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Barnacle Geese, Fife Ness, Fife,
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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

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

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications, such as the *Scottish Bird Report searchable database*, as well as partners' publications such as *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme* report.

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
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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 or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk



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BC Manx Shearwater A. Hogg

President's Foreword



Plate 276. Chris McInerny, Pots of Gartness, Clyde, October 2014. © Darren O'Brien

I'd like to start this foreword by extending deep thanks to Mike Martin, who is standing down as Club Secretary. Mike took up the post in 2006, and so has been fulfilling this important and demanding role for over eight years. We wish Mike the very best in the future, and look forward to his continued contribution on management committee. To replace Mike we are delighted to welcome David Heeley as the new Club Secretary. David hails from Fife and is an active member of the Fife branch committee. We are sure David will bring much to the Club and look forward to working with him.

While describing Club affairs, I would also like to welcome Doreen Main to the management committee. Many members will know Doreen from her role as Secretary of the Lothian SOC branch. Doreen is replacing Keith Macgregor who has served on management committee for six years, since 2008. We thank Keith very much for his work in helping to run the Club.

The Club annual conference, held this year in Perth, has just finished, and went very well. We enjoyed a series of excellent and varied talks about a range of ornithological subjects, with the theme based around birds and their sounds. Thanks to all the speakers for their presentations, and to the attendees for making the weekend such an enjoyable event. The conference requires much organization, and so I'd like to thank all of the staff at Waterston House for their hard work in making it such a success.

One important decision made at the Annual General Meeting at the conference was the agreement to convert the Club to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, as described in the current annual report, circulated with the September mailing. We thank all members for their contribution to this important discussion. Now that we have agreement from members we will instruct Morton Fraser, the Club's solicitors, to proceed with the conversion, with the completion date set for the end of March 2015, to coincide with the end of the financial year.

Preparations are underway for the 2015 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, which will be held on Saturday 21 March. This will be hosted and organized by the Clyde branch, under the chairmanship of Ian Fulton, in partnership with the BTO, and will be held at the University of Glasgow. A great line up of speakers has been organized, with the theme focusing on the ornithology of the Clyde area. The programme and booking form is included with this issue of *Scottish Birds*. Please feel welcome to attend; we very much look forward to seeing you there.

The days are getting much shorter, cooler (and wetter!) at my sites on Loch Lomond. But the disappearance of many summer breeding birds has been replaced by winter geese, ducks and passerines, and the late autumn run of Atlantic Salmon entering rivers to spawn. I believe we are very lucky with our pastime being able to witness, enjoy and feel part of the ever-changing cycle of the seasons.

Best wishes
Chris McInerny, SOC President



Plate 277. Foula's north coast showing the North Bank, 220 m, rising to the Kame, far right, 376 m. August 2014. © S. Gear

A photographic resurvey of seabird colonies on Foula, Shetland

M. Heubeck, S. Gear & M.P. Harris

In 1974, the Nature Conservancy Council commissioned the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (ITE) to design a monitoring scheme suitable for detecting changes in seabird colonies in Shetland. As part of this work MPH and others made extensive counts at different seabird colonies in June and July 1974, while MPH also took hundreds of black-and-white images using a Mamiya Press Camera fitted with a 150 mm lens, with the intention of establishing a reference baseline (Harris 1976). The island of Foula was visited on 1–3 July and MPH and Laughton Johnston counted the seabirds and took an extensive set of photographs mainly along the west and north coasts, from land and during a circumnavigation on 3 July.

The 2½ inch square negatives and 9 x 12 cm prints from 1974 were subsequently stored in Shetland by MH, who in May 2014 sent the Foula prints to SG to see if the photographs could be replicated, 40 years later. This was achieved on 21 June (from the sea) and 1 July 2014 (from land) using a Nikon Coolpix P600. Here we discuss some of the changes that are evident for those species visible in the photographs (Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, Guillemot *Uria aalge* and Razorbill *Alca torda*) in the context of the four censuses of Foula's cliff-nesting seabirds that have been made since 1974 (Table 1): in 1976 and 1987 (Furness 1981, 1987), and by Scottish Natural Heritage in 2000 and 2007 (Harvey *et al.* 2000, SNH unpubl.)

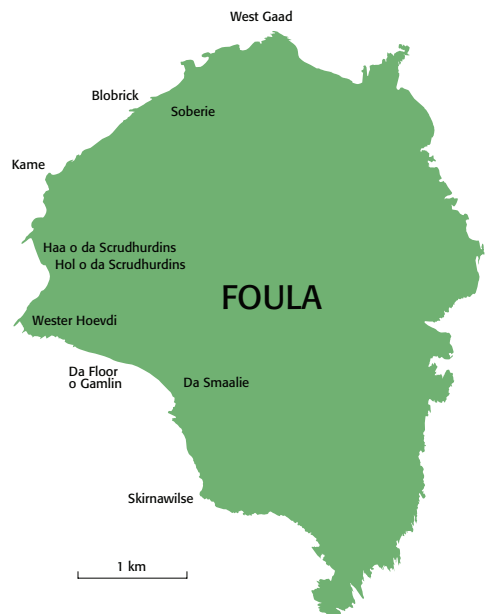


Figure 1. Map of Foula, Shetland, showing locations mentioned in the text and captions.



Plate 278. Guillemots at Skirnawise, Foula, Shetland, showing occupation of both the open ledge and boulders, July 2012. © S. Gear

Gannets were first recorded settling on the cliffs of Foula in 1970, nest building began in 1975, breeding was confirmed in 1980 on a large rock shelf at the foot of the Kame, and Furness (1981a) commented that there was room for expansion to several hundred pairs in this area, but at the expense of nesting Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* and Guillemots. Breeding numbers increased to 1,370 apparently occupied nests (AON) by 2007, and while it is clear that many of the ledges Gannets now nest on were occupied by Guillemots in 1974, many other former Guillemot ledges nearby were bare in 2014 (Plate 279). So, while Gannets may have evicted Guillemots from certain ledges, their role in any decline of the latter has probably been minimal.

Table 1. Census counts of five species of cliff-nesting seabirds on Foula, 1974–2007. AON = apparently occupied nest. **1974:** 1–3 July, two persons, single count from cliff-tops, one circumnavigation (Harris 1976). **1976:** 15 June to 5 July, mainly one person, all accessible boulder beaches visited, three circumnavigations (Furness 1981b). **1987:** 26 May to 3 July, seven persons, all accessible boulder beaches visited, one circumnavigation (Furness 1987). **2000:** mainly 3–10 June, eight persons, all accessible boulder beaches visited, one circumnavigation (Harvey *et al.* 2000). **2007:** 1–7 June, eight persons, some accessible boulders beaches visited, one circumnavigation (SNH unpublished). *Coverage excluded some boulders fields where 1,171 Shag AON and 896 Guillemot and 495 Razorbill individuals were counted/estimated in 2000.

