southern and western lowlands (e.g. Harvie-Brown 1895, Baxter & Rintoul 1953, J. Maxwell in Forrester *et al.* 2007). Background research for *The Birds of Scotland* amassed the references which had been all too briefly summarised in Baxter & Rintoul (1953). With the species in subsequent decline, knowledge of its former range became a distant memory. This paper presents a more detailed summary than any previously available.

The 'Marsh Tit' has had a rollercoaster history in Scotland, being long-recognised (before these records were reassigned to the Willow Tit) and then later re-identified as a local resident in a small area of the Borders.

## Taxonomic background

Until the late 19th century, ornithologists recognized a Marsh Tit *Parus palustris* that occurred in the UK and mainland Europe and a distinctly different Willow Tit *Parus atricapillus* that only occurred on the European mainland. At this time, all black-capped tits in Scotland (as in the rest of the UK) were thought to be Marsh Tits, as they clearly differed from the continental Willow Tits *P. a. salicarius/rhenanus/borealis*. British Marsh Tits were assigned to the subspecies *P. p. dresseri*. The English name Willow Tit appears to have been derived from the Latin 'salicarius' [connected to willows *Salix*] (Simson 1966).

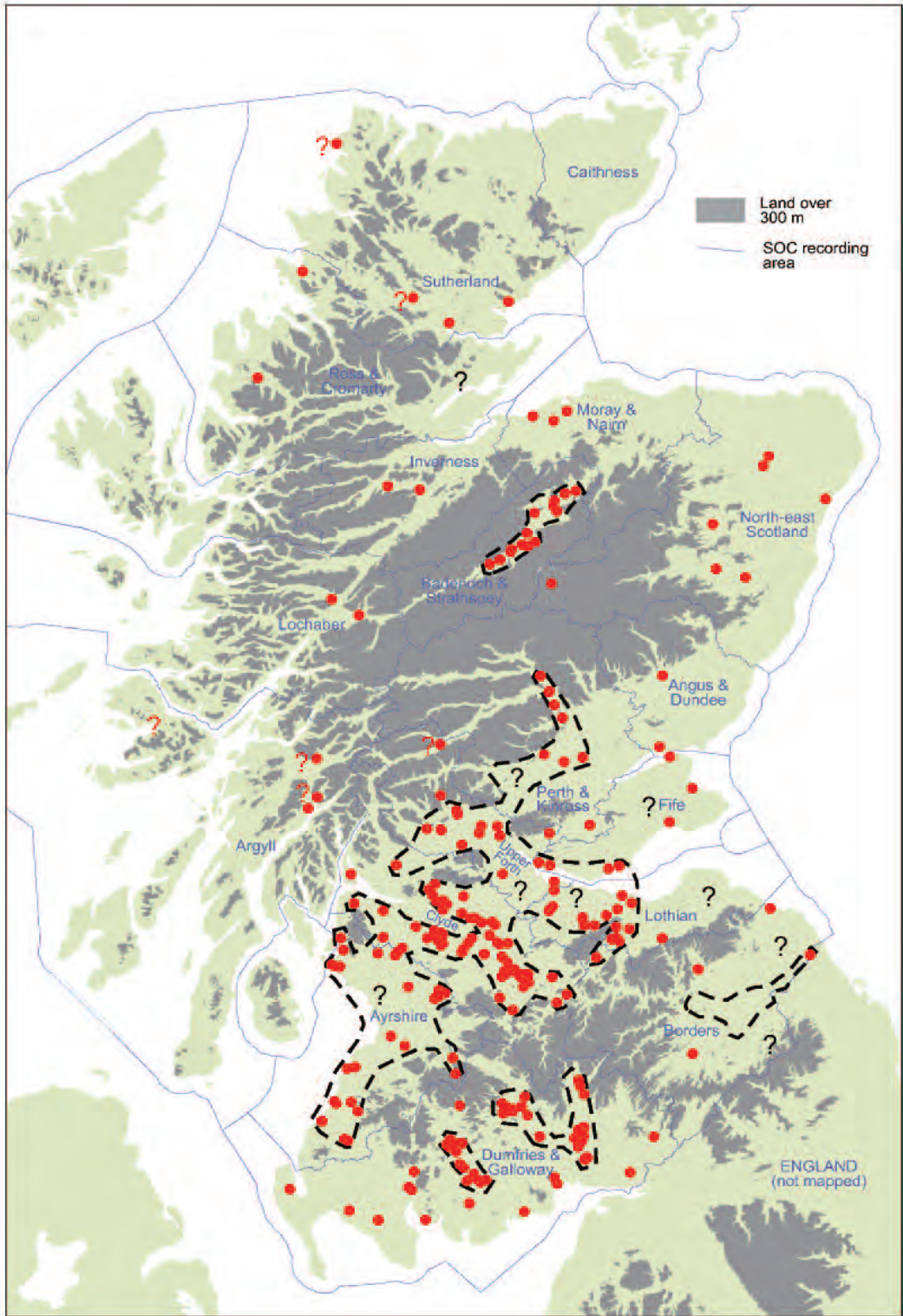
The most recent taxonomic classification is *Poecile montana* for Willow Tit (distinct from the North American Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*) and *Poecile palustris* for Marsh Tit. In 1897, two German ornithologists, Pastor Otto Kleinschmidt and Dr. Ernst Hartert, were studying skins in the British Museum and were the first to recognise that a British form of the Willow Tit *P. a. kleinschmidti* existed (Kleinschmidt 1898, Hellmayr 1900). It was much darker than the continental form and so similar to the Marsh Tit that it had previously been misidentified as such. These first specimens came from north London, but other specimens were identified in subsequent years including in Scotland.

Although Willow Tit was not 'officially' added to the British List by the BOU until 1915 (BOU 1915), Hartert (1905) was the first to list its occurrence at Scottish sites - in the valleys of the Tweed, Forth and Spey. He also mentioned two nests found by William Evans (which correspond to his two Speyside nests of 1891). Hartert had come to this conclusion having asked to examine all Evans's Scottish specimens. In correspondence to Evans in June 1905, Hartert indicated that he considered that they were all Willow Tits (Harvie-Brown 1906).

It is of note that the Speyside population had already been noted as "a shade lighter than southern examples", but when compared with British examples; a specimen was only "a little greyer" and therefore not of recent Scandinavian origin (Evans 1893). But in a letter alluded to by Harvie-Brown (1906), Evans described them as "decidedly brighter coloured - less dingy - than those got in Forth" and Harvie-Brown chooses to classify them as a northern, more brightly-coloured form and a "remnant of old Continental dispersal" (Harvie-Brown 1906). With regard to the habitat used by these northern birds, St John (1882) talked of birds in "fir woods" in winter. Evans (1893) mentions "birch and alder", "mixed wood of birch and pine", "constantly observed feeding in the pines" and "pine woods" and Kirkman & Jourdain (1930) record that they are found "in coniferous forests". Continental Willow Tits are birds of the boreal forests.

There was much debate and resistance, by some at least, to accept that two such similar species existed (Sclater 1908, Rothschild 1908). Although *British Birds* referred to Willow Tits in Scotland from 1911 and *Scottish Naturalist* followed in 1913, doubt clearly remained in some minds. Birds in Renfrewshire were referred to "a Scottish form of the Marsh-Tit" by Robertson & Mackeith (1915) on the authority of William Eagle Clarke, but Witherby in a reply to correspondence the following year said "we call [these] the British Willow-Tit".

The Marsh Tit (*sensu stricto*) did not reappear in the Scottish literature until 1921 (Laidlaw 1921). Although Hartert (1905) had mentioned it for southern Scotland, in 1911 Witherby said he knew of no Scottish specimen and this is restated by Hartert *et al.* (1912). The question of whether any of the old, non-specimen records refer to Marsh Tits will never definitively be answered. The best contenders are doubtless those mentioned at Pease Dean and Paxton in Berwickshire (Muirhead 1889) and possibly the vague mentions in the old East Lothian literature, but this is only based on these species' modern distribution. These were published as 'Marsh Tits' at a time when the Willow Tit was not recognised.



**Figure 1 (opposite).** Distribution of Willow Tit in Scotland 1800–1960 as compiled from named localities in published sources. The dashed line delimits an area within which Willow Tits are considered to have occurred sparsely in suitable habitat. Other records are assumed to be extralimital, although data are incomplete. Red question marks are adjacent to records that are now doubted; black question marks indicate areas where general comments have been made without naming sites. There are only general comments relating to the Tweed area. A rejected record from Fair Isle is not mapped.

### Distribution of Willow Tit and Marsh Tit records prior to 1960

In the following listing, all records refer to what is currently recognised as the Willow Tit (although many were published under the name Marsh Tit) unless otherwise stated.

#### Angus & Dundee

“Of rather doubtful occurrence” [Arbroath] (Simpson 1888); has nested in north Angus (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); probably nested by the river Prosen 1913 & 1914 (Baxter & Rintoul 1953, Gibson 1956, Crighton 1976); Dundee autumn 1919 (Crighton 1976); probable Balgay, Dundee 1949 (Crighton 1976).

#### Argyll

“Swarmed” in the glens of Mull before the severe winter of 1878/89 (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1892); seen Loch Awe (Alston 1906); accidental in winter (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); seen Inveraray [1890s] & heard Glen Shira 1919–21 (Stewart 1938); only accidental records (Witherby *et al.* 1940); “several records in the breeding season ..., but so far no nest has been found” (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). Note that none of these historical records are now accepted (ap Rheinalt *et al.* 2007).

#### Ayrshire

No sightings, but doubtless occurs (Gray & Anderson 1869); first recorded Ardneil Bank, West Kilbride in 1892 (also 1897) (W. Brown in Paterson 1927); “not uncommon [at Lendalfoot], and breeding ... occasionally, but it is far more numerous in winter” (Berry 1908); Largs 1915 (two skins NMS); seen Craufurdland Woods, Kilmarnock & Mochrum Woods, Maybole (Paton 1925); seen Barrhill, Fairlie Glen, Glendoune, various points near Darval (nests Tongue Burn and Glen Burn) and New Cumnock (Paterson 1927); local, sparse, fairly widely distributed (Paton & Pike 1929); “widely distributed ... though very local” (McWilliam 1936); scarce and local (Witherby *et al.* 1940); “one bred locally in widespread areas [sites listed]”, but “sharp decline since 1930” and now “occasional autumn and winter visitor” and “no proof of recent breeding” (Richards 1965); “widely though thinly distributed” (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); no reports of breeding 1955–64 (Parslow 1967).

#### Badenoch & Strathspey

[Breeds?] even as far north as Inverness[-shire] - assumed here to refer to Strathspey (More 1865, Gray 1871); inhabits the county of Inverness (Yarrell

1871–84); seen Kingussie birchwoods ... on the NW side of the river, below Kincaig ... at Baldow, Docharn nr Boat of Garten ... 7–10 at a time (Evans 1891); “struck at the time with their abundance, not having elsewhere in Scotland found them so numerous” Kingussie-Grantown 1889 [two nests found Aviemore], less common at Cromdale 1891 (Evans 1893); Aviemore 1893 (skin NMS); local and perhaps most common around Aviemore and Kinrara, but possible decline in 1895, “from 7 to 10 at a time” Baldow and Docharn (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895); found in the Spey valley (Hartert 1905); family Balavil, near Kingussie 1914 and “still well distributed [in Strathspey] 1919” (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); fairly numerous in Rothiemurchus (Gordon 1920); recorded breeding Moray, Inverness but not recently (Witherby *et al.* 1940); “in 1919 they were still well distributed ... but scarce by 1948” (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); present at Dulnain, Dorback, Boat of Garten and Rothiemurchus in 1937–41, common in wet birch woods Kingussie, Boat of Garten and Nethybridge in 1940–41, scarce in 1948, but no subsequent records (Dennis 1984); no reports of breeding 1955–64 (Parslow 1967).

#### Borders

[NB there is a possibility that some of these records may refer to Marsh Tit; see below for records of Marsh Tit since its separation.] Seen Abbotsford in 1830 (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); “permanent resident” in Berwickshire (Selby 1834); not uncommon in Roxburghshire (Thompson 1878); small numbers in many woods [Berwickshire], Pease Dean is favoured resort [nest found] and occasionally seen about Paxton (Muirhead 1889); “[breeds] lower Tweed valley and in the flat country between this and the hills, while the bird may also be found in the hill regions of the Cheviots and on the Jed at Jedburg” (Evans 1891); West Linton 1892 (skin NMS); seen near Berwick-upon-Tweed on Scottish side of border [and nests regularly on the English side] (Bolam 1897); shot Hawick 1902, rare in Roxburghshire (Laidlaw 1903); resident in Tweed valley (Hartert 1905); “as often met with in the Tweed area as in most parts of the realm” & one West Linton (Evans

1911); one Lauder Manse, rare in Lauderdale (Baxter & Rintoul 1915); "a few pairs ... in the Halmyre woods [West Linton] (Buchan 1925); records from Roxburgh, Peebles, Selkirk, Berwick are vague and the status ... (if present) in this area is obscure. Breeding stock may be fairly substantial, but more definite information is needed (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); no Marsh or Willow Tits found whilst sampling c.100 woods in Berwickshire, Roxburghshire and Selkirkshire (Nicholson 1938); "in Roxburgh, Selkirk, Peebles, Berwick ... status obscure" (Witherby *et al.* 1940); very local at the Hirsell (see Marsh Tit, below) (Douglas-Home 1946); no reports of breeding 1955–64 (Parslow 1967).

**Marsh Tit** Seen Duns Castle (Laidlaw 1921); "has, as yet, only been detected in Berwickshire" (Saunders & Clarke 1927); none found (Nicholson 1938); first Scottish nest at Coldstream (Edwards 1945); nests at the Hirsell (Douglas-Home 1946); "a local resident" (Baxter & Rintoul (1953); "Berwickshire [is] so far as I can ascertain ... is the only county in Scotland in which it has gained a footing" (Bannerman 1953).

#### Clyde

"Abundant" in Paisley (*New Statistical Account* 1834–45); breeds regularly, and is by no means a rare species (Alston 1865); not uncommon in the Upper Ward of Lanarkshire, nests regularly (Gray 1871); occurs throughout Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire (Yarrell 1871–84); a specimen from near Loch Lomond (Anon 1872); not listed for Glasgow area (Gray 1876); not seen Carmichael Parish until pair Muirglen 1898, also reported Chapel, Braidwood (Gibson 1897, 1898); seen regularly Giffnock area (Peterson & Robertson 1897); nest Fiddler's Burn, Braidwood (Dobbie 1898); shot [Glasgow-Red Bridge] 1898 (Paterson 1904); singles Darnley Glen and Giffnock (Paterson 1908); "a puzzling distribution, [around Glasgow] occurring regularly at Bardowie and east thereof, at Stepps, and about Bishop Loch, on the right bank of the river. Meantime we know nothing about it in the north-western section of this district, but on the south side, from Paisley to Cathcart, and up to Uplawmoor, it has been frequently observed" (Paterson 1909); Netherburn, Glasgow 1910 (two skins NMS); one Giffnock [east Renfrewshire], December 1910 (Wilson 1911, Patterson 1911); a few pairs nest in valley of the Calder (Stewart 1912); "[many years ago] used to be fairly common as a nesting species [at Possil Marsh]" (Rennie 1913); nest found near Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire (MacKeith 1914, Baxter & Rintoul 1915); family Loch Thom, "in winter, ... rather more widely distributed [in Renfrewshire], though far from being numerous" (Robertson & MacKeith 1915); pair Corsemalzie, seven at Possil Marsh (Rintoul & Baxter

1919); "rare on the banks of the River Clyde [itself]" but "the glens of the Rotten Calder and its tributary burns have no equal. We do not think a score of pairs an extravagant estimate of the breeding stock, and in autumn and winter little family parties are always in evidence" also "noted during the breeding season ... on the Kelvin at Kirkintilloch; on the Cart near Busby; on the Lugton near Caldwell" (Stewart 1926); "its principal haunts seem to be by the Clyde and its tributaries, from the Falls to near Glasgow, where there are many records of its breeding" (Paterson 1927); "rare in Renfrewshire" and "certain parts of Lanarkshire are the main stronghold of the Willow-Tit in this part of Scotland" (McWilliam 1936); commonest in Lanarkshire along the Clyde and particularly its tributaries from the Falls to near Glasgow; rare in Renfrewshire; few records (none recent) from Dumbartonshire (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); commonest in Lanarkshire, scarce and local Renfrewshire, few but not recent records Dumbartonshire (Witherby *et al.* 1940); Carmunnock, Lanarkshire 1943 & 1949 (three skins NMS); "widely though thinly distributed in Renfrewshire" and "[Lanarkshire] is the county in which it is most abundant", some older records for Dunbartonshire (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); breeding Lanark and Renfrew in 1955–64 (Parslow 1967).

#### Dumfries & Galloway

"Abundant" in Applegarth & Sibbaldie "chiefly during winter" (W. Jardine in *New Statistical Account* 1834–45); has decreased [in Nithsdale] and is at present a rare bird (Jardine 1839); no sightings Wigtownshire, but doubtless occurs (Gray & Anderson 1869); not mentioned (Yarrell 1871–84); Tynron (Brown 1887); not seen near Dumfries [up to c.1890], now seems to be gradually spreading again in Upper Nithsdale, and in parts of Annandale (Service 1895); very scarce and very local resident... Since [1839] it is believed that this species has slowly become more abundant [in Dumfries-shire] (Gladstone 1910); fairly plentiful in only one [un-named] valley in Kirkcudbright (Bedford 1911) [A.D. Watson mentions Palnure Valley in 1911]; changed 'Marsh Tit' entry in Gladstone (1910) to Willow Tit (Gladstone 1912, Witherby 1912); shot Grennan, Penpoint (Gladstone 1913a, Gladstone 1913b); seen Loch Ken, Livingstone & Trochie Braes (Hough 1919); family Capenoch & nest collected Scaur Water, near Capenoch (Gladstone 1923); "noted during the breeding season ... on the Nith near Dumfries" (Stewart 1926); in the 1920s scarce and local with many sightings [in Wigtownshire], but no nest found [no other records until 1969] (Dickson 1992); very sparse, especially for Wigtown and Kirkcudbright, while in Dumfriesshire Gladstone [1910] describes it as scarce and local (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); fairly frequent in





Plate 205. Willow Tit, Laurieston, Dumfries & Galloway, December 2012. © Chas Moonie

Nithsdale, Dumfriesshire, in the Thornhill-Closeburn area, where several regular localities known (Nicholson 1938); three nests Closeburn, Thornhill 1936 (Pullan 1939); scarce and local in Wigtown, Kirkcudbright and Dumfries (Witherby *et al.* 1940); fairly frequent in parts of Dumfries (Witherby *et al.* 1941); “not rare, but somewhat scarce” [in Kirkcudbrightshire] (Duncan 1947); thought to be fairly frequent in certain localities in Dumfriesshire and Kirkcudbrightshire (Bannerman 1953); no reports of breeding 1955–64 (Parslow 1967), but A.D. Watson reported the frequently around Loch Ken in 1955–60.

#### Fair Isle

[One, presumed to be of the continental race *borealis*, on 3 November 1935 (Waterston 1937, BOU 1971, Dymond 1991) was placed in square brackets by Baxter & Rintoul (1953). In the absence of more detailed notes on such an extremely rare vagrant, the record is no longer considered acceptable (Pennington *et al.* 2004).]

#### Fife

Listed as a “rare bird found occasionally” at Dunfermline (*New Statistical Account* 1834–45); occurs north to Fife (MacGillivray 1839, More 1865, Gray 1871); inhabits the county of Fife (Yarrell 1871–84); “reported from Fife” (Drummond-Hay 1885); “not common, and I have not known of a nest in the [Culross and Tulliallan] district” (Dalglish 1885); found “in all suitable localities” [around St Andrews] and breeds (Bruce 1895); uncommon

Burntisland (Nashe 1911); only known from Burntisland and Aberdour in breeding season; also seen Largo (Rintoul & Baxter 1935, Witherby & Nicholson 1937); breeds locally (Witherby *et al.* 1940); Marsh/Willow Tit Newport 1915/16 and 1916/17 (Boase 1964); “the only breeding place we know in Fife is between Burntisland and Aberdour, but we have seen it occasionally outside the breeding season in other parts” (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). No known records after 1935 (Smout 1986).

#### Inverness District

Seen near Balmacaan in 1866–67 (Craig 1882) [but maybe erroneous, Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895]; seen Corriemony, near Drumnadrochit 1932, family at least 1,050 feet above sea level “in Invernessshire” 1938 [more precise locality not documented] (Baxter & Rintoul 1953).

#### Lochaber

Two pairs feeding young Achnacarry 1938 and “we have seen them at Roybridge where they nest” (Baxter & Rintoul 1953).

#### Lothian

Not often seen near Edinburgh, but two nests found [at Bathgate] 1838 (MacGillivray 1839, Evans 1885); “Mr Macgillivray has noticed it near Edinburgh” (Yarrell 1845); winter visitor to the neighbourhood of Edinburgh as long ago as 1859 or 1860 (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895); seen Craiglockhart Hill & nest Duddingston 1860 or 1861 (Harvie-Brown

1906); rather rare in East Lothian (Turnbull 1863); nests regularly East and West Lothian (More 1865); "would seem to occur throughout the eastern Lowlands..." [assumed to include Lothian] (Yarrell 1871–84); scarce [in Scotland] ... chiefly in the Lothians (Harting 1872); "a few may occasionally be met with in the Lothians" (Booth 1887); two seen Mid Calder (Evans 1885); bred West Lothian "since at least 1886" (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); "the Lothians ... looked upon as its Scottish stronghold" [before Strathspey population found] (Evans 1893); Currie Moor 1898 (skin NMS); breeding in various places in East Lothian at the end of 19th century (Bonar in Baxter & Rintoul 1953); fairly widely distributed in West Lothian (Brock 1913); family Bathgate Hills (Baxter & Rintoul 1916); family Bathgate 1919 (Anon 1920); "noted during the breeding season ... on several of the tributary burns of the Almond, ... we have caught these Tits on the nest over forty year ago" (Stewart 1926); many sightings by W. Evans from Midlothian listed, notably a "colony" near Kirknewton, including five nests; Nash, himself, had only seen one (Nash 1935); small numbers Midlothian; fairly widely distributed in West Lothian [good many nests], none recently East Lothian (Rintoul & Baxter 1935); records vague in East Lothian (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); breeds locally Mid- and W. Lothian, E. Lothian status obscure (Witherby *et al.* 1940); "breeds in smaller numbers in Midlothian, but in West Lothian it is much more plentiful" (Baxter & Rintoul 1953); bred West Lothian 1955–64 (Parslow 1967).