Species (count unit)	1974	1976	1987	2000	2007
Gannet (AON)	0	3	124	723	1,370
Shag (AON)	abundant	3,357	2,396	2,277	258*
Kittiwake (AON)	3,853+	5,570	4,331	1,982	911
Guillemot (individuals)	33–37,000	60,021	34,472	41,435	24,799*
Razorbill (individuals)	1,720	10,373	6,170	2,121	559*

In the Seabird Colony Register and Seabird 2000 censuses, Foula held the largest Shag colony in Britain and Ireland (Wanless & Harris 2004). In 1995, the island was declared a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive, with Shag being a qualifying species, and with Foula holding at least 1.9% of the breeding North European population in 1987 (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1896>). In 1976, it was estimated that 94% of nests were in boulder fields (mostly along the west coast), 5% were on broad ledges, and 1% on tops of stacks (Furness 1981b). The 1987 census count was 29% lower than in 1976 (Table 1), with a 17% reduction in numbers in the four recording areas holding the main west coast boulder field colonies (2,360 AON in 1976) and a 56% reduction in the other six recording areas in which the species bred elsewhere around the island (997 AON in 1976). The 2000 census total was only 119 nests lower than in 1987. In 2004, Shags largely deserted Foula during the breeding season (Mavor *et al.* 2005), very few adults were present in 2005, and the 2007 nest count was 80–90% lower than in 2000 (Table 1). There has been no whole-island census since 2007, but numbers in breeding success plots on the east coast remain low (Heubeck *et al.* in prep.), only 284 adult Shags were counted from the sea around the island on 19 May 2014 (37 on the west coast, 247 on the east coast), and the photographs confirm the virtual absence of Shags from the west coast boulder fields in late June 2014. The photographs also show remarkable physical changes in the habitat, with the height above sea level of some boulder beaches having been reduced since 1974, presumably by wave action and rendering the habitat more vulnerable to inundation during summer storms (Plate 280). Other boulder fields have been considerably rearranged, whether by the sea or by rock falls from above (Plate 281), while some have remained unchanged (Plate 282; 604 Shag AON were counted among boulders and 261 AON on grassy slopes in this general area in June 2000).

The decline in Kittiwake numbers on Foula has been well documented, both by the census counts (Table 1) and by annual counts from the sea made by SG since 2002 (latest count: 361 AON on 7 June 2014). Although the 2014 photographs reveal some rock falls that have occurred since 1974, they mostly show deserted, unaltered cliff faces (Plates 280 & 283).

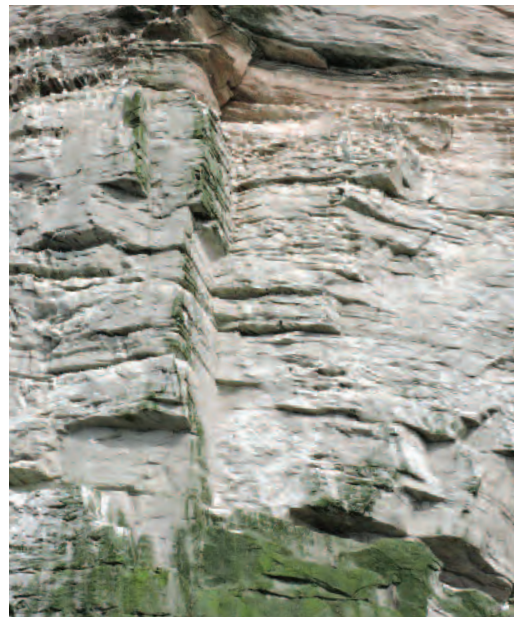


Plate 279 a–b. Cliff face on the north side of Wester Hoevdi, west coast of Foula, Shetland, 3 July 1974 and 21 June 2014. © M.P. Harris/S. Gear

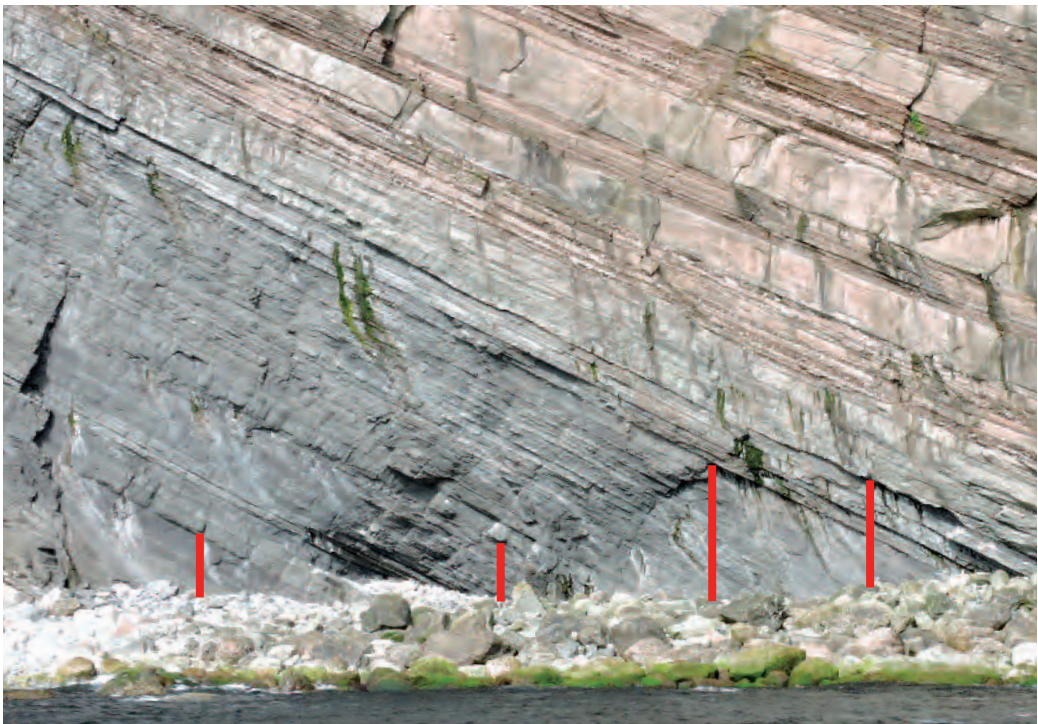
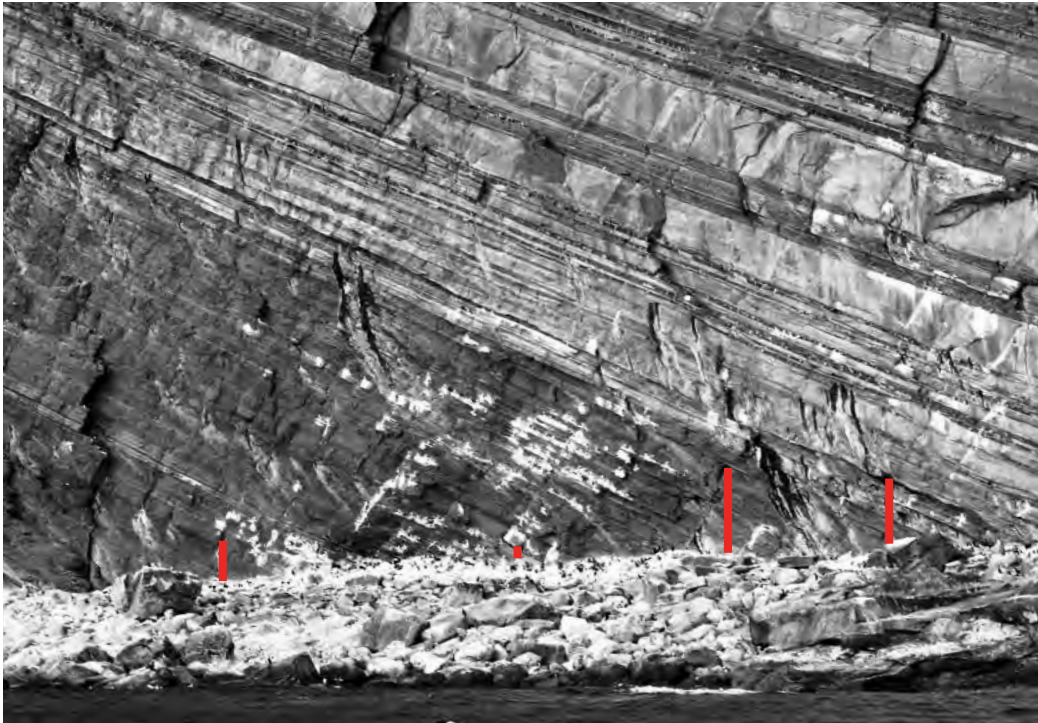


Plate 280 a–b. Boulder beach at Kittiwakes Haa o da Scrudhurdins, west coast of Foula, Shetland, 3 July 1974 and 21 June 2014. The lines on the cliff face indicate the reduction in the height of the boulders. © *M.P. Harris/S. Gear*



Plate 281 a–b. Boulder field on the south side of Da Smaalie, west coast of Foula, Shetland, 3 July 1974 and 21 June 2014. © M.P. Harris/S. Gear



Plate 282 a–b. Boulder field at Da Floor o Gamlin, west coast of Foula, Shetland, 3 July 1974 and 21 June 2014.
© M.P. Harris/S. Gear



Plate 283 a–b. Kittiwake and Guillemot colony at West Gaad, north coast of Foula, Shetland, 3 July 1974 and 21 June 2014. © M.P. Harris/S. Gear



Plate 284 a–b. Cliff face at Skirnawilse, west coast of Foula, Shetland, 3 July 1974 and 21 June 2014. © M.P. Harris/S. Gear

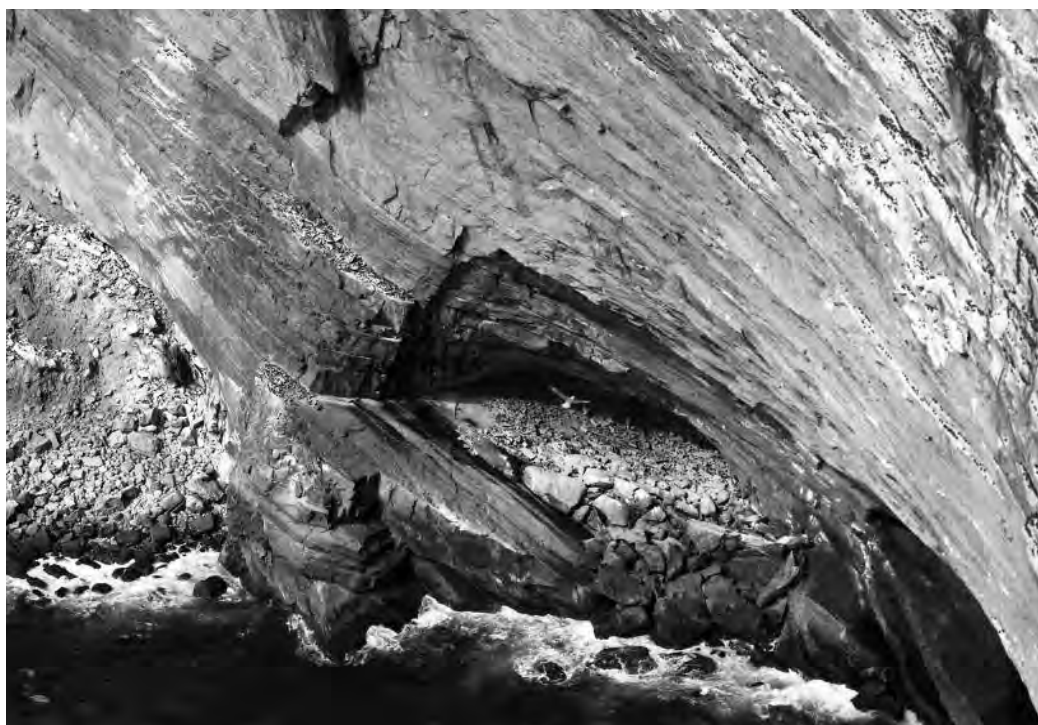


Plate 285 a–b. Guillemot colony in Hol o da Scrudhurdins, Foula, Shetland, 2 July 1974 and 1 July 2014. © M.P. Harris/S. Gear



Plate 286 a–b. Boulder field between Blobrick and Soberlie, north-west coast of Foula, Shetland, 3 July 1974 and 21 June 2014. © *M.P. Harris/S. Gear*

Furness (1981b) estimated that in 1976, 65% of Guillemots on Foula bred in boulder fields and caves, and 35% on cliff and rock ledges. He suggested that at that time there may have been a shortage of optimal nest sites on the island as birds in boulder fields moved awkwardly and had difficulty reaching the sea if disturbed. The nesting habitat breakdown for Razorbills counted in 1976 was 86% in boulder fields, 12% in cliff fissures, 2% on ledges. The census counts suggest a reduction of 60% in Guillemot numbers between 1976 and 2007, and of 95% in Razorbills (Table 1). However, these figures should be treated with caution due to the extreme difficulty of counting both species on the island, especially those among boulders and in caves, and Furness suggested that the Razorbill population in 1976 was best described as between 5,000 and 15,000 birds.