**Marsh Tit:** pair near Saltoun 1955 (Baxter 1957a); [two Hermitage of Braid, Edinburgh 1956, later noted as close-ringed (Baxter 1957b, 1959)]; bred East Lothian 1966.

#### Moray & Nairn

Numerous in fir woods [in Morayshire] during winter [and also bred] (St John 1863); one seen Forres in winter 1878/79 and pairs nested at Darnaway and Drumduan (near Nairn) c.1894 (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1895). No reliable records since then (Cook 1992).

#### North-east Scotland

Noted Banchory and Fyvie (*New Statistical Account* 1834–45); [breeds] occasionally in Aberdeenshire (More 1865, Gray 1871); inhabits the county of Aberdeen (Yarrell 1871–84); seen Newburgh 1871 and Gourdas near Fyvie in 1896 (Sim 1903); one or two seen Alford, but proof of nesting still required (Gurney 1908, Paterson 1908); one in heather at "just under 2,000 feet above sea level, when crossing the hills from Braemar to Aviemore" (Gordon 1920); "noted during the breeding season ... at Kincardine O'Neil" (Stewart 1926).

#### Perth & Kinross

Breeds in Perthshire (More 1865, Gray 1871); inhabits the county of Perth (Yarrell 1871–84); rare in NW of Perthshire (Horn 1881); "a few stragglers in the neighbourhood of Dunkeld and near Perth" (Booth 1887); 4–5 seen near Doune (Duthie 1896); seen, but doesn't breed in Tay valley (Evans & Harvie-Brown 1898); first seen Logierait 1893 (Campbell 1899); pair near Ballinuish 1902 (Campbell 1903); 'has reached' Almondbank & seen Dalguise (Harvie-Brown 1906); "reaching to ... Perth[shire] in small numbers and very locally to a little north of Perth (town), with isolated record as far as Dunkeld (Hartert *et al.* 1912); seen Kinross House (Rintoul & Baxter 1935); breeds S Perths (Witherby *et al.* 1940); "breeds" south of a line from Killin to Pitlochry (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); has bred in the Upper Tay (Gibson 1956); no reports of breeding 1955–64 (Parslow 1967).

#### Ross & Cromarty

Family Easter Ross 1919 (Harding 1920, Witherby & Nicholson 1937); nest Loch Maree 1921 (Witherby *et al.* 1941); three families Coigach, Wester Ross 1942 (Witherby *et al.* 1943, Baxter & Rintoul 1953).

#### Sutherland

Not recorded (Rintoul & Baxter 1920, Witherby & Nicholson 1937); [sightings at Invercassley & S of Cape Wrath (Graham 1953, Palmer 1953, Baxter 1955), latter considered as Blackcap by Vittery 1997]; Invercassley, Bonar Bridge and Golspie [all post 1953] (Angus 1983); no recent records (Vittery 1997).

#### Upper Forth

"Rare" at Dollar (*New Statistical Account* 1834–45); inhabits the county of Stirling (Yarrell 1871–84); Dunipace ... in autumn (Gray 1871); Dunipace & East Stirlingshire 1871–73 (five skins NMS); "not common by any means [near Callander]", one shot Loch Lubnaig 1877 (Hamilton-Buchanan 1879); nest found Dunipace 1884, [probably] recently bred near Kippen and "much more common [in Stirlingshire] in autumn than it used to be" (Evans 1885); nest found Bo'ness (Godfrey 1901); resident in the valley of the Forth (Hartert 1905); seen Bridge of Allan (Evans & Harvie-Brown 1898); signs of expansion "after passing Stirling", nests Vale of Menteith 1879, seen Dunblane, nest found Stirlingshire ?1879 (Harvie-Brown 1906); "noted during the breeding season ... on the Teith near Callander" (Stewart 1926); found in a good many places, nesting Vale of Menteith, Dunipace, Bridge of Allan and Aberfoyle (Rintoul & Baxter 1935); "breeds" south of a line from Killin to Pitlochry, found in a good number of places in Stirlingshire and distribution links with that in Lanarkshire (Witherby & Nicholson 1937); bred Stirlingshire 1955–64 (Parslow 1967).

### Changes since 1960

Having steadily contracted its range across most of Scotland since the mid-20th century, Willow Tits were only recorded breeding in Clyde (Lanark and Renfrew), Upper Forth (Stirling) and West Lothian during 1955–64 (Parslow 1967), Clyde, Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway by 2004 (Forrester *et al.* 2007) and in Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway a similar situation existed during the latest atlas period, 2007–11 (Balmer *et al.* 2013). The Speyside population (possibly with as a few as one pair) remained in a single 10-km square (Aviemore) in 1968–72 and at that time there were also records from Golspie, Lochaber and Arran. The Perth & Kinross and Upper Forth populations appear to have been lost by the mid-1960s or possibly earlier. Having once been a stronghold for the Willow Tit, even the Clyde population now looks precarious (J. Maxwell in Forrester *et al.* 2007). In fact, after single birds were seen in 2007–09, there were none reported in Clyde in 2010–14 (J. Maxwell pers. comm.). The Dumfries & Galloway population increased after the mid-20th century (e.g. A.D. Watson rarely saw it prior to 1954, but with many sightings in 1955–60), before declining later in the century (Dumfries & Galloway Bird Reports). Nevertheless, this south-western region remains the nucleus of the Scottish population to the present day.

The Marsh Tit has similarly declined after reaching its maximum range, albeit still only in Borders, in the 1980s and 1990s, when a few even spread into Lothian (Murray *et al.* 1998). During the 2007–11 atlas period, the species had all but disappeared from Scotland (Balmer *et al.* 2013).

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Plate 206. Willow Tit, Ken/Dee Marshes RSPB, Dumfries & Galloway, March 2012. © Jamie Mina

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The majority of the following references can be consulted at the Waterston Library, SOC, Aberlady; many can also be viewed online at [www.biodiversitylibrary.org](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org) and [archive.org](http://archive.org).

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# Obituaries

## J.M.A. Osborne (1948–2014)

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**Plate 207.** Jonathan Osborne, Mallorca, Spain, c.1994. © Andrea Osborne/Tim Stowe

On 28 January 2014, Jonathan Osborne (aka Jon, Jonno, Jonnors, JMA, JMAO) died after a long, hard-fought battle with cancer. He was born on 23 May 1948.

Jonathan attended Edinburgh Academy, where his academic career was unremarkable, but where he was nevertheless popular and did excel at sport, particularly cricket, being a first-rate medium-fast bowler and useful middle-order batsman. By then, his life-long interest and passion for natural history had already been kindled on holidays spent in rural Northumberland with his parents, two brothers and sister. He was a good looking young man, with a huge sense of fun and with interests that included the usual things for a good-looking young man with a sense of fun, but also football (as a much-disillusioned Hibs supporter), his cricket activities and rally driving.

After an early career in the motor trade and motoring journalism, Jonathan got his first job with the RSPB in 1981 at the original Scottish headquarters in Regent Terrace. He was to remain with the Society for the rest of his working life. Being well-organised, highly motivated and a good team player, he was popular with his colleagues. He moved from Scotland to work at The Lodge for the latter part of the 1980s, returning north at the end of that decade to work, once again, at RSPB Scotland. The RSPB is not unionised, but it has a Staff Association for which Jonathan became very active. He had a strong sense of justice and when he had to be he could be brave in sticking up for the underdog. JMAO was always a highly entertaining public speaker - a skill his employers exploited fully - and he was even more amusing in informal settings with trusted colleagues over a couple of beers.

Before returning to Scotland, he married Andrea in December 1987. Although the marriage was not to last, Jonathan remained a devoted father to their daughters, Sophie and Holly, for the rest of his life.

Every person should have a place where they feel completely at ease with themselves and their surrounds; for JMAO that place was the Isle of May. He first went there as a schoolboy in the autumn of 1966 and he made his last visit in spring 2013. In the early years, his companions would often be his brothers, Julian and Jeremy, and his friend Jeff Watson. In later years the 'crew' widened; Ken Shaw first joined the Osborne brothers in 1995, followed by Keith Morton a few years later and finally Alan Lauder - an experienced ringer, an excellent sea-watcher and almost as good a cook as JMAO. A visit would typically include up to four Osbornes (by this time his nephew Mark was also a regular) and some combination of the above with 'guest appearances' from Ian Wilson, Guy Thompson and Tony Mainwood.



Whoever was with him, however, on the May, JMAO was the 'guvnor'. He was the quartermaster, the chief cook and the driving force that ensured all bird logs were filled in to a high standard. Domestic arrangements defied the observatory's (then) basic facilities and meals were to a consistently high standard. Jonathan was also inspired by the history of the observatory and the great contributors to Scottish ornithology for whom it was also an important place, whose photographs look down upon modern visitors from the walls of the observatory living room. Any regular to the May will recognise a JMAO contribution to any of the logs - neat and crammed with information. He found the May's first Red-throated Pipit and the first and second live records of Blyth's Reed Warbler. He served on the committee of the observatory trust until the end of his life and was still assiduously attending to his duties as bookings secretary to within a few weeks of his death.

For the later part of his life JMAO lived at Earlston where he played an active part in the Borders birding scene. He could always be relied upon for survey work and he was super-efficient with his bird records. Even during his advancing illness he was still doing tetrads for the Atlas.

Jonathan, like us all, had his faults. He could be spectacularly grumpy and his unintended Victor Meldrew impersonations were simultaneously frightening and hilarious. You didn't dare ask him twice what he thought of 'so-called professionals' on the May who didn't document their bird records properly!

Jonathan Osborne cared very deeply about Scottish ornithology and nature conservation. He was a scrupulous documenter and contributor. Motivated and determined, he was reliable and always inclusive of others. He could be amusing, deep thinking and forward thinking. He was a devoted dad, a very good birder, and an unforgettable friend.

**Ken Shaw, Keith Morton & Ian Darling  
(with sincere thanks to Julian Osborne  
and Tim Melling)**



**Plate 208.** Jonathan Osborne in the Isle of May Bird Observatory, June 2013. © Hugh T.H. Morton

# Raptor persecution in Scotland: July 2014 update

I.M. THOMSON

The last article on the illegal killing of birds of prey in Scotland, written for *Scottish Birds* 33(1), appeared at the beginning of 2013, a year designated 'The Year of Natural Scotland' by the Scottish Government.

The year had dawned with some optimism. For the fourth consecutive year, we had seen detected cases of illegal poisoning decline, and although, again it is important to reiterate that these only represent what was actually found, the apparent reduction in these indiscriminate crimes was welcomed universally. In saying that, yet again, a Golden Eagle was one of the victims, with a satellite-tagged bird found dead in Lochaber in March. But, the year ended with the news that a young pair of White-tailed Eagles from the east Scotland re-introduction scheme had built a nest in an Angus glen, the first breeding attempt in the east of the country for a hundred years.

Within days of the New Year beginning, however, it was discovered that the tree had been deliberately felled, and the nest destroyed. Realism returned quickly. A police investigation was launched. The site was five miles from the nearest public vehicle access. The tree felled was the only one in the whole plantation. Full co-operation from the estate where the nest was felled was assured. Surely it would be easy to identify the culprit?

No. The police requests for information were met with "no comment" responses across the board, from all those employed in the area concerned. While the right to decline to answer questions is enshrined in Scots Law, few would agree that this amounts to "full co-operation". But, with no suspect identified, that would ostensibly mean the end of the investigation.



Plate 209. Poisoned satellite-tagged Golden Eagle, Glen Lethnot, Angus, December 2013. © RSPB Scotland

Of course, this sad example was not the first time this has happened. Indeed, when it comes to the persecution of raptors, no-one ever seems prepared to say a word that may assist in the identification of the perpetrator.

In late May 2013, two members of the public witnessed the organised 'hunt' of a pair of Hen Harriers that had just started nest-building on an Aberdeenshire estate. For almost three hours, two armed men stalked the protected raptors, guided to where they were perched or flying by a third man, communicating with those on the hill by radio. As darkness fell, four shots rang out, and the men were seen and heard celebrating the killing of the male harrier.

Of course, the killer did not leave the body lying around to be found, but at least there were the two other individuals he was with, fully aware that he had committed the crime. Again the police investigated; again, nobody was prepared to identify the criminal. Again, a raptor killer escaped justice.

This latest case was one of several, including the killing of another harrier, the poisoning of a Red Kite and shooting of another; and the shooting of four Buzzards in other incidents, which led to the Scottish Government Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, to announce further measures to combat these crimes. This included a review of sentences given for convicted wildlife criminals, and instructing

Scottish Natural Heritage to implement a means of restricting the use of General Licences (a legislative tool that allows an 'authorised person' to kill certain species under specific circumstances e.g. allows a gamekeeper to shoot a Carrion Crow, that would otherwise be protected).

It is perhaps ironic, that just a few weeks earlier, the SOC had been part of a delegation that met with the Minister to handover a petition, officially endorsed by the Club, that contained almost 23,000 names, collected in just over two weeks, calling on him to ensure that Buzzards continued to have full legal protection, and to resist calls made by some in the game-shooting sector to allow licences to control them.

Sadly, despite the Minister's robust comments, this did not seem to deter those who seem intent on continuing to kill some of our rarest protected birds with further shootings of a Red Kite and several Buzzards. But, on a positive note, a second pair of White-tailed Eagles did manage to breed in the east of Scotland, successfully fledging a male chick.

Unfortunately, 'The Year of Natural Scotland' ended, as inauspiciously as it had began, with the poisoning of yet another Golden Eagle in the Angus glens; just the latest incident of a litany of recent raptor persecution cases in this area.

2014 has been no better, with the massacre of birds of prey on the Black Isle grabbing a great deal of media attention. Twenty-two dead raptors - six Buzzards and 16 Red Kites - were found dead in a small area of farmland near Conon Bridge. Thus far, 15 of these have been



Plate 210. Poisoned Red Kite, near Conon Bridge, Highland, March 2014. © RSPB Scotland

confirmed to have been the victims of poisoning as a result of consuming bait laced with a banned pesticide.

This incident, quite rightly, attracted universal condemnation, lead to the establishment of a reward fund and resulted in an unprecedented public demonstration in Inverness town centre. But, it is important to put this case into context. It was highly unusual in that it was on lowland farmland, close to a town and in an area frequently and easily accessed by members of the public.

The vast majority of raptor persecution incidents still happen away from the public gaze, in upland areas where visitors are few and where the chances of evidence of the crimes being found is very slim. These incidents may not be seen, the bodies may not be found, but the evidence is clear time and time again - large swathes of Scotland's uplands managed intensively for driven grouse shooting continue to see virtually no raptors breeding successfully.

It is for this reason that RSPB Scotland is now calling for a robust system of licensing for grouse moors. The grouse-shooting industry has had decades to put its house in order, but has singularly failed to demonstrate that it can operate in harmony with protected birds of prey. Licences should have sanctions for wrong-doers, with repeat offenders losing their licence and thus the right to shoot all gamebirds for set periods. Estates that do practise sustainable management, and obey the law should have nothing to fear.

The one light that had shone from the gloom of 2013 was that first White-tailed Eagle chick to fly from a nest in eastern Scotland for 200 years. It thrived and survived the challenges of its first winter. But that light too was extinguished, when the satellite-tagged bird 'disappeared' on a grouse moor in upper Donside. At the same location, four tagged Golden Eagles have similarly vanished. The only eagle body recovered confirmed it had died due to illegal poisoning.

Enough is enough.

*Ian Thomson, RSPB Scotland.*  
Email: [Ian.Thomson@rspb.org.uk](mailto:Ian.Thomson@rspb.org.uk)

# NEWS AND NOTICES

## New SOC members

**Ayrshire:** Dr J. Macpherson, Mr & Mrs A. Shand, Mr & Mrs H. Thomson, Mr K. Thornhill, **Central Scotland:** Mr J. Butterfield, Ms Y. Chuang, Dr D.P. Edwards, Ms K.M. Proctor, **Clyde:** Mr J. Bell, Mr & Mrs G. Frew, Mr P. Jefferey, Mr & Mrs M. Lee, Mr & Mrs J. Leonard, Mr W. McEwan, Mr M. Smith, Ms C. Stevenson & Mr D. McIver, **Dumfries:** Ms F. Russell, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr J. Bruce, Mr M. Izzard, Mr J. Nelson, Mr A. Whitelee & Ms P. Insole, **Fire:** Mr A. Cairns, Mr R. Luxmoore, Mr & Mrs A. Scott, **Highland:** Mr A. Owen, Ms S. Walker & Mr R. Allen, **Lothian:** Mrs J. Arduis, Mrs W. Badger, Ms D. Berry, N. Blair & P. Watters, Mr J. Boyle, Ms A. Chisholm & Mr C. McNulty, Prof P. Cunningham MBE, Mr & Mrs S. Donaldson, Miss L. Greig, Mr W. Hampson, Mr Hogan, Mr M. Holton, Mrs A. Horrox, Mr J. Hunter, Ms S. MacFadyen, Mr N.R. MacIver, Mr E. & Mr J. McLachlan, Mr & Mrs P. Occleston, Ms A.J. Rutter, Ms P.M. Smith, Mr A. Turnbull, **Moray:** Mr I. Addis, Mr & Mrs B. Green, Ms G. Helweg & Mr P. Carroll, **North-East Scotland:** Mr & Mrs A. Baird, Mr T.B. Cruickshank, Mrs L. Goldie, Mr D. Heptinstall, Mr G. Millar, **Overseas:** Mr J. Malevez, **Scotland - no branch:** Mrs P. Currie, Mr S. Gibson, Mr G. McConnachie & Ms H. Allan, Ms J. Peddie, **Tayside:** Ms K. Fletcher, Mr S. Will.

## 200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **May: 1st** £30 Donald Wiggins, **2nd** £20 Miss J. Wilcox, **3rd** £10 T. Daniels. **June: 1st**, £30 A. McIvor, **2nd** £20 Keith Macgregor, **3rd** £10 R.C. Welland. **July: 1st** 30 Dr M. McIntyre, **2nd** £20 Mrs M. Watson, **3rd** £10 S. Gill. Details on how to join can be obtained by writing to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

## Events

- **SOC Annual Conference**, 31 October to 2 November 2014, Station Hotel, Perth. To book your place online, visit [www.the-soc.org.uk/the-2014-annual-conference/](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/the-2014-annual-conference/) or contact headquarters.
- **Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference**, Saturday 21 March 2015, University of Glasgow (Western Infirmary Lecture Theatre Suite).



Plate 211. Pinkfeet rising. © Lisa Hooper

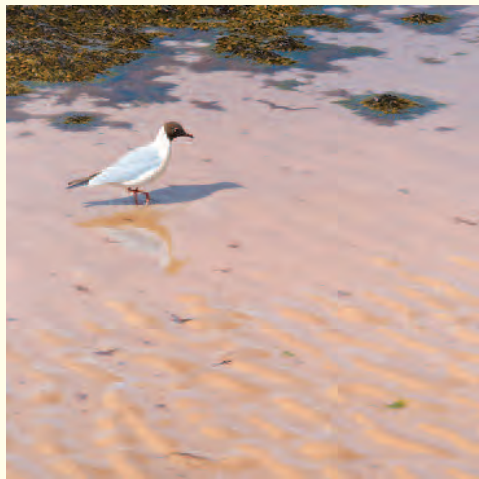


Plate 212. Black-headed Gull. © Chris Rose

## Waterston House

- **Art Exhibitions**, Lisa Hooper, 20 September to 12 November. Chris Rose, 15 November to 14 January 2015.
- **Optics Demo Day**, Sunday 12 October 2014, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. A wide range of binoculars and telescopes. Or just come along for some friendly expert advice!

## Branch updates

**North-East Scotland branch newsletter (September 2014)**, The latest issue is now available to view or download in PDF format from the North-East Scotland branch page of the SOC website. A supply of paper copies will be available at the indoor meetings. Alternatively, please call Hugh Addelee on 01330 820949 to request a hard copy by post.



Plate 213. Grey Heron, the Caul, River Nith, Dumfries, September 2013. © Edmund Fellowes

### Edmund Fellowes - winner of the *British Birds* Bird Photograph of the Year 2014

Edmund has won the *British Birds* Bird Photograph of the Year for his Grey Heron (Plate 213). The image is a local one, taken at the Caul (the weir over the Nith in Dumfries, by the bus station!). He received his prize at the British Birdwatching Fair in Rutland, presented by Simon King (Plate 214). This is the fourth time Edmund has won the competition and all his winning shots were taken locally - the first time was in 1979 (Green Woodpecker), then around ten years ago (Cuckoo) and two years ago (Goosander).

In May, Edmund was also awarded Fellowship status (FRPS) - the highest level of distinction - from the Royal Photographic Society. His submission to the Nature section involved a panel of 20 prints on the theme of bird behaviour, which included his now award-winning Grey Heron shot.

### Great Auk bone found at North Berwick, Lothian

A 1,500-year-old bone from a Great Auk has been recovered from outside the Seabird Centre in North Berwick, East Lothian, during archaeological



Plate 214. Edmund Fellowes receives his award from Simon King at the British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland, August 2014. © Mark Holling

excavations in May 2014. The dig also revealed bones of butchered seals, fish and other seabirds. The upper arm bone (distal right humerus) of the auk was unearthed at the entrance area of an early building and has been radiocarbon dated to between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. The discovery of this bone is one of several found in the Forth area during recent excavations. On the Isle of May, bones from four different individuals were discovered from possibly early Middle Ages

to perhaps the 16th century deposits (James 1995). Remains have also been found in Iron Age middens near Dunbar (Perry 2000). It is thought these were wintering or moulting birds as opposed to breeders.

*Maggie Sheddan*

**James, H.F. 1995.** *The Isle of May Excavations 1995*. Glasgow University. Archaeological Research Division, Glasgow.

**Perry, D.R. 2000.** *Castle Park, Dunbar: Two Thousand Years on a Fortified Headland, Part 4*. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Monograph Series No. 16.

### **New Scottish Raptor Monitoring Co-ordinator**

Amy Challis replaced Brian Etheridge as the new full-time Scottish Raptor Monitoring Co-ordinator in mid-June 2014. Brian retired after 11 years in post having done a superb job in developing the monitoring system for raptors in Scotland, working closely with raptor field workers and members of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme.

Amy completed her PhD at University of Stirling in 2007 and since then has worked for the RSPB in various roles in northern England, Scotland and most recently Wales. She worked for three years as a Conservation Officer for the RSPB in Tayside and Fife and was involved both with monitoring breeding Hen Harriers and winter counting, ringing and radio tracking Red Kites. She was previously a member of the Tayside Raptor Study Group and assisted with data administration for the Group. For the last few years she has worked as Data Manager for the RSPB in Wales.

After the handover with Brian, she will be preparing the 2013 Annual Raptor Report and plans to meet the representatives of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group, of which the SOC is an active member, and fieldworkers from the 11 Raptor Study Groups. The post is a crucial element in the conservation of raptors in Scotland and Amy's passion for nature conservation and birds of prey, allied to her data management skills will stand her in good stead in the post.