Guillemots and Razorbills cannot be distinguished readily on the photographs, but assuming those on cliff ledges are Guillemots, there has clearly been a considerable reduction in numbers in areas with no alteration of habitat or competition from other species (Plate 284). In boulder/cave habitat, MPH estimated between 1,200 and 1,500 Guillemots in the cave at Hol o da Scrudhurdins in July 1974 (Plate 285), and 2,757 were counted there in June 2000 (Harvey *et al.* 2000). Some were still there in 2014, but a considerable quantity of boulders have been removed by the sea at some time, probably since 2000; how often this occurs is unknown, but would be revealed by photographic monitoring of this apparently unstable habitat. Some boulder fields further above sea level have now been abandoned by auks (Plate 281), while others are still occupied but in much reduced numbers (Plate 286).



Plate 287. The Foula cliffs from the west, August 2014. © S. Gear

The 1974 photographs were taken at a time of fears over oil developments and the effects of any oil pollution on seabird populations. Large changes have indeed taken place in seabird numbers on Foula in the 40 years since, but detailed annual monitoring throughout Shetland since the 1970s by Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group, Scottish Natural Heritage, Fair Isle Bird Observatory and others give no support for the view that these developments have been responsible for these declines (Dunnet & Heubeck 1995, Heubeck 2000, Heubeck 2006, Miles *et al.* 2013, Snell & Adlard 2013). Nevertheless, the 2014 photographs illustrate not only population declines, but that some habitat change (rock falls and boulder field re-arrangements) and some competition between species (Gannets vs Guillemots) have occurred. A new census of the breeding seabirds of Britain and Ireland is required urgently, and plans for this are being discussed. While planning actual fieldwork, it would be worthwhile researching what previous photographs of seabird colonies exist, and attempting to replicate them. Such photographs need to be taken into the field in order to replicate viewing angles, but updating these would provide a useful archive for the future.

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Revised ms accepted September 2014



Plates 288. Eskimo Curlew from North-east Scotland, 1855. © K. Pellow

The 1855 Scottish Eskimo Curlew

Once one of the most abundant waders in North America, with an annual migration route taking it from its breeding grounds in northern Canada to winter in southern South America, there have been no confirmed sightings of Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis* since the early 1980s and the species is on the verge of being, if not already, extinct.

A recent review of the British records of Eskimo Curlew confirmed just four acceptable records between 1855 and 1887 (Melling 2010). The first of these concerned a bird shot at the summit of Cairn-mon-earn, Durris, North-east Scotland by W.R. Cusack Smith on 6 September 1855. The bird was preserved by Alexander Mitchell, an Aberdeen taxidermist, and later examined by John Longmuir, who considered it to be a female in winter plumage. The specimen was exhibited at the Aberdeenshire Natural History Association meeting on 19 October 1855 (Longmuir 1855, Forrester *et al.* 2007, Knox 2010).

Subsequent British records are given as birds shot on 28 September 1878 on the Slains Estate, North-east Scotland, on 21 September 1880 in the Forest of Birse, near Aboyne, also North-east Scotland and finally one shot on Tresco, Isles of Scilly on 10 September 1887. This final example, an adult in breeding plumage, was mounted and is currently on display in the Isles of Scilly Museum on St. Marys. Although all four British specimens had been preserved, the whereabouts of the first three were unknown at the time of the review (Melling 2010). I can report, however, that the specimen obtained at Durris in September 1855 is currently held in a private taxidermy collection (Plates 288–290). The bird was obtained in 2006 from another private collector, who in turn had obtained it from a dealer some years before, it having reputedly originated from a country house in Wales. In 2003, the same dealer was advertising several taxidermy specimens by Rowland Ward that



Plate 289. The gilt lettering relating to the Eskimo Curlew from North-east Scotland, 1855. © K. Pellow

had formed part of a collection of Captain Vivian Hewitt, who had resided at 'Bryn Aber' in Anglesey until his death in 1971. It may be that this specimen originated from there.

The bird is displayed in an octagonal, wall-hanging display case which has the inscription in gilt lettering "The Esquimaux Curlew. The first shot in Gt. Britain by W. Cusack Smith at Durris, Kincardineshire Sepr. 6th 1855". It also has a taxidermist's label attached internally of "H. Ward, Late Williams, 2 Vere St, Oxford St, London". Henry Ward (1812–78) was the father of the renowned Rowland Ward, and was himself a prominent taxidermist of his time. He clearly had social connections and established himself as one of London's top taxidermists,

being granted a Royal Warrant to Queen Victoria in 1870 (Morris 2003). His taxidermy was of a high standard and, whilst most of his cased specimens were in the more regular boxed style, he also specialized in octagonal wall displays.

Although the curlew had originally been preserved by the local taxidermist Mitchell, it may have been that Henry Ward was employed to case or re-case it once its importance had been realized. His many influential contacts meant that he was employed throughout the United Kingdom, including Scotland, by the most affluent customers. A large and impressive case of his containing North American birds was, until recently, housed at Scone Palace in Perthshire.



Plate 290. Eskimo Curlew from North-east Scotland, 1855. © K. Pellow

The Eskimo Curlew case itself appears to have been restored some time recently. Several of the side glazed panels are of a modern type of glass rather than the rippled glass which would originally have been used, and the glass has been re-taped.

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Barn Owl apparently predated a House Martin nest

In late August 2014, I was approached by a lady whose two-storey home backs onto farmland on the edge of the village of Lamlash on Arran. In most of the five years that she has lived in the house there has been a single House Martin *Delichon urbicum* nest above her upstairs bedroom window. She has also regularly seen Barn Owl *Tyto alba* hunting in the area. One evening between 18 and 20 June 2014, just before midnight, she was aware of a noise outside her bedroom window. She put out the light and opened the curtain. A Barn Owl was flying up against the house, almost hovering. The House Martins were vocal. After less than a minute the Barn Owl flew off. When she went out in the morning at about 06:30, the nest with two dead chicks was on the ground.

I have not found any record of Barn Owls predated House Martins.

Jim Cassels, Bird Recorder, Arran Natural History Society, Kilpatrick Kennels, Blackwaterfoot, Isle of Arran, KA27 8EY.
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Revised ms accepted October 2014

Geoff Sheppard has commented: I have never heard of House Martins as prey. I have recorded a Barn Owl taking Swallow chicks in a farm building. In that case and others where birds such as Starlings and Wren were taken it seems the owl was attracted by calls made by the prey.

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Obituaries

W.A.J. (Peter) Cunningham (1918–2014)



Plate 291. Peter Cunningham shortly after receiving the RSPB President's Award, 2008. © Martin Scott

W.A.J. Cunningham, or Peter as he preferred to be called, was born in Sheringham, Norfolk, in 1918, but his family home was in Glasgow. During his youth, his interest in nature was stimulated by walks in the fields and farmland that still existed then in the environs of the city. As a pupil at Jordanhill College School, he participated in a sponsored cruise around the Outer Hebrides and St Kilda, thus initiating his long relationship with these beautiful islands.

He began his adult career as a civil servant with H. M. Customs and Excise. War intervened, however, and he served in the Royal Navy from 1939 to 1945, joining as an ordinary seaman and leaving as Lieutenant-Commander. In 2013, as one of the few surviving members of the famous Arctic convoys, he was awarded the Arctic Star.

After the war Peter rejoined H. M. Customs and Excise and was stationed in Stornoway. His relationship with the Outer Hebrides was cemented by his marriage to Nan Maciver, a teacher from Carloway on the west side of Lewis. Together, they raised a family of two sons and a daughter. Sadly, Nan died in November 2000.

Peter's contribution to local life on the islands was considerable. He was an elder in the church for 50 years and session clerk for 20 years, and he became enthusiastically involved in local musical initiatives in addition to being commander of the Sea Cadets. However, there is no doubt that Peter will best be remembered, both locally and nationally, for his involvement with birds and natural history. With his work taking him to all parts of the island chain, he began recording birds in the 1950s. At the time, the Outer Hebrides were still largely *terra incognita* as far as the birding community at large was concerned, but thanks to Peter, this situation was soon to change. He made significant contributions to the *Scottish Bird Report* and to the BTO's first *Atlas* project as well as the BOU's milestone publication, *The Status of Birds in Britain and Northern Ireland*. In time he became the SOC's bird recorder for Lewis and Harris, and co-author, with Tim Dix, of a series of annual bird reports for the Outer Hebrides.

Many island residents were (and still are) keenly interested in the wildlife around them. Encouraged by Peter, they began to report their sightings and consult him about identification matters. In time he became an informal one-man birdline for the islands, and his office in Stornoway became the first port of call for locals who found exhausted and injured birds. Many of the phone calls he received concerned 'strange birds' seen in people's gardens. Mostly, of course, these turned out to be common species, but not always: one of us remembers being alerted by Peter about one such call and visiting

the garden in question to find that a White's Thrush had taken up residence!

As the islands' only resident birder, Peter soon found himself welcoming visitors who shared his interests. They included several of the 'big names' of the day in ornithology, but Peter was not in the least bit elitist. One of us recalls being taken under his wing when visiting the island for the first time as a schoolboy in 1955. Fifty years on, that same schoolboy returned to the island as a part-time resident to continue the migration watching to which he had been introduced by Peter so long before. Peter in turn derived great satisfaction from the return of his protégé.

Peter continued to help and encourage visiting birdwatchers and recently arrived residents throughout the 1990s and beyond. He was well aware of, and possibly rather amused by, the 'twitching' approach to birding. But he was very protective of the islands' rarer breeding birds and had no time for what he called selfish life-list tickers, still less for egg collectors.

Peter's *Nature Notes* appeared in the *Stornoway Gazette* every week for years and were eagerly awaited. They conveyed his keen observations and insights in an informative, elegant and often witty style, revealing him to be a master communicator. In addition to his newspaper column he gave many lectures and talks, and he was the author of *A Hebridean Naturalist* (1979), *The Birds of the Outer Hebrides: A Guide to their Status and Distribution* (1983), and (with Tim Dix and Philip Snow) *Birdwatching in the Outer Hebrides* (1995). These books conveyed the importance of the islands' natural heritage to local and national audiences.

One of Peter's great passions was the social and natural history of the Stornoway Castle Grounds, which are of considerable historical interest as well as constituting the largest area of deciduous woodland in the Outer Hebrides. He was very involved in the interpretation and publicising of this important part of the islands' heritage and wrote what is generally regarded as the definitive account, *The Castle Grounds: The Stornoway Woods and Nature Trails* (1978). In his tenth decade, he authored a new book on the area, *The Castles of the Lews* (2008). A year

later came his final publication, *Dolly Doctor: Pictures of Bygone Island Life* (2009).

Peter died peacefully in Stornoway on 8 July 2014, just days after his 96th birthday. He was buried in Dalmore Cemetery. He will be remembered not only as an authority on the islands' wildlife but also as a gentleman in every sense of the word and as someone who gave generously of his time to the local community. He leaves behind him a lasting legacy in the form of his contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the natural heritage of the Outer Hebrides.

Bob Wemyss, Tony Marr and Tristan ap Rheinallt

Peter Cunningham: a personal appreciation

On 8 July 2014 - just a week after his 96th birthday - the Outer Hebrides lost one of its finest naturalists, and certainly the most venerable - William A.J. Cunningham, or 'Peter' as we all knew him. He was brought up in Glasgow, where his mother was a teacher. His grandfather, a Banffshire GP, disliked his grandson's given names, so insisted on calling him Peter, after J.M. Barrie's famous character.

It was on a Jordanhill College School cruise that Peter first visited the Outer Hebrides. It was on annual holidays with his grandfather, in the whisky county of Banffshire that Peter chose his future career in HM Customs and Excise. His first posting, in Clydebank, was interrupted by the Second World War, Peter joining the Royal Navy as an ordinary seaman; he would end it a Lieutenant Commander. A highly distinguished service, for which he was awarded six medals, included no fewer than six voyages as surface escort to the Arctic convoys from Poolewe to Murmansk.