*Gordon Riddle*  
*SOC Representative on the SRMG*



Plate 215. Amy Challis, Snowdonia, North Wales, May 2014. © Richard Challis

### The Scottish Naturalist & The Western Naturalist - free online access

Over the years the *Scottish Naturalist* and the *Western Naturalist* have published a great many important papers, as well as notes and obituaries documenting the history and development of Scottish natural history. Latterly in particular, the journals had limited circulation and access has been difficult for anyone who did not receive their own printed copies or have a set of the journal(s) in a nearby library.

We would like to make access to the full run of the journals available through the Biodiversity Heritage Library. The BHL [www.biodiversitylibrary.org](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org), whose main partners in the UK are the Natural History Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, has become the world's main free archive of digitised natural history literature, and has established itself as a leading online research library. If you don't already know it, you should have a look - it offers free access to a vast amount of historical books and journals, including the *Scottish Naturalist* and the *Annals of Scottish Natural History* through to 1922, the *Proceedings of the Glasgow Natural History Society*, rare books by Pennant, Harvie-Brown, MacGillivray and much more. By adding the rest of the *Scottish Naturalist* (after 1922) and the short run of the *Western Naturalist* to the BHL we hope this will allow more people around the world to find and read these journals and appreciate their contribution to natural history. It will bring these journals to many new audiences.

The heirs of Dr Jack Gibson, as well as Aberdeen University Press and the current owners of Oliver & Boyd as publishers of the journal have either given their consent, or raised no objections to this plan. Authors, photographers and artists originally submitted their articles and other material to the *Scottish Naturalist* and the *Western Naturalist* for print publication, mostly before the idea of digital access came along. It is now impracticable or impossible to trace all the individual contributors or their legal representatives, but we believe that most or all would be happy to see their work now reaching new and wider audiences to the overall benefit of Scottish natural history. If any copyright holder does not wish to have their material included in free digital



Plate 216. The Scottish Naturalist. © Ian Andrews

access, they are asked to contact [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk) to discuss this with us as soon as possible, preferably before 1 December 2014. Arrangements are in place to have material excluded from web access where necessary.

### The 'reincarnated' Scottish Naturalist

The *Scottish Naturalist* welcomes articles, long or short, on any aspect of Scottish natural history in the broadest sense - including zoology, ornithology, botany, entomology, palaeontology, geology, ecology, conservation and the history of these subjects. The editorial team comprises Dr George Thomson (editor), Professor David Bryant, Professor Roger Dennis and Louise Bustard. Details for submitting notes, observations or longer papers are given under 'Guidelines for authors' on [www.thescottishnaturalist.org](http://www.thescottishnaturalist.org). Publication of the first volume will be when sufficient material has been received to comprise an issue and this, and following volumes, can be downloaded in pdf format from the links. It is expected that the journal will appear at least once a year.

### Corrections

Brian Henderson has pointed out that the Egyptian Goose in 2007 (*Scottish Birds* 34: 102) was on 13 September (not July) and that it was at Dalswinton Loch only (not the other two mentioned sites).

The photographs on page 155 of the June 2014 edition (Plate 149 a–c) should be credited to Ranald Strachan, Fife Countryside Ranger, rather than Paul Taylor.

# The Scottish Birdfair, 10–11 May 2014

## J. CLEAVER

If the British Birdwatching Fair could be classed as the birdwatchers' Glastonbury, then the Scottish Birdfair must surely be Scotland's equivalent of T in the Park!

Now in its third year of running, the annual event returned, bigger and better than ever, to the West Lawn of Hopetoun House, Lothian, this 10 and 11 May.

A firm highlight in the nature lovers' calendar, the Scottish Birdfair has witnessed a growing number of exhibitors (both domestic and international), as well as increasing visitor numbers, (almost 6,000 people attended the 2014 event) year upon year.

Guests visiting over the course of the weekend were presented with more than 100 planned activities for them to pick and choose from; tough decisions had to be made when selecting which walks, talks, special events or workshops one might attend due to scheduling conflicts!

The SOC's contributions to activities had been carefully designed to be representative of the Club's constitution and to allow us to showcase our work encouraging the study and recording of Scotland's birds.



Plate 217. The SOC stand at the Scottish Bird Fair, Hopetoun House, May 2014. © Wendy Hicks





**Plate 218.** Dissecting owl pellets at the Scottish Bird Fair, Hopetoun House, May 2014. © Wendy Hicks

Here's what we lined up for visitors to the fair:

- *Birdwatching for Beginners* walks with Stan da Prato
- *Recording Birds at the Isle of May Bird Observatory* workshop with Ian Darling
- *Birds in Your Garden: Facts and Fallacies* talk with Stan da Prato
- *Living with Seabirds* talk with Bryan Nelson
- *Owl Pellet Dissection* with Miranda Shephard
- *Raptor Identification Workshop* with Ian Thomson
- *Nature Photography Demonstration & Walk* with Laurie Campbell
- *BTO/SOC Members & Volunteers Thank You Reception* with BTO & SOC staff
- *Still here... Horse of the Woods* talk with David Jardine

Preparing for an event of this size is no small task and each member of staff at headquarters played a crucial role in facilitating the Club's presence at the fair. Many thanks go to Jean, Wendy, Karen, Dave and Kathryn at Waterston

House. It was fantastic to have David Clugston, the Club's Honorary Librarian, accompany the team on the stand on Saturday, and SOC President, Chris McInerny, join us on Sunday.

Likewise, without the high calibre of speakers and leaders who so generously and graciously donate their time to the event, both in the planning, travelling to and from the fair and delivering their contribution over the weekend, the Club would not attain anything like the same level of success or exposure. SOC Council and the headquarters team, especially myself, are exceptionally grateful to Stan da Prato, Ian Darling, Bryan Nelson, Miranda Shephard (and little helper Aidan), Ian Thomson, Laurie Campbell and David Jardine. This year the team were able to build on last year's successes and generate 24 new memberships and nearly £200 profit from book sales.

*Jane Cleaver, SOC Development Officer.*

# Mapping Arran's birds

J. CASSELS



Plate 219. The Northern Range - Goatfell on the right, Arran, August 2005. © Jim Cassels

I have a long connection with Arran, developing, in birding terms, from being a summer migrant, to a regular passage migrant to, on retirement in 2005, a resident. On retirement the previous bird recorder saw me coming and I found that for 2006 I was the bird recorder for the Arran Natural History Society (ANHS). I need to learn to say no.

During that first year as bird recorder news began to come out about a national bird atlas. The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Regional Representative, Richard Allan, came over and spoke with Terry Southall, our local ringer, about what was involved. Terry and another local birder, Alan Hollick, then met with me and it was seen that the organisation of the Arran contribution to the national atlas, a small selection of areas in each of Arran's 10kmsq, fell within my remit of bird recorder. I need to learn to say no.

I took it on, but decided that it would be an excellent opportunity to do a local bird atlas. This would be a first for Arran. Instead of aiming to do a small selection of areas for the national atlas we would do all the areas, all 139 tetrads, cover the whole of Arran and produce an Arran Bird Atlas. The committee of the ANHS agreed. That was the start.

## Arran - a special place with special birds

An island in the Firth of Clyde, Arran is roughly 20 miles long by ten miles across and sixty miles round. It is not remote. The ferry terminal on the mainland is less than an hour from the centre of Glasgow and the crossing is less than an hour. It is described as Scotland in miniature and, in terms of habitats, Arran has most of the habitats of Scotland with individual tetrads often containing a wide range of habitats. The Arran Moors Special Protection Area (SPA) linked to



Plate 220. Female Hen Harrier, Clauchlands, Arran, January 2013. © Brian Couper

previous Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), was established in 2003 through the work of John Rhead. It covers an extensive area of Arran. This SPA is of outstanding interest for the variety of upland habitats and breeding birds. There are large tracts of blanket bog, wet and dry heath and upland grassland. With small areas of broad-leaved woodland and several small lochs, this diversity of habitats supports a rich variety of moorland breeding birds. The area is internationally important for its breeding Hen Harriers. In addition the area is nationally important for Red-throated Divers, Golden Eagle, Peregrine and Short-eared Owl. Round the extensive coast, Great Northern, Black-throated and Red-throated Divers can all be seen most months of the year. There are decreasing numbers of breeding Eider and increasing numbers of breeding Black Guillemot. Arctic Terns breed on the off-shore island of Pladda and Purple Sandpipers are regular winter visitors. That is just a flavour of this special place with special birds.

### Collecting the data

For the national atlas, data was to be collected over four breeding seasons, April through July and four winters, November through February. For our local atlas, in order to cover all 139 tetrads that covered Arran, the data was collected over five breeding seasons and five winters. The last data was entered at the end of September 2012.

The biggest challenge to collecting the data was getting volunteers to take part in the field work.



**Plate 222.** View from North Goatfell, Arran, December 2012. © *Lucy Wallace*

The number of experienced birdwatchers on Arran is very limited. For example, the Arran membership of the SOC consists of three pensioners and an adult. A small group who, even if they were all willing, would not have been able to cover all the tetrads. The net needed to be cast wider, not only to include residents, but also visitors and particularly regular visitors.

The system was established of putting bird notes in the local paper, usually two a month, and always ending by encouraging people to send me their sightings. A web site was set up and run by me again to share bird information and encourage others to send me their sightings. Material produced by the national atlas team was used to keep members of the ANHS up to date. There were talks, not only to the ANHS but to other diverse groups on the island. As well as talks there were organised walks, usually two or three each winter run by ANHS. For five years in a row, there was an Arran



**Plate 221.** An Arran Natural History Society walk, Kingscross, Arran, February 2010. © *Jim Cassels*

Wildlife Festival - 80 events in a week in May. For the last three years finishing in 2010, the festival was run by the ANHS in partnership with Forestry Commission Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Scottish Natural Heritage.

All of this was part of trying to get people involved and trying to build up people's confidence and skills. In October 2010, Bob Swann, the Scottish organiser of the national atlas came over and spoke to the ANHS about the developing bird atlas and encouraged people to get involved.

### What was the result of all this encouragement?

The intention was to visit all 139 tetrads twice in the breeding season for up to two hours and twice in winter again for up to two hours. This was achieved with the exception of some remote areas that only received one winter and one breeding visit of two hours. It was emphasized that everyone could take part by supplying roving records. The result was that over 36,000 records on 177 species were collected over the five breeding seasons and five winters and it involved over 700 people. At the end of September 2012 the last record was uploaded into the national bird atlas website.

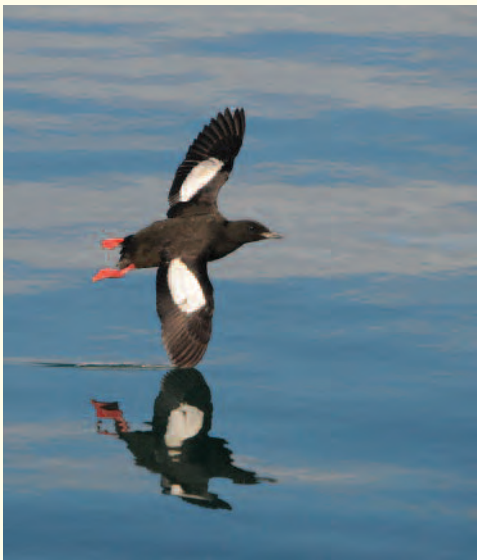


Plate 223. Black Guillemot, Brodick, Arran, June 2014.  
© Angus Hogg

### The publication

Once all the data was in, the challenge was to get it in a form that was going to be accessible and helpful. The emphasis was to be on the maps. The intention was to produce an atlas and this was done in 20 months with the help and support of a great many people. These included: the central support staff for the national atlas under the leadership of Dawn Balmer; Ian Andrews who produced the base map and directed me towards the DMAP computer programme; the skill and experience of Phil Davis from Gloucestershire was inestimable in the production of the maps and Russell Porter from Arran whose knowledge and understanding of computer programmes was invaluable in setting out the pages for each individual species. For each species there is a photograph, a fact box, maps and a brief description of the current status. The fact box contains information on the number of tetrads in which the species was recorded, as well as trend information from previous national atlases. The maps are distribution maps and some relative abundance maps. For more information including some sample pages visit the website Arran Bird Atlas [www.arranbirding.co.uk/arran\\_bird\\_atlas.html](http://www.arranbirding.co.uk/arran_bird_atlas.html)

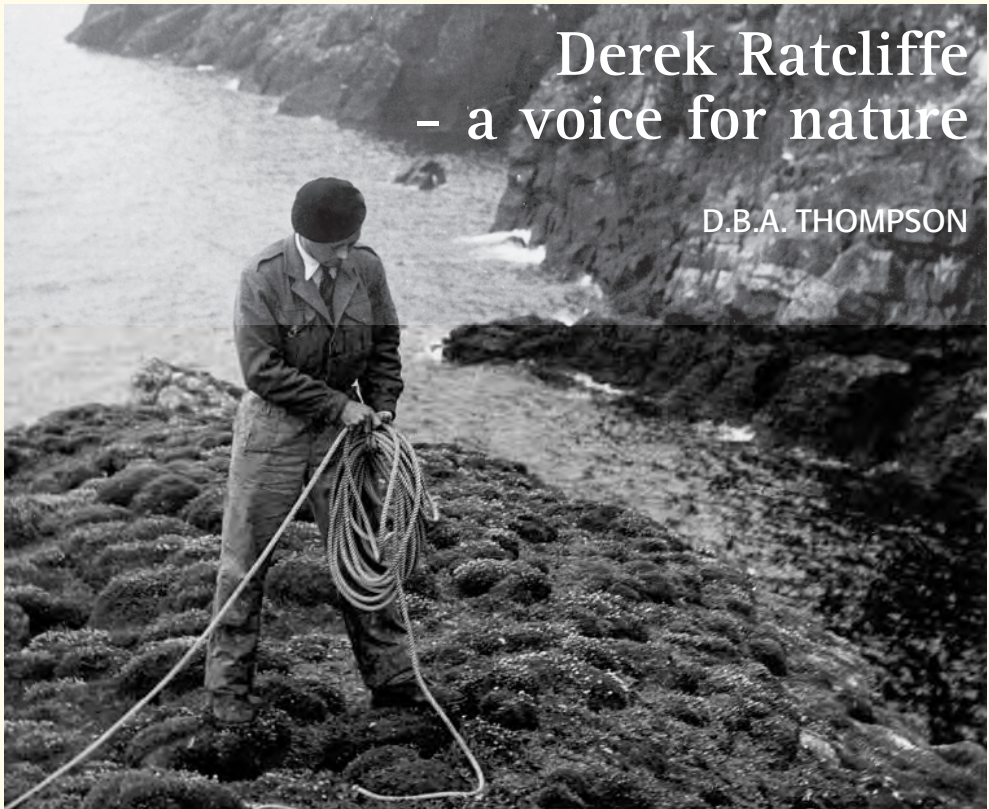
The resulting publication is 168 pages, with more than 400 maps and more than 200 photographs provided by more than 30 local and visiting photographers.

With the support of funding from the SOC, the Arran Trust and the Marsh Local Ornithology Award for 2013, the ANHS is able to have a unit price of only £8.00.

### Final remarks

The mapping of Arran's birds for the first time was an ambitious project for the ANHS. The collecting of the data and the production of the publication were both achieved through the combined efforts of a great many people who share a passion for Arran and its birds. I trust that the final publication adequately reflects the team effort of all the contributors.

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# Derek Ratcliffe – a voice for nature

D.B.A. THOMPSON

**Plate 224.** Derek Ratcliffe in 1959 preparing to descend one of the steep cliffs on Boreray, St Kilda, in order to ring Guillemots and Fulmars. *Photograph reproduced by permission of Dick Seamons*

In his excellent overview of breeding raptor populations in Scotland, Etheridge (2013) opened by commenting on the defining contributions of Scotland-based workers to our understanding of the world's diurnal birds of prey. Leslie Brown, Roy Dennis, Seton Gordon, Ian Newton, Derek Ratcliffe, Adam Watson and Donald Watson immediately come to mind, as do many names amongst the younger generations, doing superb work within the Scottish Raptor Study Group. Working with John and Hilary Birks at the University of Bergen, and a large team of colleagues, we have recently completed a book on *Nature's Conscience - the life and legacy of Derek Ratcliffe*, who died suddenly in 2005 (Thompson *et al.* in press). The contributions in this book have thrown fresh light on his ways of working and his deep-rooted faith in nature itself. Much of Derek's field work was carried out in Scotland, and here I highlight some aspects of his work which may be of interest to readers unfamiliar with his achievements and style of working.

## Achievements

Derek was arguably Britain's most outstanding field biologist and conservationist of the 20th century, and some would say the most talented naturalist since Charles Darwin and his finest peers. Yet for many of us he was a compelling enigma, ranging over Britain's landscapes and habitats, modestly studying them and their wildlife invariably in the company of close friends. Armed with a camera and tripod, binoculars and field notebooks (separate ones for botanical and bird notes) he made unrivalled contributions to nature conservation, botany, plant ecology and ornithology. He was one of the first people to link the decline of birds of prey with organochlorine pesticide use. As chief architect of Britain's post-war nature conservation policy, he led the publication of the modern doomsday book *A Nature Conservation Review* (Ratcliffe 1977) as well as many of the Nature Conservancy Council's (NCC) policy

and strategy documents. His bird books are already classics (*The Peregrine; The Raven; Lapland; Bird Life of Mountain and Upland*), as are his New Naturalist volumes *Lakeland*, and *Galloway and the Borders* (Ratcliffe 1980, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2002, 2005, 2007). His early memoir *In Search of Nature* (Ratcliffe 2000) reveals a burning desire simply to seek out and observe wildlife, invariably involving long, tough days in the field, as borne out in his earliest writing (Ratcliffe 1947).

At least four aspects of Derek's methods and approach are, I suggest, important in helping us understand the exceptional contributions he made.

### Attention to detail

In every element of his work Derek was disciplined and systematic, carefully recording what he saw and heard, and attentive to the vagaries of what he got from his data analyses. His monographs have special value in the quality of data given in tables and appendices. All of us can learn from the care and effort he put into his measurements and records, and the scepticism he deployed when drawing conclusions on the presence or absence of a raptor from a traditional range.

His meticulous work in unravelling eggshell thinning in Peregrines and other raptors is described in detail by Newton (in press). Derek was assiduous in reviewing previous studies, and in each of his monographs ten or more pages are given over to detailing the work of others in setting the scene on how his work was carried out. Norman Moore received special praise for his special endeavours on pesticides.

In *A Nature Conservation Review* (NCR) we get a vivid sense of his remarkable first-hand knowledge of NCR sites (Ratcliffe 1977). Breeding bird populations were ranked according to abundance (date stamped at 1973), starting with those species with populations smaller than nine pairs. For each of these the NCR sought a representative sample of protected sites for their populations, with a greater proportion of rarer birds' populations within grades 1 and 2 NCR sites. Of the 15 species with breeding populations of less than 100 pairs, six had at least 50% of their populations in these sites. If we look at the rarer diurnal birds of prey listed in the NCR, with the exception of Golden Eagle and Hen Harrier, their populations are now far greater - half of them by more than tenfold in 40 years (Table 1). This in itself as a remarkable tribute to the efforts of Derek and colleagues dedicated to striking out in support of raptor conservation.

**Table 1.** Raptor population estimates (breeding pairs) in Britain in 1973 (Ratcliffe 1977) and in recent years (2002–10; Hardey *et al.* 2013), compared with estimates for Scotland in 2012 (Etheridge 2013), for rare species.

Species, in order given by Ratcliffe (1977)	1973 number of pairs	Recent (2002–10) number of pairs	Change since 1973 of pairs	Scotland 2012 number	Trend in Scotland over last decade
Honey-buzzard	1–9	29–46	x 9	15–20	=
Marsh Harrier	1–9	320–380	x 87	5–10	=
Montagu's Harrier	1–9	12–16	x 3	-	N/A
Osprey	1–9	181–224	x 50	202	+
Goshawk	1–9	280–430	x 89	130	+
Red Kite	10–99	1,246 +	x 28	232	+
Hobby	10–99	2,800	x 63	1–5	=
Golden Eagle	100–999	442	NC	443	=
Hen Harrier	100–999	574	NC	505	-
Peregrine	100–999	1,285	x 2	600	-
Merlin	100–999	1,128	x 2	733	=
White-tailed Eagle	Absent	59–67	x 60	66	+

**Notes.** Ratcliffe (1977) gives population size estimate ranges on page 364 of Volume 1 of the NCR. The White-tailed Eagle was absent from Britain as a breeder in 1973, and was not included in Ratcliffe's table. Most of the recent population estimates for Britain are for 2010 onwards (some recent surveys provide more up-to-date estimates, e.g. Hen Harrier, but are not given here). The 'change' multiple estimates are simply indicative. Trends in Scotland are from Etheridge (2013): no change (=), increase (+) or decline (-).



**Plate 225.** Derek Ratcliffe scaling a birch tree to inspect a Merlin's brood in an old Carrion Crow's nest in the foothills of Skiddaw in the Lake District. The picture was taken on 9 June 1989, a month before his retirement. © *Des Thompson*

### Understanding patterns in space and time

It was Derek's obsession with understanding patterns in the spatial and temporal distribution of raptors that led to his first, great scientific breakthrough - Peregrine numbers crashing in some parts due to organochlorine pesticide contamination (Ratcliffe 1958, 1962, 1963, 1967, and later 1980, 1993, 2003a). This was borne out of exhaustive coverage of ranges occupied by raptors, with as much if not more effort going into establishing absence or failed breeding as into the timing of breeding, clutch and brood sizes, and fledging success (Greenwood & Crick, in press). His maps of breeding dispersion of Peregrine, Raven and Golden Eagle were physically demanding to produce, involving frequent daily treks of 20 miles or more, and set the standard for raptor surveys and monitoring adopted today (e.g. Hardey *et al.* 2013, Greenwood & Crick in press).

Derek's work on spatial dispersion covered other birds, especially through his classic study of Golden Plovers in the Moorfoots and north Pennines spanning 13 years (Ratcliffe 1976a). In each area, his tally of six nests found in a day is, I believe, a record. In later years, he and his wife, Jeannette, developed similar detailed studies of birds in Lapland, especially waders (Ratcliffe 2005).

### A hunter's instinct

One of Derek's greatest strengths was his perseverance in nest finding, and indeed seeking out rare plants and insects. He had a deep fascination for eggs - their colourings, patterning and textures - borne out of his earliest encounters with wildlife (Ratcliffe 2000, Thompson in press). Whilst it is perhaps unfashionable today to remark on this deep interest in eggs, it is nonetheless a fact, and an important one. Derek, like many of our greatest ornithologists, delighted in finding nests and seeing and describing their contents. It was another obsession, and lay at the root of his work to understand variation in site occupancy and success. His discovery of eggshell thinning relied crucially on the origin and dates of eggs taken in collections. Derek was always careful to draw a line between the illegal nature of egg collecting and the value of historical collections.

### Standing up for nature

Derek found being the NCCs Chief Scientist between 1973 and July 1989 achingly difficult for much of his tenure. Most days, he had to listen to, read and witness half-baked views on the government's and land managers' stewardship of the countryside. He would endure meetings in silent anger, appalled at the rambling utterings, promises and platitudes of officialdom. He sought sanctuary in the company of friends and trusted colleagues; his escape was being in the field, and writing most evenings.

His last fight, to save the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland (the Flow Country, a term he first coined) from widescale afforestation ultimately led to the demise of the NCC, announced within days of his retirement (Marren 2002). You only get a sense of his difficulties on reading his work after he retired (e.g. Ratcliffe 1989, 2003b, 2007). His interview with Graham White on BBC Radio 4 in January 1997 is revealing (White 1997), with comments such as: "...I got fed up hearing about 'balance' when I worked for the Nature Conservancy Council; 'balance' is usually a euphemism for 'conceding defeat'; now that I am retired and free to express my own views, I speak as a champion for peregrines. I don't care what arguments are brought by the shooting-lobby and their claims of damage being done

by peregrines. I like looking at peregrines and so do millions of other people; we're a political interest group in opposition to the shooting lobby; it's as simple as that."

This has sharp resonance today, as does his comment on the science underpinning nature conservation, so clearly articulated by Ratcliffe (1976b, 1977) but more candidly in his interview with White as: "Nature conservation is 'scientific', to the extent that it depends on facts and knowledge about how things work... But science can't provide the value judgements on which all conservation issues rest. It can't provide the ethical inspiration, or impulse to act, for the conservation movement... We need to believe in nature conservation itself, as a vitally important, more human endeavour that is just as important as all these other things. Nature conservation is about what people live 'for'... [it] is essentially a moral and ethical activity; it can only flourish in a climate where people are not ultra-materialistic, or merely concerned with their own economic advancement...we are losing a part of our 'spiritual and aesthetic heritage' if you like, and that is something which matters to a great many people in this country." (White 1997). Today, ecosystem services and the many values of nature are highlighted by politicians and environmentalists (e.g. UKNEA 2014); Derek provides a cogent reminder of why nature matters.

If all of this implies Derek was rather sullen and troubled then we only have half a measure of his persona. He was entertainingly irreverent, uncontrollably mischievous as a mimic, intensely irritated by pomposity, and intrigued by the human psyche. His great friend and mentor, Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, and he often spent more time dissecting the frailties of human nature than the intricacies of bird behaviour. Both fascinated them, with conversations running for days, and on one occasion close to Strathpeffer conducted by Derek driving in excess of 100 mph openly musing on a moot point of detail. Days in the field were immensely enjoyable, invariably very long, and touched with a sense of competitiveness when it came to nest finding. Beautifully written letters invariably ensued, peppered with questions and details of earlier visits.

Derek adopted an uncompromising and judicious stance in defence of nature, which some liken today to a naïve misunderstanding of the political and economic realities of nature's place. I think Derek's writings and sayings, in later years almost a lament for what had been lost, provide an inspiring example of how nature could move you to believe in its core importance - in its own right and for us all. We can give nature a voice, as Derek did, or we can abandon it and be deafened by its silence.

### Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Ian Andrews, John Birks, Chris Rollie and Pat Thompson for comments, to Graham White for making his BBC transcript available, and to Dick Balharry, Ingvar Byrkjedal, Humphrey Crick, Jeremy Greenwood, Stuart Housden, John Lawton, Richard Lindsay, John Mitchell, Ian Newton, Mike Pienkowski, Tim Reed, Chris Rollie, David Stroud and Bill Sutherland for their contributions on birds to *Nature's Conscience*, which I have drawn from here.



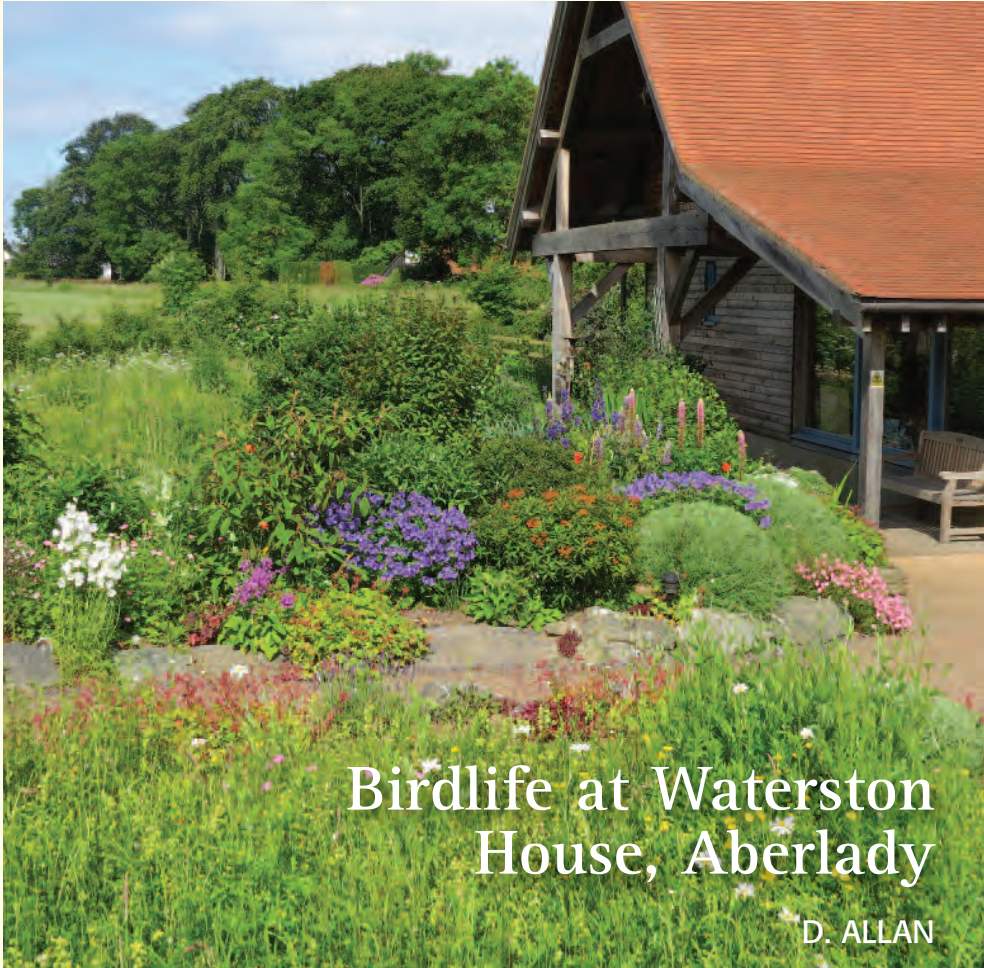
Plate 226. Derek Ratcliffe photographed in his Cambridge garden, January 1997. © Graham White



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## Birdlife at Waterston House, Aberlady

D. ALLAN

Plate 227. The gardens at Waterston House, Aberlady, Lothian, June 2014. © Dave Allan

Since Waterston House first opened in 2005 its gardens have been developed and managed for wildlife (Plate 227), and as the various habitats are maturing the avifauna is increasing. Common garden species such as Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Greenfinch are regularly seen at the garden's feeders together with Blue, Great and Coal Tits. Out of the breeding season Great Spotted Woodpecker is seen and heard almost daily with a family party of four coming to the feeders this summer. Several Tree Sparrows have also been coming to the feeders with the local House Sparrows and the resident pair of Pheasants appears from the meadow areas to feed on the spillage, with two chicks appearing this summer.

The pond (Plate 228) offers a suitable place for bathing and drinking and Linnet and other finches regularly come to do so. The pond also offers good feeding, with the hatching of insects, for the breeding Swallows that nest in the eaves of the building, at least five pairs this year, and the House Martins breeding nearby also come over to feed. Other species seen around the pond include Pied Wagtails and the occasional Grey Wagtail. Moorhen, Common Sandpiper and Grey Heron have put in an appearance. This year a brood of six Mallard chicks was a pleasant surprise (Plate 229), and over the Christmas period we had our first sighting of a Kingfisher. This spring we also had our first Spotted Flycatcher feeding near the waterfall - now a rare sighting in lowland Lothian.

As the scrub and trees are maturing, more cover is available for the birds from predators such as Sparrowhawk which come in quite regularly. Species such as Whitethroat, Dunnock and Yellowhammer have appeared and Whitethroat may have bred this year. This is not to forget the flyovers such as Siskin, Redpoll and Waxwing which have stopped off to feed in the garden.



**Plate 228.** The pond at Waterston House, Aberlady, Lothian, June 2014. © *Dave Allan*

Kestrels can also occasionally be seen feeding over the rough grass beyond the pond. On a couple occasions a Barn Owl has been seen flying over the gardens and some pellets were found under the eaves of the building.

Nest boxes have been erected in the mature woodland and scrub between the car park and the road and Blue Tit, Great Tit and Tree Sparrow have nested. Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap and Chiffchaff utilise this area and Fieldfare, Redwing and Crossbill have all been seen, plus Nuthatch on at least one occasion.

Over 100 species of birds have been recorded from the centre, of which over 60 have been seen within the gardens. The gardens receive many compliments from visitors to Waterston House and although a relatively small area, a wonderful diversity of habitats has been created by our volunteer gardeners and it is with many thanks to them that the bird list is increasing, as is other wildlife.

***Dave Allan, SOC Events' Co-ordinator.***



**Plate 229.** Mallard with brood, Waterston House, Aberlady, Lothian, May 2014. © *Dave Allan*



Plate 230. A composite Scottish beast. Composed by Lang Stewart

## Scotland's national bird?

### S.R.D. DA PRATO

The Golden Eagle is already a symbol of wild Scotland. In a poll organised by *The Scotsman* newspaper in 2004, it came top and this led to a petition by RSPB Scotland to the Scottish Parliament asking that it be made our official national bird. However, there was no agreed procedure at that time to handle a request for a national symbol so the proposal went no further. This changed as the Scots Pine later went through the Parliamentary system to be named our national tree following a campaign by the Woodland Trust and a consultation organised by the Forestry Commission.

The Golden Eagle was voted the nation's favourite animal in a year-long poll run by Scottish Natural Heritage and the tourism agency VisitScotland in 2013. In the vote for the 'Big Five', Golden Eagle, Red Squirrel, Red Deer, Otter and Harbour Seal, the eagle secured 43.8% of the 12,000 votes; double that of the Red

Squirrel, the second most popular contender. This was followed by the RSPB presenting a petition to the Scottish Parliament's petitions committee<sup>1</sup> who heard submissions in January 2014 from Duncan Orr-Ewing of RSPB Scotland and wildlife cameraman Gordon Buchanan who, having grown up on Mull, knows a bit about eagles. Duncan Orr-Ewing said: "Golden Eagle is a true bird icon of Scotland", and argued that highland chieftains, Scottish regiments and the Royal Company of Archers traditionally wore eagle feathers. The Golden Eagle is also well documented in Gaelic and Scottish culture. The committee procedure is that relevant experts, ministers and parliamentary committees are then asked to report on the desirability of the petition being put into practice.

Many would think this one of the least controversial proposals to come before the MSPs, but one vociferously disagreed. Jackson Carlaw stated his opposition on the grounds that the eagle had been a symbol of the Roman Empire and later the Nazi regime: "the Golden Eagle is the symbol of an empire that once invaded large parts of Scotland, and more recently of another empire that tried to. In the lifetime of many people in this country it was the last thing their relatives saw as they were marched to their deaths."

This prompted SOC activist Bernie Zonfrillo to write a rather good letter to the *Herald* on 30 January 2014<sup>2</sup>: "There are several species of eagles in Europe and nothing on any Nazi emblem defines it as a Golden Eagle. Indeed the Nazi eagle was usually black and the Black Eagle has never spread its wings over Scotland. Similarly, the Imperial Eagle was the emblem of the Roman legions, and has never been part of the UK fauna... The nonsense spoken by Mr Carlaw is further compounded by his suggestion that the European Robin be considered as it is found in almost every European country .... The symbolic European Robin already exists on the Glasgow coat of arms. (*It was, unofficially, proclaimed Britain's national bird after a poll run by The Times in 1961 - eds*). My own suggestion would be the Gannet or maybe the Great Skua, both of which have most of their world population within Scotland. However, if such a symbol has to be given approval by politicians then some sort of cuckoo may be more appropriate."

Gannet is already the symbol of the BTO. It would lead to a flurry of activity by cartoonists showing the bird plunge diving for deep-fried Mars Bars and haggis and satirists noting that Gannets never eat green vegetables or salad referring to Scotland's health problems. The other problem with Bernie's letter is that he suggests Cuckoos as representative of Scottish politicians. However, many Cuckoo populations are in serious decline which is, sadly, not true of politicians. In Scots, Cuckoo is gowk which is even more expressive.

"The word goes back to an ancient Germanic source that even then could mean a bastard, simpleton, or fool, laying the ground for its most common sense, that of an awkward or foolish person ... gowk in a Robert Burns poem: "Conceited gowk! Puff'd up wi' windy pride!"

Further possibilities come with our endemics or potential endemic species and subspecies. Scottish Crossbill is currently our only endemic bird, but notoriously difficult to identify. SOC members might well propose Crested Tit though that is only separate at subspecific level. Red Grouse has been a full species in the recent past and is admired on many a bottle of whisky. It is not however confined to Scotland as it occurs in both England and Ireland. Scottish Ptarmigan is an endemic subspecies. Of the seven others, six are confined to islands: Hebridean Song Thrush and Wren, Shetland Starling and Wren, St Kilda and Fair Isle Wrens. Scottish Linnet is more widespread, but poorly defined and further research could change the status of many of these birds. None are likely to approach the eagle in the public's imagination.

In one of the more interesting letters all this generated, Robin Knox suggested the whaup (Curlew), a widespread species with a beautiful, haunting call which has led to many literary references notably by Robert Louis Stevenson as a key image of Scotland when he remembered the hills of home from Samoa: 'where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying'.

More frivolous comments included the Highland midge as candidate for Scotland's national insect. Playing on the bird word

inevitably led to TV newscaster Jackie Bird. And someone had to bring the referendum into the discussion "... a light distraction from the serious business of getting rid of the albatross round our necks that is Westminster."

In February 2014, SNH, the Government's statutory conservation agency, refused to recommend the Golden Eagle to be Scotland's National Bird. They say it is a contender, but suggest that other species are also worthy of consideration, such as the Scottish Crossbill, Crested Tit, various sea birds, Golden Plover, Curlew, Osprey, White-tailed Eagle and the Red Grouse. This infuriated members of the Scottish Raptor Study Group and many birders who strongly support the designation of the Golden Eagle as Scotland's National Bird, as designation would go some way to reducing the current illegal persecution of this species.

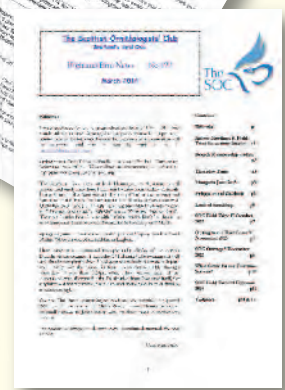
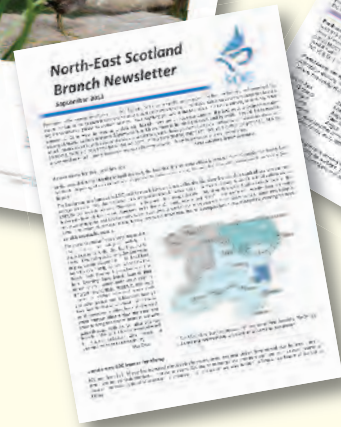
Scottish environment minister Paul Wheelhouse recognizes the continued persecution that this species faces and is *not opposed to the idea of the Golden Eagle as a national bird* but he will not recommend the golden eagle as Scotland's national bird *I am not yet convinced that there are compelling arguments in support of having a national bird*. Very strange after his response to the designation of the Scots Pine as Scotland's national tree when he revealed plans were in place to have a National Tree Week and to set up a special fund to help promote Scotland's national tree as a *clear symbol of our affinity with Scotland's trees, woods and forests, and their importance to us all*.

So where does this leave the petition? At the time of writing - June 2014 - a public consultation now seems some time away while the parliament attempts to create a process for adopting national symbols. There may be a debate on this issue next year.

**Stan da Prato, Tranent, East Lothian.**

<sup>1</sup>[www.scottish.parliament.uk/gettinginvolved/petition/s/goldeneagle](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/gettinginvolved/petition/s/goldeneagle)

<sup>2</sup>[www.heraldsotland.com/comment/letters/argument-being-presented-against-the-golden-eagle-is-nonsensical.23304285](http://www.heraldsotland.com/comment/letters/argument-being-presented-against-the-golden-eagle-is-nonsensical.23304285)



# BRANCH SPOTLIGHT: heard it through the grapevine?

W. HICKS & J. CLEAVER

With the new SOC website continuing to attract an increasing number of hits and the Club's profile in social media circles growing steadily, we thought it would be interesting to look at the extent of web and email communications at branch level and/or how members can keep in touch with branch news and activities, and 'what's about'.

## Newsletters

From time to time, HQ circulates a newsletter to all members (and non-members who have subscribed to SOC news via the website or the Contact Form available at Waterston House) with an email address. This free circular features reminders of upcoming exhibitions and other events at Waterston House as well as wider Club news and activities such as SOC conferences and the Club's involvement in bird fairs, surveys and special projects. The e-newsletter is created and distributed using MailChimp - a free (and secure) email marketing service. As well as being able to handle large mailing lists (compared to sending via Microsoft Outlook, for example, which has a limit - usually around 250 - to the number of emails addresses it can

deliver to per hour), MailChimp also provides a number of attractive templates to choose from, allowing the inclusion of images etc., and a tracking facility, which enables the sender to see how many recipients have opened the email.

A number of branch newsletters used to be circulated periodically alongside the quarterly Club mailing. However, in recent years, many have switched to electronic format, circulated to local members via email as well as being available as downloadable PDF files on the SOC website.

**Fife Branch Newsletter** (Editor: Paul Taylor PaulDTaylor43@aol.com) is a quarterly electronic publication featuring details of branch activities, field trip reports, letters, photographs, sightings and other interesting articles. The latest and previous issues are available on the SOC website.

**The Stonechat** (Editor: Tony Scott, da.scott@tiscali.co.uk) is the Ayrshire branch newsletter, which comes out three times a year and is available in PDF format on the SOC website. A number of paper copies are printed and distributed at the indoor meetings in September and February.

**Highland Bird News** (Editor: David Bain, bainrock@btinternet.com): Three to four issues of HBN are produced each year and circulated to branch members by email. Some hard copies of the latest issue can be picked up at the indoor meetings or can be posted to members on request. Current and back issues are also available on the Highland branch page of the SOC website.

**North-East Scotland branch newsletter** (Editor: Hugh Addelee, Grampian.secretary@the-soc.org.uk): Following the re-naming of the Grampian branch to North-East Scotland last year, the branch newsletter was resurrected and the first new-look issue was circulated to NES members alongside the September 2013 issue of *Scottish Birds*. The second issue has just been published and can be viewed or downloaded from the SOC website. A small supply of hard copies of the latest issue will be available at the branch meetings or can be posted to members on request.

**Stewartry Branch Newsletter** (Editor: Joan Howie, joanospreys1@btinternet.com) is produced twice a year - early September, ahead of first winter meeting, and in late Dec/early Jan, in time for that month's meeting. Currently available in hard copy only, posted to local members and available at branch meetings.

### Email notices

Some branches adopt a more ad-hoc approach, emailing members as and when news comes in and/or providing reminders of upcoming branch meetings and outings, for example. Branches with such an email service in place are Borders, Caithness, Central Scotland, Dumfries, Fife, Moray, North-East Scotland and Tayside. In some cases, the emails may include notification of interesting bird sightings.

**Important:** If you are not receiving any of the above branch e-communications, please drop a line to admin@the-soc.org.uk as it could be that we do not have an email address for you or the one we do have may be incorrect or out of date. **Remember to let us know if your email address has changed!**

### Forums, grapevines and discussion groups

Many keen birdwatchers opt for paid services to ensure they receive up-to-the-minute news of rare bird sightings around the country. Chief among these are Angus Murray's popular **Birdline Scotland** hotline (tel: 09068 700234, calls charged at 60p per minute) and the various subscription options offered by **BirdGuides** (www.birdguides.com). However, there are also a number of free local birding news channels available.

Some SOC branches use email to notify members of unusual and rare birds sightings. For the **Highland** email service, contact Al McNee aj.mcnee@care4free.net; for SOC **Clyde** Grapevine daily sightings, contact val.wilson@btinternet.com

In **Fife**, local recorder Malcolm Ware (Malcolm.ware12@talktalk.net), operates a free text messaging service, and further north, local birder Andy Webb runs the **North East Scotland** Rare Bird Text alert (ABZ-Text) for a small annual subscription charge (<http://abz-text.andywebb.org.uk/html/abz-text.html>).

However, by far the most popular platform for sharing and discussing local bird news is online forums. These are free web-based sites (usually with an optional email alert service) which keep subscribers informed of sightings and sometimes also surveys and other information deemed of interest to the local birding community. Managed by a 'moderator', subscribers can post their sightings and comments. Some branches, such as Lothian, also use their local forum to post reminders of upcoming branch meetings, events or special announcements. To join the groups, simply type in the links below (or do a Google search on the group name) and click on 'Join Group' (note: for Yahoo forums, you will be prompted to sign in to your Yahoo email account or create one).

### Angus Birding News Forum

[www.angusbirding.com](http://www.angusbirding.com)

This internet forum is run by Angus & Dundee Bird Club, but is open to all, with SOC members encouraged to use the site. It is necessary to register prior to use, but this simply requires an email to the webmaster, Mark Caunt (details on the website).

**Ayrshire Bird News** (Yahoo)

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ayrshirebirding>

**Borders SOC Bird News Group** (Yahoo)

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/bordersbirdnews>

**Dumfries and Galloway Birding** (Yahoo)

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/dumfriesandgallowaybirding>

**Lothian Bird News** (Yahoo)

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/lothianbirdnews>

**Forth Birding** (Yahoo)

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ForthBirding>

**The Highland and Moray Bird Forum** (Freeforums)

<http://highlandandmoraywildlife.freeforums.org>

**Rare Birds in N-E Scotland** (Yahoo)

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ABZ-Rare-Birds>

**Orkneybirding 'Orkbird'** (Yahoo)

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Orkbird>

As well as online forums, some branches have groups of members who meet regularly to discuss local surveys and any development plans that pose threats or opportunities for birds, and to exchange information on recent sightings:

**Borders Discussion Group** meets from September to March on a Monday evening (usually the Monday after the branch meeting) in Melrose. The meetings are usually announced on the Borders Bird News forum (see above) and are open to anyone wishing to attend.