After the hostilities ended Peter returned to his previous career and in 1949 finally won a post as Customs Officer and Receiver of Wrecks in Stornoway, where he remained for the rest of his days. He was able to follow his passion for natural history and soon became the local recorder for the Scottish Ornithologists' Club and a contributor to surveys for the British Trust for Ornithology. For long a lone voice in the

wilderness he found a local outlet to share his interest in weekly contributions to the Stornoway Gazette, a selection of which were published as *A Hebridean Naturalist* (with illustrations by the late Andy Miller Mundy) in 1979. A year earlier he had published an account of the Stornoway Castle Grounds and, in 1983, a definitive – though all too brief – *Birds of the Outer Hebrides*. This tapped into a lengthier, but unfinished and still unpublished, work by his friend and correspondent the late Dr J.W. Campbell. More recently, Andrew Stevenson pulled together a fuller, more up-to-date account for the preparation of *The Birds of Scotland*, tapping into, of course, the Outer Hebrides Bird Reports.

I first met Peter over 50 years ago, while I was at school in Inverness. He often visited Dr Maeve Rusk, secretary of our Bird Group (now a branch of the SOC) – and a very dear mentor of mine – who met up with him whenever she held ophthalmic clinics in the Outer Hebrides. Indeed Peter contributed a delightful appreciation of Maeve in *Scottish Birds* 31(2), when she herself died in 2011. In the 1960s Peter also enjoyed company in the field from BTO member Norman Elkins when a meteorologist at Stornoway. Especially after he retired in 1978, Peter was always ready to show off his

‘patch’ to anyone interested. In 2000, he undertook a voyage to South Africa on the St Helena mailboat, birdwatching all the way of course. In February 2008, he was presented with a prestigious award by the RSPB.

With his passing the Outer Hebrides has lost its finest naturalist since William Macgillivray, who compiled the first list of local birds in 1830. Harvie-Brown and Buckley went on to publish *A Vertebrate Fauna of the Outer Hebrides* in 1888. Peter was able to include some of Jimmy Campbell’s unfinished work when his own list was published in 1983. In its foreword, their friend Prof. V.C. Wynne Edwards, a distinguished successor over a century later to Macgillivray’s Chair of Natural History at Aberdeen University, wrote how Peter’s book “seems assured of an enduring, useful life, being by far the best-researched stock-taking ever made of the islands’ birds.” In his latter years Peter was delighted to encounter so many ornithologists now living and working in the Outer Hebrides. But he had prepared the ground. So to keep Peter’s legacy alive, the time is surely ripe for a new checklist to be published.

John Love

James Wood (1944–2014)



Jim was born in Edinburgh in August 1944. An engineer by trade, he married Barbara in 1965 and, after living in Edinburgh, they moved to Ardnamurchan where he worked as an engineer in a fish research establishment. When he took early retirement at the age of 59, they bought a bed and breakfast business; in all they stayed in Ardnamurchan for 25 years. Here Jim started his bird photography photographing Black Grouse and Golden Eagle among other species. Running the B&B led to a growing reputation among travelling birdwatchers. If they gained his trust he would show them some local birds. After he suffered a heart attack Jim and Barbara moved from Ardnamurchan down to East Linton in East Lothian. Here, he soon became known as a talented photographer. He often provided photos for the Aberlady Bay

Plate 292. Jim Wood, Norway, June 2009. © David Devonport

Reserve bulletin and information board. People started to want his pictures. Jim used to put pictures on Birdguides; his pictures have also been used in several bird guides including a guide to the birds of Estonia, a country he did not even visit. Jim and Barbara travelled the world photographing birds in South Africa, Australia, Costa Rica, Trinidad & Tobago, Spain, Portugal, Norway, Finland, Gambia and Goa. Nearer home I also took him twice down to Norfolk then to Caerlaverock.

He was a very patient man, but single-minded about his photography. He did not always fit in well with the local bird club, so it was not a surprise when he let his SOC membership lapse after he left East Lothian.

Jim and Barbara moved to Boat of Garten and very soon after they bought a holiday home on Shetland, intending to go there for a few weeks at migration time. However, Jim soon realised Shetland was his perfect place for photography. They started to spend most of the year there, only going to Speyside at Christmas and the middle of summer. He was extremely happy on Shetland, where he soon met all the local birders and in particular his good friend Hugh Harrop, whom he knew from travelling to Norway on a Shetland Wildlife Holiday.

Jim took some of his best pictures on Shetland. He found an Isabelline Shrike and also a

Booted Warbler, which was identified by Hugh though his photograph. On foreign trips, Jim used to photograph as many birds as possible, including those he could not identify. The good quality images meant that on his return he would put the pictures onto an internet bird forum to get them identified. He used to photograph gulls he was unsure about and send me the pictures before he put them on Facebook. Jim was an avid Facebook contributor and spent hours on the computer on bird forums and also editing his pictures.

Jim was deaf, so when I used to take him birdwatching I had to tell him what species were calling. He had been diagnosed a diabetic 40 years ago. He also had a heart attack on a hill in Ardnamurchan from where he was rescued by helicopter. This led to triple bypass heart surgery. He never complained about his health, or let it stop him looking for birds.

His health finally gave out on 16 September 2014 when he died peacefully in his sleep at home in Speyside. Jim's funeral at Warriston Crematorium in Edinburgh was attended by his family and friends, some of whom had travelled a considerable distance to pass on their condolences to Barbara, share memories of Jim and bid a very fond farewell to a good friend who will be missed by many.

David Devonport

Frank Spragge (1930–2014)

I first met Frank (Ned to family and very close friends) in the early 1970s when I moved to Fife. Frank was then chairman of the Fife & Kinross Branch of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, a post he held for 14 years. He was also chairman of the Trust's Council for three years and chairman of the St Andrews (later Fife) Branch of the SOC from 1984 to 1987.

Frank introduced me to many wildlife sites in Fife and quickly encouraged me to become involved in the local activities of the SWT,

including serving on the branch committee. I was a committee member for part of the time Frank was chairman until his retiral. Committee meetings at the Spragges' house were sometimes entertained by Daisy, their dog, who brought a succession of old, usually large, bones into the room which were dropped with a great thump on the floor. Daisy then gnawed on these or chased them around the room until Frank, realising that some committee members were nearly hysterical with laughter, firmly booted Daisy outside.