**Lothian Discussion Group** meets September to April, but on a Wednesday evening, at Waterston House, Aberlady. To join the Lothian Discussion Group email list for advance notice and details of meetings, please contact staff at Waterston House.

**Websites**

The SOC website [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk) hosts a dedicated Local Branches area, accessed via the 'About Us' tab. Here, you can find links to the latest indoor meetings and field trips programmes, branch contacts and links to useful information e.g. local birdwatching site guides, details of regional publications and information on branch newsletters and email services.

**Ayrshire Birding** [www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk](http://www.ayrshire-birding.org.uk) is a site sponsored by the Ayrshire branch and is a one-stop shop for anything to do with birds and birding in the area - news, sightings, site guides, latest photos, branch activities.

**Birding Lothian** [www.birdinglothian.co.uk](http://www.birdinglothian.co.uk) all the latest bird news and photographs (hosted by Lothian birder, Kris Gibb)

**Caithness Birds** [www.caithnessbirds.co.uk](http://www.caithnessbirds.co.uk) was launched in 2013. Maintained by branch chair, Julian Smith, the site shares the latest branch news, meeting reminders, outings and photographs.

**Clydebirds** [www.clydebirds.org.uk](http://www.clydebirds.org.uk) is designed to provide locals and visitors with information on recent sightings and details of where to watch birds in the area

**Birds in Moray and Nairn** [www.birdsin-morayandnairn.org](http://www.birdsin-morayandnairn.org) is a comprehensive website operated by Martin Cook, secretary of the SOC's newest branch, Moray Bird Club. The site includes details of upcoming survey work, branch meetings and outings, latest sightings and links to regional bird reports and other publications.

**Outer Hebrides Birds** [www.outerhebridesbirds.org.uk](http://www.outerhebridesbirds.org.uk) is an excellent resource operated by the local bird recorders, providing useful information on submitting records plus a 'hot news' sightings section.

**Social media**

As well as providing a platform for quick and wide-reaching dissemination of general Club news, events and views, the SOC Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub](http://www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub)) and Twitter account (@scottishbirding) are useful for promoting any branch-related news. A





number of SOC branches already feed HQ with their news, unusual sightings and photos for posting on the page. In addition, a few parts of the country have their own social media sites:


#### Central Scotland

 [www.facebook.com/UpperForthBirds](http://www.facebook.com/UpperForthBirds)  
 @UpperForthBirds


#### Caithness

 [www.facebook.com/pages/Caithness-Birds/267550040061648](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Caithness-Birds/267550040061648)  
 @CaithnessBirds



#### Clyde

 To access the Clydebirds Facebook page, administered by SOC member John Molloy, click on the link on the homepage of the Clydebirds website (see above) and sign in with your personal Facebook logins.

#### Outer Hebrides

 [www.facebook.com/outerhebridesbirds](http://www.facebook.com/outerhebridesbirds)

#### Lothian

 <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lothian-Bird-News/145104562325678>  
 <https://twitter.com/LTNBirdNews>

#### Other useful contacts

*Don't forget your local bird recorder!* As well as uploading your sightings on BirdTrack [www.bto.org/birdtrack](http://www.bto.org/birdtrack), remember to notify the local recorder (contact details for all SOC bird recorders can be found on the SOC website or on the inside back cover of *Scottish Birds*).

#### Ayrshire Birders Abroad

These popular holidays, organised independently by seasoned tour guide and SOC/RSPB member, Tony Scott, have taken local members and non-members alike to a wide variety of places both in Europe and further afield. In 2015, *Ayrshire Birders Abroad* is planning a trip to New England, USA. Further details and information will be sent to individuals who have joined in these trips previously and details will be made available in *The Stonechat* and on the Ayrshire Birding website. If you would like to be added to the mailing list to receive details of these trips, please drop Tony an email: [da.scott@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:da.scott@tiscali.co.uk)

## CLASSIFIEDS

#### WANTED Newsletter contributions!

Any bird-related stories, news and views welcome e.g. interesting sightings; unusual behaviour observations; birding holiday trip reports; reviews of birding sites, reserves, resources, or even cartoons! Editors would also love to receive trip reports or stories of interesting finds from visiting members to their region. Or maybe you know a child who is mad on birds who could write a few words - a junior birder's eye view? Please send any contributions to the branch newsletter editors.

#### WANTED Got something worth Tweeting about?

If you have any interesting photos, sightings, survey results or any other Scottish bird-related news, we'd love to Tweet it to the Club's growing number of followers or pop a note up on the SOC Facebook page! Send your stories or scoops to Jane Cleaver [jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk)

#### WANTED Good birding sites in Clyde

*A Guide to Bird Watching in the Clyde Area* - Marion Osler is working on the second edition of this publication and she is looking for up-to-date information on good birding sites. If you visit a site regularly in the Clyde recording area which you think would be an interesting place for people to visit, please contact Marion on [m.e.osler@talk21.com](mailto:m.e.osler@talk21.com)

#### VACANCY Treasurer, SOC Tayside Branch

Long-standing Treasurer, Bob McCurley, feels that it is time to hand over the reins to new blood and would be delighted to hear from any members interested in what is ultimately a fairly undemanding role - mainly consisting of collecting entry charges (to cover tea/coffee) at indoor meetings and administering the reimbursement of local speakers' expenses. For more information, please contact branch secretary Brian Brocklehurst. Tel: 01382 778348, email: [brian.brocklehurst1@btinternet.com](mailto:brian.brocklehurst1@btinternet.com)

#### VACANCY Event organiser/s, Central Scotland branch

Are you passionate about the birds of Clackmannanshire? Fancy getting involved with the local SOC committee to coordinate branch outings and other activities e.g. helping to promote indoor meetings (the branch hosts some excellent speakers - they deserve a bigger audience!). To discuss how we could use your help, contact Jane Cleaver [jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk)

*Wendy Hicks, SOC Office Manager.  
Jane Cleaver, SOC Development Officer.*

# BOOK REVIEWS

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

**The Crossley ID Guide - Britain and Ireland.** Richard Crossley & Dominic Couzens, 2014. Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0-691-15194-6, paper flexibound, 304 pages, £16.95.



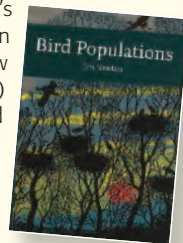
Much has already been written on this 'different' ID guide. Dominated by large colour photos depicting birds in a range of plumages and poses 'in their natural habitats', at first sight the book is naturally appealing - I tested it on the non-birding members of my family and all were immediately positive (son, seven years: "This book is really good", but quickly spotted: "These pictures are all animated", i.e. digitally manipulated). Realising the images have indeed been patched together essentially by dropping the birds onto the habitat backgrounds, you realise this is something totally different, and likely to set the hairs of any conventional wildlife photographer on end! While many of the scenes and individual photos are stunning and full of interest, others look rather more contrived - putting birds into water has clearly been a significant challenge. I also struggled with the apparently inconsistent perspective in a few. And whilst I can also see some potential value for ID in having a great variety of views of any given species I doubt I would be inclined to turn to it myself in preference to a conventional guide - of limited value in separating Meadow/Tree Pipit, or juvenile Herring/Yellow-legged Gulls.

The introductory commentary is thoughtful and conveys the purpose of the book - not as a field guide *per se* but to inspire reader interaction and understanding of a bird's place in its environment. Thus the main audience is intended to be beginner and intermediate birders. Setting to one side the odd artificial, unnatural or jarring image, I think it ought to succeed in this aim of engaging interest. Finally - personal favourites (it's that kind of book): scoters, storm petrels, curlews & godwits, grouse, nearly all the raptors, woodpeckers, doves, tits, Nuthatch, flycatchers, chats, sparrows - all superb, but our own Crested Tit is hard to beat.

*Stephen Welch*

**Bird Populations.** Ian Newton, 2013. Harper Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-742953-0, hardback, 596 pages, £55.00.

Ian Newton's previous book in the New Naturalist (NN) series was 'Bird Migration'. His latest contribution to the NN library deals with another enormous topic - bird populations. At nearly 600 pages, this is not a light, or quick, read. However, as you would expect from one of the pre-eminent ornithologists of the day, this is a wonderfully clear discourse on the wide range of factors that impact on bird populations. In the author's own words, this is a book about bird numbers - what controls and influences them; why are some species increasing and others



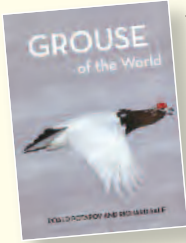
decreasing and so on. Natural factors, such as competition for food and nesting sites (between and within species) are considered, as well as human influences; the chapters on managed hunting and 'other bird killing' (which includes persecution) deal with some of the more controversial issues currently faced by many species of bird and are of particular relevance in Scotland today. Each issue is illustrated by reference to detailed studies of many species and this is where the particular joy of the book lies, with fascinating insights at every turn of the page. A wonderful book.

*Andrew Bielinski*

**Grouse of the World.** Ronald Potapov & Richard Sale, 2013. New Holland, London, ISBN 978 1 78009 250 8, hardback, 408 pages, £29.99.

The grouse family (Tetraonidae) has provided a fascinating group of species to study, showing a high degree of adaptation to the varied environments they occupy throughout the world. They have been particularly well studied in Scotland, resulting in one of the most detailed avian population studies in the world on Red Grouse, currently treated as a subspecies of the Willow Grouse.

The first chapter provides an overview of grouse systematics, evolution, adaptation and behaviour and is based on an extensive literature review. The book reveals some fascinating insights into grouse behaviour and adaptations, including their ability to survive heavy snow and low temperatures in northern climes by digging snow holes using their specially adapted feet.



The following eight chapters cover the 19 species in the family, including details on morphology, distribution, population, behaviour and breeding ecology. It was disappointing not to see much data on the population dynamics of some species, however this can be found elsewhere.

The final chapter covers the current status of grouse and the conservation threats they face, many of which we are all too familiar with in Scotland, such as habitat loss and degradation, over hunting and predation.

This is the first comprehensive guide to the family and includes many drawings, maps and photographs. Some drawings seem a bit dated in style; however, the 36-page bibliography is testament to the extensive amount of research that has gone into this book. Anyone who wants to understand this family from a global perspective should definitely read this book.

**Mike Thornton**

**The Life of David Lack: father of evolutionary ecology.** Ted R. Anderson, 2013. Oxford University Press, USA, ISBN 978-0-19-992264-2, hardback, 246 pages, £37.50.

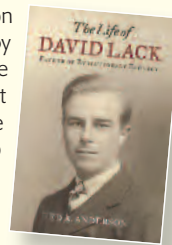
Although Ted Anderson never knew David Lack, his meticulous research ensures that Lack's character emerges with real clarity. Lack's 'unofficial mentor' was Julian Huxley, one of the founders of the study of animal behaviour, but 'behaviour' failed to rub off on Lack, who remained firmly wedded to avian ecology,

to which he contributed perhaps more than anybody else. His *Life of the Robin*, which included relatively little on behaviour, was his first main contribution to ecology and embodied the clarity and penetration which marked all his writing.

Ted Anderson has thoroughly researched the background to the 13 chapters of his wide-ranging book; many of the headings use Lack's publications to illustrate parts of his life. His impressive grasp of detail illuminates his account of Lack's character as a boy and his early passion for bird watching. And for singing in the choir! He gives an interesting account of David's extracurricular activities at school, which included rugby, cricket and chess.

Anderson mentions Lack's phenomenal focus on detail, which captivates his readers. 'The significance of clutch-size' is the most frequently cited paper ever published in the journal *Ibis*. 'The Natural Regulation of Animal Numbers' had a huge impact on population ecology and has been cited more than 3,400 times.

The final section of this book, by describing the significant careers of all the researchers who worked with or for him, testifies to Lack's huge impact.

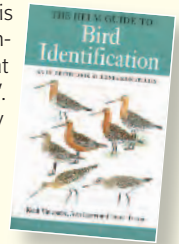


Anderson has provided a fine and eminently readable tribute to a highly productive ecologist.

**J. Bryan Nelson**

**The Helm Guide to Bird Identification.** Keith Vinicombe, Alan Harris & Laurel Tucker, 2014. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-3035-3, paperback, 396 pages, £25.00.

This book is subtitled 'an in-depth look at confusion species'. That is exactly what it is, based on an earlier identification guide published in 1989, but significantly expanded to encompass many more of those difficult species in odd plumages, for example, eclipse ducks, autumn warblers and immature gulls. Interestingly, only one-third of the text concerns passerines.



Following short sections on the use of the book and tips on identification, topography and moult, there are 350 pages of text and 1,250 illustrations. Coverage is mainly of regularly occurring British species but rarer species are described when confusion with commoner birds is likely, e.g. pipits and warblers. Species texts include general features such as size and behaviour, followed by plumage stages, flight identification and vocalisations. Guidance is given on the time of year a species is most likely to be found in Britain.

It is perhaps rather uncharitable to level any criticism, as the content is so good. The taxonomy departs in some instances from the latest checklist of British birds (August 2013 - no surprise there!) and many of the illustrations have been derived from the earlier work, achieving a less pleasing, darker, greyer, cast in the process. Despite the claim that it is suitable for birders of all

levels, relative novices may be deterred by the sheer breadth of coverage and it does not replace a standard bird guide. However, if you are into the fine detail, then this is an indispensable addition to your library.

*Norman Elkins*

**RSPB Handbook of British Birds (fourth edition).** Peter Holden & Tim Cleeves, 2014. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-0647-2, paperback, 320 pages, £9.99.



The first edition of this handbook was my first guide into the birdlife in my surrounding area and is filled with notes and ticks with lists written out in the back cover. What I have always liked about this book is that each species gets its own page with stunning illustrations and some extra wee facts such as the oldest ringed bird for that species as well as population and conservation notes. Each account also includes a distribution map which has now been updated using the data collected in the *BTO Bird Atlas 2007–11*, although one or two species maps are outdated, such as the Nuthatch for example, which still doesn't show the species spread into areas such as South Lanarkshire and Glasgow.

When you compare this edition to the older editions you notice a few extras which really help to make a cracking book even better. The family index on the inside covers are great for narrowing down where to start looking. There are new double page sections which help you to compare easily confused species in flight such as birds of prey and the gulls. The rarities section is

bigger with two new species included in this edition.

For £9.99 this book is certainly value for money and I feel the layout and text makes bird watching more accessible for people who may be put off by more comprehensive and expensive books.

*Hayley Douglas*

**Arran Bird Atlas 2007–2012.** Dr Jim Cassels for the Arran Natural History Society, 2014. Arran Natural History Society / Scottish Ornithologists' Club. ISBN: 978-0-9512139-5-7, paperback, 168 pages, £8.00, available at shops across the Isle of Arran, at SOC Aberlady, or by order through Alan and Jill Hollick at [alanandjill-hollick@gmail.com](mailto:alanandjill-hollick@gmail.com).

This superb Atlas reflects both the diversity of birdlife on this Clyde island, and the enthusiasm and determination of the Arran Natural History Society, ably co-ordinated on this occasion by Dr Jim Cassels. Whilst national atlases usually use 10-km squares as the basic grid, in which not all tetrads (2 km x 2 km squares) are covered, it was decided on Arran that all 139 tetrads would form the reporting grid, each one the subject of winter and breeding season Timed Tetrad Visits in addition to Roving Records. With a very small resident birding population, this set the organisers quite a challenge, and it was decided to complete the fieldwork over five years rather than the four for the national Atlas. Much assistance was provided by the many visitors to the island, and in



total over 700 people submitted over 36,000 records on 177 species during those five years.

The Atlas begins with a simple and well set-out introduction, describing the island and how the data were collected. The introduction includes maps of recording effort for both winter and breeding seasons, species richness maps for both seasons, and special maps for red and amber listed species. The formats of the subsequent species accounts are clearly set out, and the small size of the island allows the maps for each species to be very clear, with well defined colour coding.

Each species account, sometimes one per page, sometimes two, includes a photograph, a fact box giving the number of tetrads in which the species was recorded in the breeding season and/or in winter, and trends on Arran going back to the first national Atlas commenced in 1968. This is followed by the maps showing, as appropriate, breeding and winter distribution and, where there was adequate data, relative abundance maps. Maps are not included for sensitive species. A brief description of the status of each species concludes each account.

It is again testimony to the organisers that they were able to produce this high-quality Atlas within 20 months of the end of fieldwork. Not only does it add to the scientific knowledge about this island but with its handy and manageable size and attractive price it may attract many more visitors to the island. And who knows, they may be able to help the organisers in their next project, allocating all sightings to 1-km squares to form the basis for the next Arran bird atlas.

*Mike Betts*

## RINGERS' ROUNDUP

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

### Wandering Shags

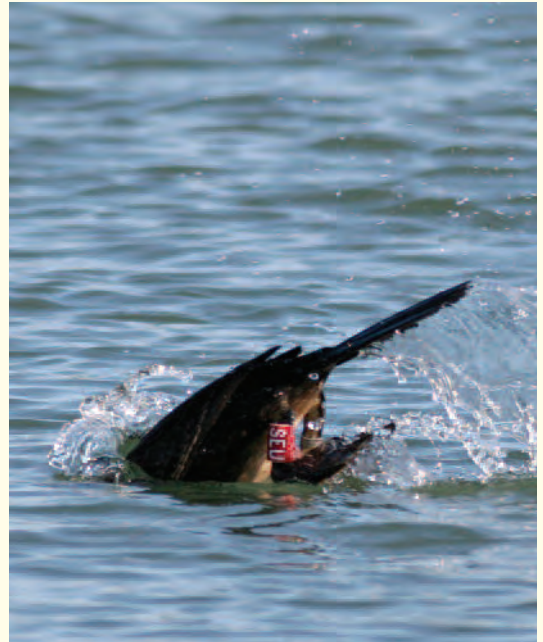
Last summer (2013) over 1,300 Shag chicks were colour-ringed at 14 east coast UK colonies. The subsequent winter 56.5% of all chicks ringed in 2013 were re-sighted between September and March! This has given us a tremendous insight into the movements of juvenile Shags in the winter months.

The majority of re-sightings came from Scotland and England and these juveniles travelled a range of distances, with some being seen at the breeding colony through the winter and others being seen hundreds of kilometres away. Five colour-ringed juveniles were re-sighted abroad last winter.

Three Farnes-ringed juveniles were re-sighted in the Netherlands, including 'red SEU' which was ringed on 19 July 2013 and subsequently seen in Lauwersoog Harbour 15 times throughout October and November.

'Red RRU' was ringed at Bullers of Buchan (North-east Scotland) on 7 July 2013 and re-sighted three times; once at Bullers of Buchan on 20 August 2013, then at Boddam on 23 October 2013 and the final re-sighting was from Büsum, Germany, on 1 January 2014 (Happy New Year!).

'Red PEP', also a Farnes bird, was ringed on 17 July 2013 and then seen 100 km inland fishing on a river near Namur, Belgium during October and November 2013. It will be interesting to see if and where these individuals are re-sighted this winter!



**Plate 232.** Shag 'red SEU' foraging in Lauwersoog Harbour, the Netherlands, October 2013. © Guido Meeuwissen

### Whaups, Peesies, Skirlin' Wullies and other waders

With the **Whaup (Curlew)** in dramatic decline over much of the UK the RSPB are into the second year of a colour-ringing programme looking into brood rearing habitats and subsequent wintering areas, survival and natal fidelity. Alan Leitch has colour-ringed 80 chicks in Orkney this summer, whilst Hywel Maggs and Jenny Lennon have ringed 40 in Donside, North-east Scotland. Both sites had returning colour-ringed chicks from 2013 in non-breeding flocks, but apart from a dispersing bird from Donside to the Ythan Estuary in late summer 2013, there have been no other sightings away from the breeding grounds yet.

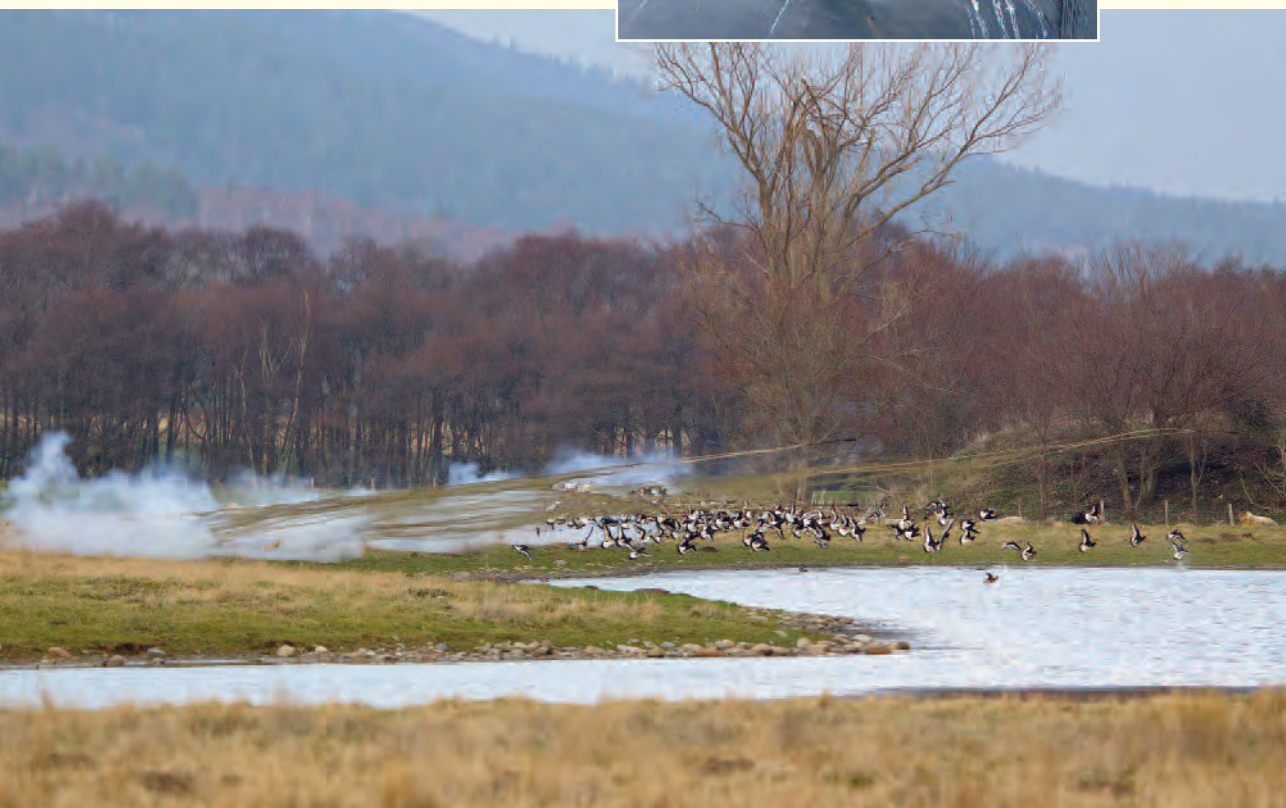
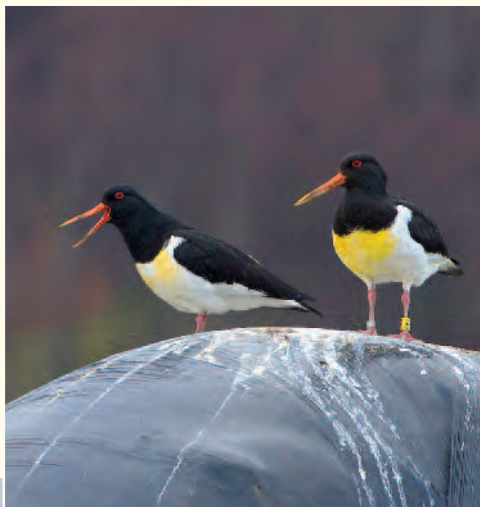


**Plate 233.** Lapwing, yellow-flagged chick at Rigifa Pool, Cove, Aberdeen, June 2014. © *Morag Jones*

**Peesies (Lapwings)** are also sadly in decline. New leg-flagging studies have begun in Lothian (light green flag, Mike McDowell) and Grampian (yellow flag, see Plate 233) to investigate post-fledging dispersal and subsequent survival and return to natal areas. Bruce Lynch also metal ringed 100 chicks in Glen Clova whilst looking at growth rates of chicks and hopes to start a colour-ringing project next year.

**Plates 234–235.** A catch of 88 Oystercatchers, Ballater, North-east Scotland, March 2014. **Inset;** a pair of breeding birds on territory several weeks later. © *Harry Scott*

Lastly on the home breeding wader front, and happy to report due to its enterprising adaptability, not in decline is the **Skirlin' Wullie (Oystercatcher)**. Eighty-eight birds were colour-dyed and darvic ringed (see Plates 234–235) in spring 2014 near Ballater, North-east Scotland to investigate the origins of an inland spring pre-breeding roost gathering. So far, about a third of the catch have been re-sighted breeding or present in nearby glens but a chick ringed by Hugh Insley in the Highlands near Moy in May 2006 was re-trapped in the catch suggesting some birds perhaps stop off on their way further north into the Highlands.



Highland RG conducted a similar Oystercatcher study in Speyside in the 1990s which resulted in a lot of their birds being re-sighted breeding in Orkney and Shetland.

A bird ringed in Wales in winter was also re-trapped in the spring Ballater catch, so these birds could turn up anywhere during the winter. The dye will have faded and been moulted out but please check all Oystercatchers for white or yellow darvics or colour-rings?

Please check all wader flocks this winter for colour-ringed/darviced/leg-flagged birds.

All colour-ringing projects with contact details can be found at [www.cr-birding.org](http://www.cr-birding.org).

Of course there are many other wader studies going on around Scotland, the UK and across the Western Palearctic which involve birds we are likely to encounter in the breeding season, on migration or during the winter.

Whilst ringing **Dunlin** on the Outer Hebrides in May 2013, Hugh Inasley was lucky enough to catch two birds which had already been ringed, both in their wintering grounds in Banc D' Arguin, Mauritania on 21 November 2011 and 6 May 2013 respectively.

Ian Andrews was somewhat surprised to spot a leg-flagged **Knot** ('yellow MXP') in his photograph of a flock of 3,000 at Musselburgh, Lothian in December 2013 (Plate 236). It turned out to be a bird ringed at Mårnes, Porsanger in northern Norway in May 2009 which had also been re-sighted there in May 2010 and 2012.



Plate 236. Knot flock, Musselburgh, Lothian, December 2013. Inset: close-up of leg-flagged 'yellow MXP'. © Ian Andrews

## Lesser/Common Redpolls

The new Siskin! Coming to nyger feeders and tape lures; lots being ringed.

- L000730 JuvM 19/01/11 Hamilton, Strathclyde  
Rtpd 18/11/12 La Neuville, Nord, France 753 km
- L000729 Ad 17/01/11 Hamilton, Strathclyde  
Rtpd 06/03/13 Les Roberts, Liart, Ardennes,  
France 872 km
- Y904767 JuvM 24/10/12 Pett Level, Sussex  
Rtpd 11/05/13 Shebster, Highland 895 km
- Y217682 JuvM 18/12/11 Shooters Hill, Greater London  
Rtpd 19/05/13 nr Tongue, Highland 827 km
- D191072 JuvF 13/10/12 Hollesley, Suffolk  
Rtpd 25/05/13 Bettyhill, Highland 803 km
- 12574099 JuvM 14/01/12 Hockai, Belgium  
Rtpd 25/06/12 Glen Quey, Tayside 901 km
- Y469077 Juv 29/10/11 Grendon Wood, Buckinghamshire  
Dead 24/04/13 Kirriemuir, Tayside 550 km
- 12329236 JuvM 24/03/12 Liege, Belgium  
Rtpd 17/05/13 Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway  
887 km
- 12253479 JuvM 11/11/11 West-Vlaanderen, Belgium  
Rtpd 17/05/13 Leswalt, Dumfries & Galloway  
695 km
- L542561 JuvF 02/03/13 Warsop, Nottinghamshire  
Rtpd 06/08/13 Ellon, Grampian Region 463 km
- HD41086 Juv 07/10/13 Utsira, Rogaland, Norway  
Rtpd 15/10/13 Fair Isle 369 km
- Y935121 AdM 10/10/12 Pett Level, Sussex  
Rtpd 11/05/13 Callander, Central Region 675 km

## Interesting gull movements

Geoff Atherton was lucky enough to find and photograph Shetland's second ever **Yellow-legged Gull** on Foula on 6 July 2014, amazingly wearing an Italian metal ring! Unfortunately, the bird was found dead the next day. It will be interesting to find out when and where this bird was ringed.



Plate 237. Italian-ringed Yellow-legged Gull, Foula, Shetland, 7 July 2014. © Geoff Atherton

**Common Gull** metal ET47509 has featured a few times before in Ringers' Roundup, a 14+ year-old Highland chick wintering every year in Sligo, Ireland but there's a new kid on the block now. Yellow darvic 2A35 was ringed as a chick by Ian Livingstone and Clyde RG colleagues at Hunterston, Ayrshire on 7 July 2013 and re-sighted and photographed by Graham Prole in Poppintree Park, Dublin on 1 February 2014. It was still there at the end of February, so it will be interesting to see if it returns there in subsequent years like ET47509 at Sligo.



Plate 238. Common Gull 'yellow 2A35', Poppintree Park, Dublin, Ireland, 22 February 2014. © Graham Prole

Tom Dougall and Lothian RG colleagues have started putting engraved darvic rings on **Black-headed Gull** chicks in the Moorfoot Hills in the Borders, to investigate their post-fledging dispersal and wintering grounds.

A sighting of 'white 2ADS' by Dieter Blumel was a bit of a surprise in Katingsiel, Eiderstedt, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany on 7 July 2014. The bird was obviously enjoying the beer so much it decided not to come home!





Plate 239. White-throated Sparrow, Cowal peninsula, Argyll, June 2014. © Jim Dickson

## White-throated Sparrow, Cowal peninsula, 19 June 2014 - first record for Argyll

J.M. DICKSON & T. CALLAN

As was the case with many other parts of Scotland, the spring of 2014 in Argyll will be long remembered for being way above average for the quality of rare bird records. After a spate of good gull records that included American Herring, Bonaparte's, three Ring-billed, two Yellow-legged, a potential Azorean Gull and a potential Thayer's Gull a broader range of rarities appeared including; three Rustic Buntings, Black Kite, Red-rumped Swallow, Pied-billed Grebe and a Collared Flycatcher. The supporting cast of White-billed Diver, two Red-breasted Flycatchers, Marsh Warbler, Honey Buzzard, Rose-coloured Starling, two Bee-eaters, Temminck's Stint, Red-backed Shrike, American Wigeon and three Little Egrets in a four week spell were exceptional for this county.

At last it was looking like this magical spring spell was over and with the usual 'famous last words' I

suggested to John Bowler on Tiree that at last things have now gone quiet! Well not exactly...awakened by a phone call from Tom Callan on 19 June, I heard something like "morning Jim... think I have a White-throated Sparrow in my garden [at Otter Ferry]... have checked the field guides and pretty sure that's what it is". My usual doubting self quickly tried to think of something to question his reasoning for this seemingly unlikely record which was miles nearer to Glasgow than the usual hotspots for this kind of vagrant like Tiree or Islay. A short discussion on the head pattern seemed to clinch it when Tom mentioned the yellow bits in front of the eye when seen head on! I suggested Tom put more seed down and said I'd be there within a couple of hours as Otter Ferry was on the 'wrong side' of Loch Fyne and such is the nature of the highly convoluted coastline of Argyll.

En-route I called Angus Murray to let him know I was going to check this out and as it was in a private garden best not to put out any information until Tom expressed his views. I arrived at Tom's lovely garden at about 11:15 hrs only to be told it had been there all morning, but had now disappeared! Tom had first seen it sometime after 07:30 hrs through his patio door windows and it had at times been on the door steps! It had been seen chasing off Dunnocks and had fed more or less constantly for almost three hours. Tom had taken some photos and from these the bird was clearly a very smart White-throated Sparrow.

After about 30 minutes waiting behind the patio window and with no show, we decided to have a look about outside just in case it was resting under a bush or behaving in a Dunnock-like fashion. Another 30 minutes went by and the usual fears were starting to creep in. Back into the house, back to the patio doors and there it was on the lawn about 5 m away! A great new

species for Argyll and a nice Scottish tick. After a few photos were taken I discussed with Tom that there may be some Scottish birders that would like to see this bird, especially those that hadn't seen one in the Northern Isles where just about all Scottish occurrences have been from. It was felt than on balance there would be some interest, but as this was not a 'mega rarity' and indeed, is the most common transatlantic landbird to the Northern Isles, then his and his wife's private life would not be too unduly disrupted. Always a difficult judgement to make particularly when a bird can really only be best viewed from within a person's garden and in this case from inside the house! After a bit of hesitation Tom decided it was okay to put the news out and potentially looked forward to meeting some new birding folk. At this point Angus was given the go-ahead to put the news out. At least one group of birders managed to see it later that afternoon, however there was no sign of it the following day with disappointment for three groups of birders.



Plate 240. White-throated Sparrow, Cowal peninsula, Argyll, June 2014. © Jim Dickson



Plate 241. White-throated Sparrow, Cowal peninsula, Argyll, June 2014. © Jim Dickson

### Description

A very smart sparrow or bunting like bird not dissimilar in size to a House Sparrow but with a more bunting like build and showing a fairly long tail. This bird was clearly a bunting like passerine that appeared to show most topographical features found on the inside cover of a field guide!

The most striking feature immediately apparent was the head markings, particularly the broad white supercillium, white chin/throat and on closer view through binoculars the black lateral crown stripes, eye-stripe and the contrasting white medial crown stripe. Also noticeable, particularly when the bird was viewed face on, was the bright yellow fore-supercillium just above the eye to the upper mandible base.

In many ways the bird resembled an eastern bunting of Yellow-browed or even a Rustic at times, however, the underparts were clearly not pale and streaked as with these bunting species but a fairly uniform grey wash from the ear-coverts, sharply bordering the white chin/throat to the sides. The belly and undertail appeared more whitish with brown tones on the flanks.

The upperparts were rich chestnut brown with very narrow fine black and white streaking very similar to a Reed Bunting, as were the closed wings/tertials, showing a nice mix of darker and paler brown tones. The greater coverts were neatly tipped white forming

narrow 'wing bars' and the upper tertial was narrowly edged white.

The rump and upper-tail coverts were un-streaked and were a dull brownish grey. The tail appeared long brown and with no white outer tail feathers.

The bill was conical bunting or sparrow like and steely grey in colour. The iris was a deep chestnut brown and the legs were pale brown/dull pink in tone.

Not heard to call, however, it sang at least on one occasion and was very distinctive. A fairly high-pitched tuneful whistle given slowly and deliberate with two initial high note whistles followed by three disyllabic descending more drawn-out whistles. Later, Martin Scott reminded me of the mnemonic 'O-oh sweet Canada Canada Canada' which was spot on.

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### White-throated Sparrow status in Scotland

*There are 20 previous records of White-throated Sparrow in Scotland. Forrester et al. (2007) listed 15 records since when there have been records in Shetland (2004, 2006, 2010), Fair Isle (2010) and Highland (2012). The only previous mainland Scottish record was in Caithness in 1970. Eds.*



Plate 242. American Herring Gull, Campbeltown Harbour, Kintyre, February 2014. © Eddie Maguire

## American Herring Gull, Kilmichael, Kintyre, February–March 2014 - second mainland Scotland record

### D. BROWN

I'll remember the winter of 2013/14 for two things; continual deep and fast-moving depressions swinging across the Atlantic, and the resulting low cloud and endless grey days making field work in Argyll an uphill struggle!

Sixth of February, and yet again the cloud and sea met outside the flat in Inveraray! With little hope of getting any eagle monitoring in, I set about the back-log of paper work but by lunchtime boredom had kicked in and with the mountains still invisible, I decided to head south along Loch Fyne and do some birding. The first stop produced four Little Auks, a pleasant surprise, followed by a couple of juvenile Glaucous Gulls at Lochgilphead.

Earlier in the year Tom Lowe and I had been discussing the never-ending stream of depressions coming across the Atlantic and what they might bring. As well as Kumlien's, American Herring Gull seemed to be a good bet, so I decided if there was to be any chance

of finding one I needed to get down to Campbeltown at the end of Kintyre. As well as being well placed geographically, it's also one of the most active fishing ports on the west coast.



Plate 243. American Herring Gull, Campbeltown Harbour, Kintyre, February 2014. © Eddie Maguire

The problem with Campbeltown is it's a slog, even from Inveraray. I did a drive by on the two Snow Geese at Tayinloan but kept on pushing south. Finally I rounded the corner into the extensive grazing pastures of the south and was greeted by floods peppered with birds in every field. I was still keen to get to the harbour though and time was starting to run out. Just south of Kilmichael Farm the most extensive flood yet came into view. The water was barely visible for birds and it was just too good to ignore. As I scanned through the gulls present, more drifted down from the nearby fields and on the second pan I was smacked around the chops by a large dusky gull with a white face! American Herring Gull, surely? The gulls were about 500 m away and surrounded by Wigeon, Greenland White-fronts, and Greylag Geese. I knew getting close was going to be a tricky task.

I continued watching it as it wondered around before making a short flight onto the flood. Smooth and dusky throughout the underparts, black tail, heavily barred upper and undertail coverts, dark greater coverts, and that characteristic dopey look. Every box was ticked; this looked like the real deal. By now I'd got some shots and video on the iPhone, but I needed better, so I slung the DSLR over the shoulder and set of cautiously down the field. Flock by flock, birds started moving until I was left with the last half dozen gulls, including the American Herring Gull thankfully. The bird continued to show well for another five minutes before the last of them got up and headed east towards the harbour. I followed as rapidly as I could and amazingly relocated the bird roosting on a shingle island at the mouth of Campbeltown Bay; a cracking end to a great afternoon.

The next morning, I headed back down to the floods and met Jim Dickson, the Argyll recorder. After an hour of checking the floods and fields, we relocated it back on the original flood. It showed as it had done the day before. Cue its disappearance. Maybe through a lack of interest and its mobile behaviour it kept a low profile for eight days until Eddie McGuire relocated it on the harbour wall in Campbeltown. His stunning shots managed to kindle some interest and for the next month (until 27 March) it was seen almost daily either out on the floods or in the harbour. During



**Plate 244.** American Herring Gull, Kilmichael, Kintyre, Argyll, February 2014. © Dan Brown

this period it had advanced its moult into first-winter plumage quite markedly, with the white forehead becoming a white head! Eddie estimated that over 300 birders made the journey down the peninsula for Scotland's second mainland American Herring Gull.

In many ways this bird was a 'classic' juvenile American Herring Gull and thankfully didn't present too many ID issues, but it would be interesting to know how many more subtle individuals are overlooked. On 21 February, Tom Lowe and I ventured back down Kintyre to have a look at the American Herring Gull and in doing so found a cracking third-winter herring gull sp. Unfortunately, the weather was against us and getting images proved difficult, but its apparent 'young' look (i.e. its appearance is more second-winter), combined with a very dusky shawl and black 'piano key' secondaries are all great pointers towards another American Herring Gull. One that got away...

**Dan Brown, Glasgow.**

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### **American Herring Gull status in Scotland**

*Accepted Scottish records of American Herring Gull have come from 1997, 1999, 2002 (up to 5), 2004 (2), 2006, 2007 (2) and 2008 (others in 2007 are currently 'in circulation' with BBRC). Apart from the Caithness record in 1999, all have been on the Outer or Inner Hebrides. Eds.*



Plate 245. Pied-billed Grebe, Loch Thom, Clyde, April 2014. © John MacLean

## Pied-billed Grebe, Loch Thom, 20–29 April 2014 - first Clyde record

M. HOLCOMBE

As part of their duties, the Clyde Murshiel Rangers contribute to the monthly BTO-organised Wetland Bird Survey. On 20 April 2014, the survey was undertaken by myself and volunteer Lorna McCartney.

Starting at the western side of Loch Thom and taking in the Compensation Reservoir, we had only spotted and recorded the usual geese and gulls. We had just finished the count on the eastern side of Loch Thom and were starting the drive to the Gryffe Reservoir when I saw a glimpse of a small greyish bird moving over the water and diving. By the time we had stopped it was out of sight. Initially, we thought that it was maybe a Coot or Little

Grebe, but it was really hard to be sure and given the fact that Coot and Little Grebes aren't seen very often at Loch Thom, we decided to wait.

We continued to scan the loch and it wasn't long before it was spotted again, but we still weren't sure what we were looking at. Although it had the greyish colouring of a juvenile Coot, it wasn't the right shape, plus it had a pale barred bill and pale rump. The bird was quite close to the shore, so we were able to get a good look, but we couldn't find it in any of the bird ID guides that we had with us, so after watching it for 30 minutes we decided to move on and finish our WeBS count.



Plate 246. Pied-billed Grebe, Loch Thom, Clyde, April 2014. © Davie Abraham



**Plate 247.** Pied-billed Grebe, Loch Thom, Clyde, April 2014. © *Davie Abraham*

Lorna persevered with our mystery bird and consulted a number of different people, including Tom Byars, who helped point her in the right direction. In the end, it was the barred bill and pale rump that helped Lorna positively identify it as a Pied-bill Grebe. Unable to keep her excitement to herself, she sent me an early morning text (I happened to be enjoying a lie-in on a well-deserved day off). After checking the identification for myself, I agreed that it did indeed appear to be the bird we'd seen. Dragging myself out of bed, I went back up to Loch Thom to see if I could get a photograph of it. Thankfully, the staff from RSPB Lochwinnoch arrived not long afterwards to help scan the loch, but unfortunately we couldn't re-locate the grebe. Everyday for four days we actively scanned Loch Thom to get a second sighting to no avail, but eventually ranger John MacLean managed to re-locate it and got a decent photograph which was circulated to allow the identification to be confirmed.

The grebe remained until the following weekend, 26–29 April, allowing many visitors to see it.

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#### **Pied-billed Grebe status in Scotland**

*In The Birds of Scotland Forrester et al. (2007) listed nine records of Pied-billed Grebe in Scotland between the first record in 1975 and the end 2004. Since then there have been sightings in Mull (Argyll) in 2011, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) in 2012 and North Uist (Outer Hebrides) in 2013/14. This is the first record for Renfrewshire and the Clyde area, and only the 13th Pied-billed Grebe ever recorded in Scotland. Eds.*



Plate 248. Caspian Stonechat, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2014. © Steve Arlow

## Caspian Stonechat, 27 April to 31 May 2014 - first record for Fair Isle

D. PARNABY



Plate 249. Caspian Stonechat, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2014.  
© Tommy Hyndman

April on Fair Isle typically sees a rush of first arrival dates of a variety of common migrants, usually with a few scarcer species and the occasional decent rarity thrown in for good measure. So it had been in 2014, with easterly winds dominating the latter third of the month and bringing a good selection of birds including Western Subalpine Warbler, Crane, Great Grey Shrike, several Wrynecks, two Garganey and a reasonable supporting cast of warblers, chats etc.

As the month neared its end, there was a growing feeling of optimism with the charts showing winds stretching right from south-east Europe to the UK: it was exactly these conditions that had delivered Fair Isle's two previous Cretzschmar's Buntings... The 27th certainly started well, with a Short-toed Lark, in the Havens, and a Red-breasted Flycatcher - both found on census, along with clear signs that there were more birds about than the previous few days.



By two o'clock, the day seemed just about perfect, with the beautiful weather and good birds, followed by a classic FIBO Sunday roast all topped off with Sunderland's 'great escape' gathering momentum with a four nil win over Cardiff. The general feeling of contentment and relaxation was then shattered by a call from Deryk Shaw: "Cretzschmar's Bunting at Burkle!" Unfortunately, the bird had flown by the time we got there, so the team went into action searching the island. Although this turned up further good birds, there was no sign of the bunting. It was some five hours or so of constant walking later that hope appeared to be fading with the light, and I approached Richard Cope and Chris Dodd near Midway in an attempt to work out how many Short-toed Larks were actually present on the island. Just before I reached them, my attention was drawn to a very black and white bird flying across the field next to me before alighting on a fence along the Meadow Burn. It was clearly a stonechat, but with the front-on view revealing an intense burnished orange breast, contrasting with a white belly, and a huge white collar, it looked very interesting indeed. It dropped down to the ground and returned to the fence on a feeding sortie and, despite the

distance, there was clearly a large white rump, and perhaps even more white than that. A couple of distant record shots revealed that the tail was also well marked with white, with the Wheatear-like pattern of the tail feathers confirming that this was a Caspian Stonechat, another fifth for Britain (like the bunting) and the first record of this subspecies for Fair Isle.

Any initial disappointment that the gathering crowd may have felt at this not being the Cretzschmar's were soon dispelled as the Stonechat worked its way along the fence towards us and showed exceptionally well, and a real little stunner it was. It spent most of its time perching on fence lines and dropping briefly to the ground to feed. Its showy demeanour, coupled with its immaculate plumage, made it a real treat to watch. It was the perfect end to a really good day's birding on Fair Isle, although things got even better the next day when Richard relocated the Cretzschmar's Bunting!