Plate 293. Frank Spragge, north-east Greenland, August 1978. © R.M.M. Crawford

Frank followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Royal Navy at the age of 14. He was educated at Dartmouth Naval College and rose to the rank of Lt-Commander. In 1961 he was seconded to work with the US Naval Research team at Saxa Vord RAF station on Unst, Shetland, where he was involved in intelligence work tracking Soviet submarines. At this time, he also developed an interest in birds as part of his broad interest in natural history and many other areas.

After his retirement from the Navy, he became heavily involved in conservation matters, both locally and nationally. Frank's boundless enthusiasm and energy enabled him to achieve a great deal. He used his many contacts throughout Fife unashamedly for the benefit of both the SWT and the SOC, sometimes as joint projects. It was Frank who arranged for the redundant Osprey Hide at Loch of the Lowes to be moved to Cameron Reservoir, Fife, a task which would have daunted many. A local farmer and volunteers helped with the transport, installation and the establishment of

the hide. Frank's entries in the hide log book provide a record of his many visits, including appreciation of the efforts of volunteers: "a very smart lawn-like approach to the hide these days" and delight in the sightings from the hide: "another splendid display [of geese]", "about 6,000 [Pink-footed Geese] ... the west end of the reservoir now black with birds", "opened the flap to find a fine Greenshank right in front of the hide".

Frank also saw the potential in Fleecefaulds Meadow, near Ceres, designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest as a wonderful place for wild flowers. He bought the land, managed it for some time and then donated it to the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Fleecefaulds Meadow was chosen as one of 60 meadows in the UK designated as Coronation Meadows to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The abundance of flowers and butterflies there in mid-summer are a great legacy for all his efforts towards conservation.

He was not daunted by the more difficult aspects of conservation, including helping with the gull cull carried out during the 1970s on the Isle of May. "This was a difficult and unpleasant task, and Frank's contribution was greatly appreciated, especially for boosting the morale of the team".

Both Frank and his wife Carol were extremely supportive of a number of charities and Frank funded a post-graduate scholarship at the University of St. Andrews for conservation students. Frank died after a long illness. Our condolences go to Carol.

Frank had a great sense of humour, slightly wicked at times, and comments were delivered with a twinkle in his eye. Many people have commented on Frank's boundless energy, enthusiasm and positive outlook. He had a boyish delight in the natural world which he was happy to share with all. It was a pleasure and a privilege to know and to work with him.

Jean Stewart



Plate 294. The Station Hotel in Perth. © Jimmy Maxwell

SOC Conference 2014, The Station Hotel, Perth

Blue skies, autumnal colours and warm sunshine greeted 160 delegates, all heading thanks to excellent signing, towards this spacious hotel in the centre of Perth. After registration, settling in and rather extended evening meals, Chris McInerny, Club President, welcomed everyone in the massive ballroom and introduced the first speaker.

Tay reed beds - Les Hatton

Where to start? Well, from a position of almost complete ignorance based on what Les categorised as factoids - assumptions or speculations repeated so often that they become accepted as facts.

Glimpsed from the Perth to Dundee road, there is no hint of the richness of bird life, nor of the response of this habitat to various management policies. Did you know what a 'wale' was? I had wondered whether this area

might be like a chilly version of Norfolk, but as Les described it, it in fact reminded me of the great reed beds of Eastern Europe.

Les had a disarmingly self-effacing manner, but his presentation was clearly founded on wide and long experience. He was pleased to acknowledge the work done by the team on the Tay and he spoke warmly of the essential and continuing role played by the RSPB. And what a success story with the mounting figures of breeding Bearded Tits, Water Rails, Reed Warblers and Marsh Harriers. Monitoring of the dispersal of adult birds showed remarkable journeys in this country, in Europe and Africa. The Bearded Tits, however, proved to be singularly parochial and one might wonder where genetic refreshment would come from.

The enormous number of hirundines using the reed beds for feeding and roosting reflected their importance for the whole of Scotland.

His final words were of encouragement to birdwatchers to keep a close eye on their local reed beds where these exciting birds might yet be found.

Ivan Draper



Plate 295. Les Hatton. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 296. Birdwatchers at the Tay reedbeds. © David Palmer (photoscot.co.uk)

Saturday morning as usual offered a choice of several led walks in the local area. Blairgowrie Lochs (Dave Merrie), Carsebreck (Ben Darvill), Loch Leven (Scott Paterson), Scone Palace (Neil Morrison & Chris Wernham) and Tay Reedbeds (James Bray).

As usual the sun gave us a beautiful bright morning and all the walks were enjoyable, including the Tay reedbeds where Bearded Tits were showing well. In the afternoon the lectures continued...

Up close and personal with Golden Eagles - Laurie Campbell

With Laurie's reputation, there was never going to be anything other than stunning photography to illustrate his presentation, but there was much, much more. The talk was in two parts, initially describing his early experiences with the Golden Eagle in his six-year collaborative work with Roy Dennis for the *Golden Eagle* book. The second part was his most recent commissioned work with the North Harris Trust to help promote the area and bring the Golden Eagle to the visiting public (living in a camper van securely marooned in peat!).

The most fascinating element of the talk was his insight into the practicalities and techniques involved in photographing eagle behaviour, the mind-boggling length of time spent in the hides at each occasion, the meticulous integration of

often stone-built hides into the upland environment, and usually working alone. Imagine a 38-hour session in a tiny hide, the sheer effort in hauling deer carcasses up the hill to attract adults in winter and spending nights in a hide to capture unique shots of sleeping eagles at roost. The reward was superb images and a lot of respect for the early pioneers in this field with their very basic equipment. What he shared with them was excellent field craft and, he admitted, an element of luck.



Plate 297. Laurie Campbell with his photographs. © Jimmy Maxwell

The intimacy of working with eagles revealed a range of behaviour in the survival struggle at the nest including portrayal of the Cain and Abel syndrome. Memorable incidents were the Golden Eagle descending onto the top of a hide, nearly joining him inside, and reaching the point of being able to gently talk to one eagle which had become accustomed to noise from the hide.

Throughout the talk, what came through strongly was the level of care taken in the process of 'getting up close and personal', the total focus and commitment to his work, and his respect for this superb raptor.

Gordon Riddle

Potential impact of fishery reforms on seabird communities - Steve Votier

The European Union Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is not working particularly well and 47% of Atlantic fisheries and 80% of Mediterranean fisheries are still being over-fished. Meanwhile globally, seven million tonnes of fish caught by commercial fisheries are discarded each year. Forthcoming reforms to the CFP may lead to a complete ban on discarding; will such changes be good or bad for seabirds? Great Skuas are dietary generalists and major feeders on discards. When discards are not available, skuas increasingly predate gulls and other seabirds.