The 'Daily Log' made for an entertaining read that night, with birds including: Cretzschmar's Bunting, Caspian Stonechat, Western Subalpine Warbler, three Short-toed Larks, Red-breasted



**Plate 250.** Caspian Stonechat, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2014. © Roger Riddington



**Plate 251.** Caspian Stonechat, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2014. © David Parnaby



Plate 252. Caspian Stonechat, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2014.  
© John L. Irvine



Plate 253. Caspian Stonechat, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2014.  
© David Parnaby

Flycatcher, seven Wrynecks, Great Grey Shrike, Blue-headed Wagtail, 33 Willow Warblers, 32 Chiffchaffs, 25 Blackcaps, three Sedge Warblers, three Lesser Whitethroats, 2 Whitethroat, 10 Redstarts, three Black Redstarts, Whinchat, five Pied Flycatchers, 27 Tree Pipits, 13 Ring Ouzels, 167 Fieldfares, nine Redwings, 33 Song Thrushes, Mistle Thrush, 28 Robins, six Dunnocks, 22 White Wagtails, Tree Sparrow, 51 Bramblings, eight Common Redpolls, Crossbill, Chaffinch, 12 Reed Buntings, 13 Snow Buntings, 41 Swallows, six House Martins, two Sand Martins, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, three Green Sandpipers, two Jack Snipe, seven Whimbrels, Kumlien's Gull, Iceland Gull, 174 Wheatears, 204 Meadow Pipits, two Linnets, two Collared Doves, seven Woodpigeons and two Tufted Ducks!

If that wasn't the best-ever April day on Fair Isle, then it can't have been far off! From the second day, the Caspian Stonechat was seen to be making an occasional coughing action (as if it was trying to regurgitate a difficult pellet) which suggested it may have had an unidentified health issue. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, it remained until 31 May, during which its health didn't appear to deteriorate.

Although no-one made the journey specifically to see this bird, it was well received by several people twitching the Cretschmar's Bunting, as well as all of the birders on the island. It was only the second Scottish and fifth British record of this distinctive subspecies, following autumn birds in Cornwall in 1985, Suffolk in 1993 and the Isles of Scilly in 2013 and a spring bird at Virkie, Shetland in May 2006.

Interestingly, a male Caspian Stonechat was seen at Morups Tånge in Sweden on 15–16 April and the same bird was then relocated on Lista fyr in Norway on 19 April, but, despite being tipped off that the route it was taking was likely to see it heading straight for Fair Isle, this was not the same bird. The Scandinavian bird was a first-summer male showing an obvious contrast between the brown primary coverts and flight feathers and the black greater coverts, whereas the glossy black greater and primary coverts, black flight feathers and lack of pale tips to the black head, throat and underwing coverts would suggest the Fair Isle bird was an adult male.



Plates 254–255. Caspian Stonechat, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2014. © (Above) Steve Arlow, (below) Larry Dalzell



The BOU split Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* from European Stonechat *S. rubicola* in January 2012 and retained 'Caspian Stonechat' *S.m. hemprichii* as a race of Siberian Stonechat, pending further analysis (Sangster *et al.* 2011, BOU 2012, Svensson *et al.* 2012). Although

formerly known as *S.m. variegatus*, recent work has established that the correct name for the white-tailed, north Caspian form should be *S.m. hemprichii*, with *variegatus* now applied to the south Caspian race formerly known as *armenicus* 'Armenian Stonechat' (Svensson *et al.* 2012).

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Plate 256. Yellow-rumped Warbler, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2014. © Mark Warren

## Yellow-rumped Warbler, North Ronaldsay to Unst, 6–7 May 2014 - seventh Scottish record

M. WARREN & R. BROOKES

### North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 6 May 2014

Early May 2014 on North Ronaldsay had certainly begun in exciting fashion with waves of newly arrived migrants coming on a daily basis on what seemed like endless easterly winds. Several Garganey, a couple of Wrynecks, a Short-toed Lark and Little Bunting were all recorded during the first week but the star bird had been a partial summer-plumaged Spotted Sandpiper near the pier late evening of the 2nd until 16:36 hrs on 6 May!



Plate 257. Yellow-rumped Warbler, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2014. © Mark Warren

Up to 16:35hrs I wasn't exactly doing badly, with the lingering Glossy Ibis, seven Garganey, plenty of passage Waders and about a dozen common warblers in the notebook from my assigned census route of the east side of the Island. I was heading for home with just a few gardens left to check and as I approached Scott's Haa the next 60 seconds went something like this: "Blackcap, another Blackcap - nice, small bird with a Yellow-rump..., what the..., that's not a Serin that's a warbler, it's got two wing-bars, holy #@&\$ that's a Yellow-rumped Warbler!!!"

I've been fortunate enough to find my fair share of rarities on this Island over the years but at this point I was a long way from calmness. Maybe because for once there was no tricky identification conundrum to solve with this bird, or because I'd never seen any of the American wood warblers before, or perhaps simply because the Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler was incredibly mobile and I was afraid of losing it. Between 16:36 and 16:37 I managed to take a few photos, fumbled the buttons on my phone to get the news out and keep track of the bird. As Yellow-rumped Warblers go, it was quite a dull individual, hence my presumption that it was a female - not that I had any comparable experience. The Observatory

team arrived within 10 minutes, with the summoned copy of the 'Sibley Guide' just to check a few personal reservations I had over the drab plumage and to rule out any of the rarer, dull female-type American warblers.

The bird was structurally different to our warblers, with a stockier shape. Its plumage was essentially grey-brown above, with a subtly streaked mantle, a similar coloured crown (within which some random blue-grey feathering was present on both sides), contrasting warmer brown ear-coverts, a subtle white supercillium and a white throat. The underparts were white based with fine blackish streaks on the breast and down the flanks and there was a hint of yellow 'carpal patch'. Two white wing-bars were always obvious and when the bird flew it came alive when its startlingly bright lemon-yellow rump was revealed as were large white spots on the outer three tail feathers. It also regularly gave a 'clicking' contact call which was reminiscent of a *Locustella* warbler.

A few of us skipped tea and watched the bird until about 19:30 hrs when it seemed to go to roost in original garden I had found it. This surprised us a little as there were still a couple of hours of feeding time still available and we



**Plate 258.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2014. © Mark Warren



**Plate 259.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2014. © Pete Donnelly

speculated it may be getting an early night in anticipation of moving on...? We failed to find it in its favoured areas the next morning, but around 14:30 hrs our questions of the previous evening were answered in stunning fashion - Shetland birder Robbie Brooks had found a Yellow-rumped Warbler at Haroldswick Pools, Unst, Shetland!!!

Surely it couldn't be the same bird? Remarkably it was! Thanks to a series of excellent photographs taken at both locations which revealed a number of plumage similarities (in particular the blue-grey feathering in the crown) and it was proven that the bird had travelled the 130 miles north in less than 18 hours! A fantastic way for North Ronaldsay's second (and Orkney's third) Yellow-rumped Warbler to become the first mainland Shetland record.

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**Haroldswick, Unst, Shetland, 7 May 2014**

Around 09:30 hrs on 7 May 2014, I decided to take a drive around some of my favourite migrant spots as we'd been having a spell of south-easterlies. My first stop off was going to be Haroldswick Pools which had been particularly good for some of the commoner migrants over the preceding weeks. Unfortunately, as I drove down the hill I could see a vehicle parked there, so I headed further north to check Skaw, Lamba Ness and Norwick first.

Going back to the pools around 11:00, I pulled up and within a minute, I noticed a small bird at the far end of the *Rosa* which was facing me with its head slightly turned. It seemed to have quite a pale breast, slightly streaked with a contrasting dark head. I had a feeling it wasn't anything I'd come across before; so, doing what I always do, I grabbed the camera and managed to fire off a few frames just in time before it dropped down in to the *Rosa* bushes. Checking the pictures on the back of the camera, I could see it was something very different from what I was used to and had a 'gut' feeling it must be an American warbler due to its overall structure. My experience of American passerines, however, was limited to just two birds - a Red-eyed Vireo that was at Valyie on Unst in September 2012 and the Cape May Warbler found by Mike Pennington in Baltasound in October 2013.

**Plate 260.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Unst, Shetland, May 2014. © Robbie Brookes

As I looked through my *Collins Guide* and also the 'Sibley' app on my iPod, I kept an eye on the bushes for the bird to re-appear; thankfully it did and I got to see its bright yellow rump. Time to 'phone a friend' I thought.

The first call was to Brydon (Thomason) who I knew was on the island. Brydon, however, was out guiding at that time, so he suggested I photographed the back of the camera screen with my phone and send him some pictures. This I did, but they just wouldn't send - probably down to the image sizes and the pretty slow network that we have here. The next call was to Chris Rogers who was also birding around the north of Unst, all I got was his answerphone, so I left a message and hoped he got it. Last but not least, I emailed and texted Mike (Pennington) who I knew would be teaching at the school - maybe he would have time to come down at lunchtime? After what seemed like a long time, Chris pulled up. He was oblivious to what I thought I'd found as he'd not received my call (when he arrived, he took my excitement to be that I'd re-found the Wryneck!) He looked at the pictures and confirmed it was indeed a Yellow-rumped Warbler (plus a few expletives!).

Shortly after, Brydon arrived with his guests and then a while later, several other local birders

from Mainland arrived. Most of the time, the bird only showed briefly when it came to the outside of the bushes to feed, before flitting back to cover. By mid-afternoon it hadn't been seen for a while, so it was suggested to look around the village. I decided to drive up to a nearby croft cottage with a nice overgrown garden. I didn't find the Yellow-rumped Warbler, but I did get a brief view of a Subalpine Warbler - too brief to get its race though. I phoned Brydon again but we couldn't relocate it. Thankfully it was re-found later by Brydon and identified as a 'western'.

By 17:45 hrs I had to return home to Baltasound, but a number of people continued to look for the Yellow-rumped Warbler, which then turned up back at the Rosa bushes around 19:45 and was seen by a number of people.

The following morning I was up at 05:00 to go and see if the bird was still there. By 05:45, I'd seen it and by 06:00 the news had been put out again that it was still present. I then spent most of the morning watching and photographing the bird; on this day however, it was behaving differently. Instead of skulking around, it was now perching on the tops of the bushes, fly catching and even going down on the ground to feed in the open. I checked the bushes again the following morning, but it had moved on.



**Plate 261.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Unst, Shetland, May 2014. © *Robbie Brookes*



**Plate 262.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Unst, Shetland, May 2014. © *Robbie Brookes*

I had seen that there had also been one on North Ronaldsay the day before, but I didn't think for one minute that this could be the same bird. When I heard later that the pictures of the two sightings had been compared and it was confirmed it was indeed the same bird, it hit home how lucky it was for the bird to be re-found 130 miles away, let alone that it was me that found it.

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### **Yellow-rumped Warbler status in Scotland**

*This record of the same bird at two sites represents the seventh record for Scotland. Previous records were on Fair Isle (1977, 1999), Outer Hebrides (1982, 1999) and Orkney (1995, 2003). Eds.*



Plate 263. Collared Flycatcher, Tiree, Argyll, May 2014. © John Bowler

## Collared Flycatcher on the Isle of Tiree, 27 May 2014 - the first record for SW Scotland

**J.M. BOWLER**

Late May to mid-June 2014 was quite simply the best period to date for scarce and rare spring migrant passerines on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll. Lying well out on the west coast, drift migrants are usually at a premium on the island and indeed recent springs have seen more in the way of scarce North American migrants stopping off on their way north. Springs with good falls on the east coast have occasionally resulted in the odd surprise making it this far out west over the years, but these have generally been restricted to one good bird per spring! However, an exceptional prolonged spell of light NE and E based winds combined with frequent bands of misty rain over the Inner Hebrides throughout the latter half of May and the first half of June 2014 resulted in an unparalleled and almost daily arrival of continental drift migrants.

The first indication that this was going to be an unusual spring was when I chanced upon a Red-rumped Swallow, the first for Tiree, spiralling in misty conditions over the western headland



Plate 264. Collared Flycatcher, Tiree, Argyll, May 2014. © John Bowler





**Plate 265.** Collared Flycatcher, Tiree, Argyll, May 2014.  
© John Bowler

of Ceann a' Mhara (20 May), whilst doing my monthly breeding seabird census there. The following morning I almost tripped over a female or immature male Rustic Bunting in our garden at Balephuill, as I went to put out grain for the sparrows in the drizzle. Numbers of scarcer migrants such as Spotted Flycatchers, Blackcaps and Whitethroats steadily increased around my Balephuill patch in SW Tiree over the next few days as the light NE winds continued and on the evening of 26 May, I found a splendid male Red-backed Shrike on the scrubby hill-side above our house at Carnan Mor, the first spring record of this species for the island.

At about 18:00 hrs on the following evening (27 May), I thought I would head back up to Carnan Mor to try to take some better photos of the shrike. However, there was no sign of the shrike, so instead I contented myself with going through the bushes to pick out a Lesser Whitethroat and a Garden Warbler in amongst the Whitethroats and Spotted Flycatchers, all scarce non-breeding migrants on the island. As I cautiously worked the largest patch of bushes, a striking black and white flycatcher perched up in more open bushes nearby. Even when first seen in flight, I immediately knew this was not a male Pied Flycatcher. The large white wing flashes appeared to join up with a bold white rump in flight and there was an obvious broad white collar behind the black crown - it was a male Collared Flycatcher!

Knowing there were no other birders on the island, I simply watched and photographed the bird as it fed in the hawthorns for over an hour. The bird mostly kept to cover whilst feeding, fly-catching from perches within the bushes and sallying up to catch small insects flying within the branches. It only perched in the open when I first found it and after I had left the hillside. Despite being in close proximity to the bird for over an hour, I did not hear it call.

This was a small neat black and white flycatcher, very similar to Pied Flycatcher in shape, size and actions, but differing in key plumage points, particularly in the larger amount of white present. Most prominently, it had a bold and broad cleanly white collar bending up high around the nape separating the black crown from the black mantle, as well as a large rounded white patch on the forehead. The white patch on the wing was also very extensive with a large club-shaped extension reaching the front edge of the base of the primaries. Flight views revealed a large white rump patch that almost appeared to join up with the white wing flashes, whilst the tail was all black, lacking the white edges of Pied Flycatcher. The plumage above was shinningly black and together with the broad and cleanly white collar, large white rump and large white forehead patch suggested to me that this bird was an adult male.

The bird was still visible on the scrubby hill-side from our garden gate until 19:50 hrs, but I did not see it after that. I checked for the flycatcher the following morning (28 May), but it had moved on, although there was a newly arrived Redwing in full song in our garden at Balephuill, a Marsh Warbler fresh in nearby at Mannal and a Common Rosefinch later that evening in our garden. A singing male Rustic Bunting in our garden on 2–3 June, a female-type Red-breasted Flycatcher at Carnan Mor on 6 June and a stunning male Red-breasted Flycatcher in our garden on 19 June completed a truly amazing spring on Tiree!

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Plate 266. Savi's Warbler, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, May 2014. © Paul Baxter

## Savi's Warbler at Loch of Strathbeg, May–June 2014 - the first record for North-east Scotland

P. BAXTER

Having a young family, my birding activities are currently curtailed and restricted to either early mornings or 'after bed-time'. The summer evenings typically present two to three daylight hours of birding and the opportunity to get out into the field each evening. Having recently moved to the north of the region, Loch of Strathbeg is now only 13 minutes away and given the reputation of the site for turning up outstanding birds, it would be foolish to pass up the opportunity of visiting there on a regular basis, so I try and head there several evenings each week.

May had produced several nice spring birds on the reserve, for example Spoonbills, American Wigeon, Little Gulls, etc. - nothing earth-shattering, but enough to make for a pleasant visit. There was also the confirmation (finally) that Bearded Tits had bred at the reserve and these cracking birds are always nice to see. The evening of 29 May was pleasant - warm, sunny and still and I enjoyed an hour or so in the

Tower Pool Hide which gives a good panoramic view of the Tower Pool and Savoch Pool and associated marshlands. I had seen nothing new that evening, but at 21:00 hrs, I became aware of a *Locustella* buzzing song, although it was very faint and was overpowered by the closer Sedge Warblers. The song only lasted about 20 seconds or so, and then followed a pause of what seemed like an age when I almost decided that I must have misheard something else. I stuck with it and eventually heard it again, still distant, but clear enough to know not to give up on it. At this stage, my initial suspicions were that it was a Savi's Warbler, as opposed to a Grasshopper Warbler, but I needed to try and get closer. I tried around the west end of the reserve, from Coralhill, but the fog had descended and all I was presented with was a wall of silence, even the Sedgies had gone quiet. I had also lost my sense of direction and wasn't at all sure whether I would have been able to hear the bird from my current location. Time was pressing, so I decided to head around

to the loch and visit the Fen Hide, although I didn't hold up much hope as I thought this would have been further away from the bird.

After crossing the disused airfield at Crimond, heading towards the loch, I was pleased to find that the fog had cleared, at least partially, and hoped this would be the prompt for the dusk chorus to continue. Indeed, upon approaching the Fen Hide along the boardwalk, several Sedge Warblers and a Grasshopper Warbler could be heard. I entered the hide and opened the windows and sat and listened, and was soon greeted by the unmistakable sound of a singing Savi's Warbler. Yes, it was distant and it was now almost dark, but it was a huge relief to confirm that the distant song I had heard earlier from the Tower Pool Hide was a Savi's and that it was audible from a closer point on the reserve. It was now 22:30 hrs and rather late to be phoning the news out, so I decided, after a few unsuccessful attempts at getting hold of people, to return home and broadcast the news via email. It would also give me a chance to look at the maps and estimate how far the bird was from the Fen Hide and whether there was any chance of getting closer (as it turned out, the Fen Hide was the closest accessible point to the bird, estimated at 250–300 yards away).



**Plate 267.** Savi's Warbler, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, May 2014. © Paul Baxter

The following evening, only five local birders gathered and were rewarded with the bird commencing singing at 22:00 hrs. It was also audible from Starnafin Centre, but much more distantly. A singing Grasshopper Warbler that evening provided a fine comparison.

Andy Webb phoned early the next morning to tell me that he was actually watching the bird from Fen Hide. Much to his credit, he had located the bird singing from the top of the *Phragmites* by scanning the general area the song had been coming from. I was relieved to meet up with Andy and to actually see the bird, as I had thought this would be a 'heard only' record. This is what had apparently dissuaded many visitors from visiting the previous evening. The fact it was both audible and visible was a game changer for many and the bird was reported at both dawn and dusk over the next few days. Although viewing was distant, with patience it could be seen, perched up singing high on the reeds and it remained faithful to a particular area. I sketched this area on a map, and left it in the hide, hoping it would help visitors locate the bird.

The last time I heard the bird was at dusk on 15 June, prior to leaving on holiday, and that was the last report that I am aware of. Earlier that day, myself and Pete Shepherd had watched it from the Fen Hide, and most of the views we had were of the bird in flight. It appeared to be quite active and territorial in behaviour and was seen to pursue Sedge Warblers on several occasions. We commented and discussed its behaviour, noting that it was very active and visible for a *Locustella*.

It constitutes the first record for North-east Scotland and only the second for the Scottish mainland, following one in the Tay reedbeds at Cairnie Pier, Perth & Kinross on 10–16 May 2005 (*Scottish Birds* 30(1): 64–66). All other Scottish records have involved birds on the Northern Isles, particularly in Shetland during the late spring.

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# Scottish Bird Sightings

1 April to 30 June 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 - Ayr; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

Prolonged spells of SE winds certainly paid dividends. Fair Isle dominated the headlines in April and early May with an astonishing run of major rarities found, and the rest of the Northern Isles provided a strong support cast. Away from there the main highlights were towards the west, but most areas had at least one good bird to enjoy.

**Snow Goose:** the two white-morph birds lingered in the Rattray Head area (NES) until at least 5 April; the two blue-morph birds were at Braehead, Clyde to at least 12 April, and the white-morph and intermediate birds were at Tayinloan, Kintyre (Arg) to at least 10 April. A white-morph was at Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 21 April; one flew over Evanton (High) on 21 April; two white-morph birds were on Muck (High) on 23 April, and an intermediate bird at Cornaigmore, Tiree (Arg) on 22–28 April. One was at Kinnaird Head (NES) on 19 May. **Red-breasted Goose:** the unringed individual was noted again at Caerlaverock



**Plate 268.** Blue-winged Teal, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, June 2014. © Tony Hilton

WWT Reserve (D&G) on 20–22 April. One was at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 13 June.

**American Wigeon:** the presumed lingering drake was seen again at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 17 April; a drake was at various sites on Tiree (Arg) from 21 April to 19 May. Single drakes were at Spey Bay (M&N) on 11 May, at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 15–23 May and 1 June; at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 16–25 May, and there or nearby at Loch na Muilne to 1 June, and a drake and a female were at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve on 24 May. One was at Balnakiel, near Durness (High) on 4 June, and at Loch na Phuill, Tiree on 8–10 June, and one at Loch na Reivil, North Uist (OH) on 10–25 June. One was at Port Allen (P&K) on 12 June, one at Loch of Strathbeg again on 14–15 June, and one at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve (P&K) on 22–24 June. **Green-winged Teal:** one remained at

Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) to at least 6 April; one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) until 12 April; one reappeared at Loch Gretchen, North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7th and 11–17 April; one was at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 25 April; one was at Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 8 May. One was at Balnakeil, near Durness (High) on 14 May, and one again at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 22 May. **Blue-winged Teal:** a drake was on 'The Shunan', Mainland (Ork) on 13 April; a drake was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 14–28 June. **Ring-necked Duck:** a female was at Langais, North Uist (OH) on 2–9 April; a drake was on Loch of Asta, Mainland (Shet) on 2–9 April; a drake was at Loch of Clickimin, Mainland (Shet) on 7 May, and another near Dunbar (Loth) on 24–27 May. A drake was at Murton Gravel Pit (A&D) on 9–26 June, one was at Loch Tarbaidh, NW of Rhiconich (High) on 11 June.

**King Eider:** a drake was off Burghead (M&N) on 2 April; a drake was off Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 5–19 April; a female was at Loch Erribol (High) on 3 April, a female was off Ruddons Point, Fife again on 5–27 April; a female was noted again off Fidra (Loth) on 12–21 April. A drake was seen on the Ythan Estuary (NES) from 25 April to 27 June at least, with presumably the same bird also seen off Blackdog (NES) on 26 April. A female was at Fisherrow/ Musselburgh (Loth) on 30 May to 8 June. **Surf Scoter:** a drake remained off Fisherrow/ Musselburgh (Loth) to 10 May; one was off Rerwick Head, Mainland (Ork) on 1–3rd and 28 April; one was at Portmahomack (High) on 21 April; an immature bird was in the Sound of Harris (OH) on 2 May; two drakes were among the scoter flock off Murcar/Blackdog

on 17–25 May, with one still to end of June; a female was at Castlehill, Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 25 May to at least 13 June.

**White-billed Diver:** at Portsoy (NES) at least 14 were noted offshore from Portsoy (NES) on 6 April and 3 May, with land-based sightings including three on 15 April, at least seven on 18th, with two to 28th and one still on 29–30 April and 5 May. Elsewhere there were singles off Burghhead (M&N) on 4 April, and Handa Island (High) on 5th, with at least 14 noted offshore from Portsoy (NES) on 6 April, with three there again on 15th, at least seven on 18th, with two to 28th and one still on 29–30 April; one was off Herston, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 April, one was at St Abb's (Bord) on 12 April; one off Kirkabister, Mainland (Shet) on 18 April; two were off Port Skigersta,

Lewis (OH) on 20 April and one off Tiumpan Head, Lewis on 21st. One was off Kettle Ness, West Burra (Shet) on 27 April. In May four were off Garron Point (NES) on 3rd, one off Portnockie (M&N) on 4th, with three off there on 5th, and singles were off Burray and Herston/St. Margaret's, South Ronaldsay (both Ork) on 5th. Singles were off Cullen (M&N) on 7 May, and in Water Sound, Burray (Ork) on 7–8th; off Whitehills, near Banff (NES) on 8 May, one in Bluemull Sound (Shet) on 10 May. One was at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 25th, and one off Castlehill, Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 25 May to 3 June. **Cory's Shearwater:** one flew past Kinnaird Head (NES) on 29 June.

**Night-heron:** one was at Reawick, Mainland (Shet) on 19–20 April [found dead on 21st], with another at Quendale/Spiggie (Shet) on

**Plate 269.** Night-heron, Spiggie, Shetland, April 2014. © Rebecca Nason





Plate 270. Great White Egret, Dinnet, North-east Scotland, January 2014. © Harry Scott

18–30 April. **Great White Egret:** one was reported again from the Loch Davan area (NES) on 5 April, and it, or another, was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 7–8 April. One was seen at Polmont (UF) on 20 May; one was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 11 June; one was at Kyle of Tongue, near Durness (High) on 18–19 June, and one at Bogside Flats, Irvine (Ayr) on 18 June. **Purple Heron:** one was at Loch Ken (D&G) on 12 June. **White Stork:** one flew over Abington, Clyde on 10 June. **Glossy Ibis:** one lingered at Loch Leven/Vane Farm RSPB Reserve (P&K) from 17 April, reportedly intermittently into July; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 22 April to 25 May; one flew over Spiggie/Virkie on 8 May; one on Fair Isle (almost certainly the North Ronaldsay individual) on 17 May was the first record for the island. One was at Loch of Hillwell,

Mainland (Shet) on 20–25 May, around Virkie on 28 May, at Sullom, Mainland on 1 June, and Spiggie again on 4 June. One was at Cambus (UF) on 2nd and 11 June, and the North Ronaldsay bird was seen again on 5–6 June. **Spoonbill:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 14 May, with two from 17th, and three present on 20–23rd, with four on 21st and one still on 29 May. A single was at St. Cyrus (NES) on 18th, and at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 18–24 May, with one at Cambus (UF) on 25 May. One was at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 26 May and 7 June; one at Loch of Strathbeg again on 11 June, with it, or another, at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 14th or at Findhorn Bay (M&N) 14–17th, with two there on 26–30 June. Singles were at Loch of Mey (Caith) on 15–17 June, at Spey Bay (M&N) on 20 June, and at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 28 June.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** the bird at Loch nam Feithan/Balranald, North Uist (OH) was still present to at least 19 April; an elusive individual was at Loch Thom, Clyde on 20–29 April. **Honey-buzzard:** one flew over Mousa (Shet) on 21 May, with singles over Long Haven, near Peterhead (NES) and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 May, Fair Isle and Dornoch (High) on 30 May, over the A75 near Eastriggs (D&G) on 5 June; and Cookney, near Newtonhill (NES) on 8 June. One drifted south through Mainland Shetland and then over Fair Isle on 9 June, and one was seen over Finstown, Mainland (Ork) on 24th, and nearby at Firth on 27 June. **Black Kite:** one flew over Inverpolly Lodge (High) on 19 April; one was at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 22–23 April; one was noted on Mull (Arg) on 23 April; one flew over Lochgilphead (Arg) on 3 May; one was over Jedburgh (Bord) on

21 May. **Montagu's Harrier:** a dark-morph bird was seen in the Lammernir Hills near Whiteadder Reservoir (Loth) on 3–4 May. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was in the Lammernir Hills, NE of Faseny Bridge (Loth/Bord) on 4–7 May. **Hobby:** one flew over Port Ellen, Islay (Arg) on 11 April; one was at Blair Drummond GP (UF) on 4 May; one near Kirkcaldy, Fife on 7th, and one flew over Long Haven, near Peterhead (NES) on 29 May. On Shetland, one was at Esha Ness, Mainland on 30 May, with it, or others, at Hermaness, Unst on 1 June, at Lund, Unst on 4th, with one on Fair Isle on 9 June. On 10 June one flew over Murcar Golf Course (NES), with further singles at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 16th; at White Sands Quarry, near Dunbar (Loth) on 17th; at Wood of Cree RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 18th; at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 19th, and over Langholm Moor (D&G) on 27 June.

**American Coot:** the individual at Loch Flemington (High/M&N) remained to 14 April. **Crane:** one flew over Belhaven, near Dunbar (Loth) on 3 April; two were near Scotstown Head (NES) on 7 April; two were seen at Lochgilphead (Arg) on 18 April; one flew over Athelstaneford (Loth) on 21 April; one was on Fair Isle on 22 April; one was at Lochluicart (High) on 23 April; one flew over Grenitote, North Uist (OH) on 24th and then Askernish, South Uist (OH) on 25th; one was in the Quendale area, Mainland (Shet) from 28 April to 6 May, and one was on Foula (Shet) on 24 May and then Unst (Shet) the next day. Four flew over East Calder (Loth) on 21 June.

**Kentish Plover:** one was at Dunvegan, Isle of Skye (High) on 23 May. **Dotterel:** a notably early individual was at Munloch (High) on 17 April. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** one was at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 24 May. **Temminck's Stint:** one was

at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve on 16 May; two were at Letham Pools, Fife on 19–20 May, with one still to 25th; two at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 22–26 May, one at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 22–23rd: one at Balnakiel, near Durness (High) on 24 May, and on Fair Isle on 27 May. **Broad-billed Sandpiper:** one was at Loch Indaal, Islay (Arg) on 23 May. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15 April; one at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 5–6 May; one on North Ronaldsay again on 17 May; one was at Haroldswick Pool, Unst (Shet) on 29 May and one was at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) from 29 May, with two there on 3 June. One was at Haroldswick Pool, Unst again on 28–30 June. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was on Westray (Ork) on 16–18 May. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 May; one was at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 15–16 May. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was at Loch Fada, Benbecula (OH) on 11 May, with it, or another, at Daliburgh, South Uist on 17 May. **Grey Phalarope:** an unexpected spring sighting involved one flying over Sanday (Ork) on 26 May; it, or another, (largely in breeding plumage) was at Loch Gretchen, North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13–30 June.

**Pomarine Skua:** first reports of northbound birds included three apiece at Newbie and Luce Bay (both D&G), and four off Balranald, North Uist (OH), all on 12 April. Passage continued through to 2 June, with peak counts of 35 at Southerness (D&G) and 55 at Powillimount (D&G) on 6 May, and 34 at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 14 May. **Long-tailed Skua:** the first of the spring was one past Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 20 April, with no further reports until one over Saltcoats (Ays) on 11 May and 13

past Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 14 May. Passage continued to 15 June, with peak counts of 18 past Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist on 15 May and 48 past Noup Head, Westray (Ork) on 21 May. **Laughing Gull:** an adult was on Fair Isle on 19 June. **Franklin's Gull:** the wintering adult was still present on Canna (High) on 12 April. **Ring-billed Gull:** a first-summer was at Loch a Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 16 April; a first-winter was at Ardrishaig (Arg) on 19 April; a first-summer was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 24 April; a second-summer was at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) on 6–8 May; a first-summer was at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist on 12 May. **Thayer's Gull:** the juvenile was seen again at Bruichladdich, Islay (Arg) on 20–25 April at least.

**Iceland Gull:** a small number lingered into April, mostly singles in the north and west, with fewer in May, and single figure totals present at the end of June. Highest counts were of three at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 2nd and 15–20 April; three on Fair Isle on 4th, and three on Westray (Ork) on 19 April. **Kumlien's Gull:** one was at West Loch Ollay, South Uist (OH) on 6 April; a juvenile was on Fair Isle from 20 April to 26 May. **Glaucous Gull:** lower numbers evident compared to Iceland Gull, again decreasing progressively, but a few still present at end of June. Highest counts were of three at Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 2–6 April; six at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 14 April, but a peak of just two there on 19–29 May. **Bridled Tern:** one on Fair Isle on 16–19 June was the first record for the island. **Caspian Tern:** one was at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 4–5 June. **Whiskered Tern:** one was at Loch Bhrusda, Berneray [the one near North Uist] on 3–4 June - the second for the Outer Hebrides. **White-winged Black Tern:** two were at Loch nam Feithan, near Balranald, North Uist

(OH) on 20 May, with three there on 21–24th; one was on Stronsay (Ork) on 26 May.

**Scops Owl:** one was on North Ronaldsay on 15–16 June - the eighth record for Orkney and second for the island following one there on 2 June 1892. Remarkably, one (same?) was at Windhouse Lodge, Yell (Shet) on 24 June. **Snowy Owl:** one was seen near the summit of Glas Maol (NES) on 11 April; one was at Grenitote, North Uist on 10–12 May, with presumably the same seen at Creag Ghoraidh, Benbecula (OH) on 23 May. **Alpine Swift:** one flew over Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 24 May, with it, or another, seen at Marwick/Birsay Bay (Ork) on 26–29 May, and one was over Westburn Park, Aberdeen (NES) on 30 May.

**Bee-eater:** one was in Glen Aros, Mull (Arg) on 27 May; one at Dales Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 29 May; two flew over St Abb's Head (Bord) on 5 June. **Hoopoe:** the overwintering bird was still at Leswalt (D&G) to at least 8 May, with another at Monreith (D&G) on 5–11 April, and two at Leswalt on 14 April; then singles at Watton and Upper Dounreay (both Caith) on 19 April; one at Waternish, Isle of Skye (High) on 21st; one at Inverscaddle Bay (High) on 23rd; one at Torness Point/Thorntonloch (Loth) on 26–27th; one at Stonehaven (NES) on 27th, and one in a garden at Pollokshields, Glasgow, Clyde on 29 April. One frequented gardens at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 12 May, with one near Haddington (Loth) on 19–26 May; one at Innerleithen (Bord) on 20th; one at Dundonald (Ayr) on 21 May; and one at Tarskavaig, Isle of Skye (High) on 25 May. One was at Oldmeldrum (NES) on 30 May to 6 June, and one at Mintlaw (NES) on 11 June.

**Wryneck:** earliest reports were of singles at Anstruther, Fife and on

North Ronaldsay (Ork), Fair Isle and Whalsay (Shet) on 22 April, and four on Fair Isle and one on Out Skeries (Shet) on 23rd. Over 30 more were noted by the month's end, with a remarkable total of seven on Fair Isle on 27th. At least 13 more occurred to 28 May - all on the Northern Isles. **Golden Oriole:** one was at Oxensetter, Mainland (Shet) on 19 May; a male at Lochmaddy, North Uist (OH) on 20–21 May; a male at Vidlin, Mainland (Shet) on 21–26 May; a male at Baltasound/Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 23–24 May; and a male at Erisiadar, Lewis (OH) on 29 May. One was at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 1 June, and one at Cheese Bay, North Uist on 8 June.

**Red-backed Shrike:** an excellent spring passage started with a male at Barns Ness (Loth) on 27–28 April, one at Rerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 27th, and a female at Torness (Loth) on 28th. At least 30 were found in May, all on the east coast from Borders to Shetland except for a male at Carnan Mor, Tiree, Arg on 26th. Passage continued to 15 June, with peak counts of eight on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28 May and

six on Fair Isle on 5 June. **Great Grey Shrike:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 April; one at 'The Shunan', Mainland (Ork) on 7 April; one at Loch of Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 9 April; one at East Fortune (Loth) on 15 April - found dead later. One was on Fair Isle on 23–24 April, with two there on 25th; one was at Penicuik (Loth) on 25 April. One was on Fair Isle on 30 April to 1 May. **Lesser Grey Shrike:** a male was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 16–30 June. **Woodchat Shrike:** one was at Kirkwall (Ork) on 19 June, with it, or another, at Quholm, near Stromness, Mainland (Ork) from at least 23–24 June. **Calandra Lark:** one was on Fair Isle on 22 May - the fifth recorded there out of a British total of 18 birds. **Short-toed Lark:** three were on Fair Isle on 27 April, with two still on 29th to 2 May and one remaining to 6 May. One was on Fair Isle on 9–11 May, and singles again on 19th and 27–30 May. **Red-rumped Swallow:** one was at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 18 May; one was at Ceann a'Mhara, Tiree (Arg) on 20 May, and one was at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) the same day. One flew past Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 25 May



Plate 271. Red-backed Shrike, Fair Isle, Shetland, May 2014. © Larry Dalziel





**Plate 272.** Greenish Warbler, Tynninghame, Lothian, June 2014.  
© Ian Andrews

**Greenish Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 6 June; a singing male was at North Locheynort, South Uist (OH) on 7 June; another held territory at Tynninghame (Loth) on 7–22 June. **Yellow-browed**

**Warbler:** unusual spring records (undoubtedly a legacy of last autumn's record passage) involved one at Tomess (Loth) on 25–28 April, one at Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 26 April; one at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) also on 26th; one on Unst (Shet) on 2 May.

**Iberian Chiffchaff:** a bird exhibiting characteristics of this fairly recently split species was on Rousay (Ork) on 7 June. **'Subalpine' Warbler:**

one was at Mire Loch, St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 28–29 April, and one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 1 June. **Eastern Subalpine Warbler:**

one was at Pool of Virkie/Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 24–27 April; a male was on Fair Isle on 25 April to 2 May; a male on Out Skerries (Shet) on 2 May, and a second male on Fair Isle on 8 May. **Western**

**Subalpine Warbler:** a male was on Fair Isle on 3–20 May, with a female present on 16–27th; a male was at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 25 May; a male on Fair Isle on 13 June, and a male on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17–18 June. **Savi's**

**Warbler:** a singing male was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve from 29 May to 16 June at least. **Icterine Warbler:** earliest records

were from Shetland - one at

Scatness, Mainland on 23 May; one at Clate Head, Whalsay on 24th; and one at Norwick, Unst on 25th. Further singles were on Fair Isle and at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 26th, and another on Fair Isle and one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 27 May; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 28th, and two on the Isle of May on 28–29th; and singles on Fair Isle on 29th, and Toab, Mainland and at Skibberhoull, Whalsay (both Shet) on 30 May. Three were on the Isle of May on 1 June, with singles on Fair Isle on 5–6 June; at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 6th and St Abb's Head (Bord) on 8 June.

**Blyth's Reed Warbler:** singles were at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 19 May; on Foula (Shet) on 24 May; on Fair Isle on 27 May, and at Solas, North Uist on 27 May - the first spring record for the Outer Hebrides. Others were seen on Out Skerries on 28 May and Skaw, Whalsay on 28–29 May (both Shet); at Torry, Aberdeen (NES) on 31 May. One was on Fair Isle on 13 June, with one at Scatness, Mainland and another nearby at Virkie (both Shet) on 13–14 June. One ringed at Eastshore/ Pool of Virkie (Shet) on 22 June was refound on Fair Isle on 25th, and remained to 28 June. **Marsh**

**Warbler:** singles were at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 21 May, at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 25th; on Papa Westray (Ork) on

25–26; at Baltasound, Unst on 26th, and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27 May. One was at Mannal, Tiree (Arg) and one at Tresta, Fetlar (Shet) on 28th; one at Scousburgh/Sandness, Mainland (Shet) on 28–31 May; one at Fife Ness Muir, Fife on 29 May, and one at Torry, Aberdeen (NES) on 31 May. In June, one was at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 2nd; at least seven different birds on Fair Isle from 5–30th, while on Shetland singles were at Voe, Mainland on 5 June, at Sandgarth, Mainland on 6th, Wester Quarff on 7–8th, and Skaw, Whalsay on 8 June. One was at Bragar, Lewis (OH) on 8th; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11–18th; two at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 12th, and one on Trondra (Shet) on 14 June. **Great Reed Warbler:** a singing bird was at Vidlin/Swining, Mainland (Shet) on 3–7 June; and one at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 8–9 June.

**Waxwing:** presumed north-bound flocks included 16 in Kirriemuir (A&D) on 5–6 April; 10 in Dundee (A&D) on 3–5 April; 10 in Aberdeen (NES) on 2 April, with 16 there on 8th. A notable late bird was on Fair Isle on 2–6 May. **Rose-coloured Starling:** adults were at Grenitote, North Uist (OH) on 11 June; at Bunessan, Mull (Arg) on 12–14th; at Bo'ness (UF) on 15th; at Achiltibuie (High) on 19–25th; at Port Ellen, Islay (Arg) on 23–26th, and in a garden at Hopeman (M&N) on 28–29 June.

**Hermit Thrush:** a first-summer was on Fair Isle on 13–16 May - only the third spring record in Britain, following birds on Fair Isle on 2 June 1975 and Fetlar (Shet) on 30 April to 1 May 1998. **Bluethroat:** one was on Fair Isle on 30 April to 1 May, with further singles there on 9th and 13 May. One was on Troon Golf Course (Ayr) on 18 May, and one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 19 May; singles were on Fair Isle on 21–25 May, at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 22–23rd, and



Plate 273. Collared Flycatcher, Fair Isle, Shetland, May 2014. © Larry Dalziel

on Out Skerries (Shet) on 26th. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** the individual on Fair Isle was seen again on 5 April. **Caspian Stonechat:** one was present on Fair Isle from 27 April to 4 June. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** singles were on Fair Isle on 27 April to 1 May; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 24 May, on the Isle of May on 26 May; at Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 5 June, and on Tiree (Arg) on 6 June. One was at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 16 June. A male was at Balephuul, Tiree on 19 June. **Collared Flycatcher:** a male was at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 28–30 April, another was at Carnan Mor, Tiree (Arg) on 27 May, and yet another on Fair Isle on 28–29 May.

**Grey-headed Wagtail:** a male was on Fair Isle on 2–3 June. **Black-headed Wagtail:** a male was at Funzie, Fetlar on 25 May - the first for Shetland (one previously on Fair Isle on 7–9 May 1970). **Citrine Wagtail:** a female was at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 1 May; a first-summer male was at Haroldswick, Unst on 23–24 May; an adult male was at

Balnakiel, near Durness (High) on 18–19 June. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were at Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) on 26 April, at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 29 April and 3 May, and on Fair Isle on 1 May. **Olive-backed Pipit:** one was at Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 2 May. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was at Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 1 June.

**Serin:** one frequented gardens at South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 12–23rd April; one on the Isle of May on 4 May. Both were first records for their respective areas.

**Two-barred Crossbill:** a female was seen at Claddich (Arg) on 14 April; at least two were present at Tynninghame on 8 June, with a male and two females present on 9th, two males and five females noted there on 10th, and at least two females still on 11th. **Common Rosefinch:** one was on Fair Isle on 21–25th and 27–28 May; on Shetland two were on Out Skerries on 23–24th, with one still to 30th; singles on Bressay on 24th, at Norwick, Unst on 25th, at Boddam (Mainland) on 26th, at Toab and

Virkie (both Mainland) on 27th. One was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 25 May; one at Balephuul, Tiree (Arg) on 28th; a singing male on the Isle of May on 28–29th; and one at Balcomie, Fife Ness (Fife) on 31 May. One was at North Bay, South Uist (OH) on 1–2 June; one on Fair Isle on 9th, and another on 11th. One was at Grenitote, North Uist (OH) on 11 June; one at Frakkafield, Mainland (Shet) on 18 June; a first-summer male at Crianlarich (UF) on 23 June, and a male at Ulbster (Caith) on 28 June.

**White-throated Sparrow:** one at Otter Ferry on 19 June was the first record for Argyll. **Ortolan Bunting:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 30–31 May. **Cretzschmar's Bunting:** one present on Fair Isle from 27 April to 2 May is only the fifth British/Scottish record, but was the third for the island. **Rustic Bunting:** one was at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 9 May; one was at Balephuul, Tiree (Arg) on 21 May, with a male on North Ronaldsay (Ork) and a female at Skaw, Unst (Shet) the same day; one was found at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 27 May with others on Iona (Arg) on 27th and on Out Skerries (Shet) on 27–30th, with one at Skaw, Unst on 30 May. A male was at Balephuul/Carnan Mor, Tiree (Arg) on 2–3 June. **Little Bunting:** singles were on Fair Isle on 29 April and 9 May, and at Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 12 May; one was at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 16 May. **Yellow-rumped Warbler:** one was found on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6 May - the third for Orkney and the second island record, following one in October 1985. Remarkably the following day it was refound at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) and remained until the morning of 8 May.

*For arrival dates of summer migrants see the Birdline Scotland tables on the SOC website ([www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk)).*

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# PhotoSPOT

**Plates 274–275.** I generally find Jack Snipe by scanning with my binoculars or telescope from the marsh edge; in this case I visited Lower Carbarns Farm, near Wishaw, Clyde. Most often I was unsuccessful, so I would enter the marsh, treading carefully, stopping every now and then to re-scan. No doubt the birds hunkered down and froze, motionless. But no matter how carefully I looked, this often resulted in up to three birds taking flight from right under my feet!

This winter I 'got my eye in', I was managing to find one or two Jack Snipe each visit without disturbing them! At first I digiscoped the birds using my Swarovski ATS HD scope with 20–60x zoom, usually with the lens at 20x, and my Panasonic Lumix Lx5 attached via adapters. I set the camera to 'intelligent-auto' and used a cable release attached to the camera.

However, I wanted to see if they would tolerate me photographing them with just a hand-held camera, hopefully avoiding obstructive vegetation. I found that each bird was different; some even allowed my camera to within one foot of them (Plate 274 © Frank Gibbons).

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*Featuring the best images posted on the SOC website each quarter, PhotoSpot will present stunning portraits as well as record shots of something interesting, accompanied by the story behind the photograph and the equipment used. Upload your photos now - it's open to all.*