Fulmars, Gannets and shearwaters also eat discards. Steve's recent research on Gannets now includes putting GPS recorders and cameras on the birds to find out where they feed. Male Gannets spend more time near fishing vessels than do females. In the Mediterranean, shearwaters follow fishing boats on their trips. Many birds are killed by long-line fishing, not only albatrosses in the southern ocean, but also in fisheries off Ireland. Discards attract birds which then may get caught in long-lines, although the scavenging communities of seabirds may have been increasing during the period of high discarding. Among the uncertainties are whether immature birds are particularly dependent on discards and whether the kind of fish provided as discards are as good nutritionally as naturally-foraged prey. Steve's fascinating talk on this complex subject was enlivened by Gannet-filmed videos of encounters with fishing vessels!

Graham Pyatt

Undiscovered owls - Magnus Robb

Magnus gave us a preview of some of the discoveries to be included in his forthcoming book on owls, and illustrated his talk with many sound recordings.

Although much is still not known about Barn Owl sounds, most of those heard in the field are screeches, particularly the 'espresso machine' call made throughout the year. During courtship, females produce a tremolo call and the males a more extended rasping hiss, with American birds adding a *crick crick* at the start. A major part of the talk was devoted to the various subspecies of Little Owl. Recording in several countries in Europe showed that all but subspecies *vidalii* use variants of the "cucumiaow" call, including the much paler southern birds in subspecies *lilith*. Subsequent genetic studies have confirmed what the calls suggested, that *vidalii* does seem to be sufficiently different from the other subspecies to possibly justify its separation as a different species.

Another important result of the owl research has been the discovery of a new population of Brown Fish Owls in Turkey. These have a very deep hoot at about 150 Hz and also rhythmic duetting calls, with the males starting and finishing with two-note calls and the female



Plate 298. Chris McInerney shares an idea with Steve Votier. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 299. Magnus Robb checking audio with Stephen Hunter. © Jimmy Maxwell

giving a four-note call in the middle. This differs from the Brown Fish Owls in Goa and SE Asia.

However, the biggest surprise of the owl research came in March 2013, when Magnus and a colleague were in Oman trying to get a good recording of Pallid Scops Owls, which hoot very quietly. At the end of a less than successful session, a distant deep hooting, sounding like a *Strix* species, could be heard over the headphones. This was unlike any *Strix* known to occur in the region, having a rhythm like 'here comes the bride'. In subsequent visits, recordings were obtained from closer to the bird, including a pulsed call and later in the spring a few photographs were also obtained. It has now been published as a new species - the Omani Owl *Strix omanensis*.

Roger Hissett

The 78th SOC AGM

There were no matters arising from last year's AGM minutes and no comments regarding the Annual Report. In the Annual Accounts, Alan Fox (Treasurer) thanked Jean Torrance for her excellent book-keeping work and gave the appropriate details concerning the Club's financial position. Again the tremendous benefit of legacies was emphasised and due credit was paid to profits accruing from Waterston House activities, notably art sales overseen by Dave Allan, where the loyalty of all the wildlife artists was appreciated.

Since March this year, Club investments have been handled by consultants Brewin Dolphin. They work for many other similar charitable organisations and choose a very wide selection

of investments for us. There was discussion, including opinions from the floor, regarding how much discretion should be left solely with the firm and there was a consensus that we should initiate suitable monitoring in this area.

There was then a full discussion about the re-structure and conversion of the Club to a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) (see SOC Annual Report 2013/14 for a full explanation.) The present structure is complex for many historical reasons and the new format would be simpler, with more legal security and less personal responsibility laid on Council trustees. OSCR (Scottish Charity Regulator) would still oversee the wording in accounts and insist on transparency at all times. From the floor, David Jardine wished to commend Council members for their hard work in instigating and considering these constitutional changes and hoped that the present company would give them their full agreement and support. A resolution proposing the changed format was carried by those present.

Regarding Council office bearers, Alan Fox agreed to continue for another year and Mike Martin (Secretary), due to retire, was given a vote of thanks for his work. His successor, David Heeley, was then introduced to the members. Bob McGowan was duly elected as a new Council member and it was announced that Sandy Scotland was willing to carry on as Independent Financial Examiner.

Annual SOC Conference Dinner and Dance

A delicious dinner was served very efficiently in the palatial and pillared Grampian Suite. The annual speech was delivered by Ian Darling. It started with old family memories of weddings in this same hotel, gravitated through some hilarious wedding video frolics and finished with more humorous anecdotes. The dance was once more led by the Orwell Ceilidh Band and this little threesome really can play! Instrumentally varied with bagpipes, tin-whistle, guitar, accordion and drums, they kept up a lively mixture of dances which delighted even the non-dancers!

Sunday morning started with the usual sumptuous breakfast - especially the fruit selection. Soon it was time for the first talk of the day...

The Birds of Clackmannanshire

- Neil Bielby

On behalf of the Clackmannanshire Bird Atlas Group, Neil presented an account of the scope, methods and results of the 'county' survey undertaken between 2000 and 2007. The area is only 159 km² and the survey unit during the breeding season was the 1-km square, although in the winter the unit was the tetrad. The habitats are varied and include the Ochil Hills (35%), lowland farmland (25%), water and wetland (9%), woodland (15%) and urban & industrial land (15%). The Ochils are heavily sheep-grazed and harbour few birds other than Meadow Pipit and Skylark. Lowland farmland has a more diversified avifauna although intensification of cropping has reduced populations of waders and Grey Partridge, although Tree Sparrow is more widespread than expected. The wetlands are many and varied and form the richest habitats for birds, especially geese, ducks, waders, grebes and Moorhen. Significant numbers of Dippers were also recorded along the rivers. The broadleaved woodlands have seen an expansion of Great Spotted Woodpecker and Chiffchaff. Conifer woodlands are now being diversified under modern management and are likely to harbour more birds in future. Urban areas provide much scope for adaptable birds including Spotted Flycatchers in the larger gardens. In total, 134 species were recorded, including 98 breeding and 21 wintering (non-breeding) species. There are several informative appendices including one on where to watch birds.

Graham Pyatt



Plate 300. Neil Bielby with Roger Gooch. © *Jimmy Maxwell*



Plate 301. Peter Slater. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

Bird song as you've never heard it: wrens of Central America - Peter Slater

I remember hearing Peter Slater talk on bird song a good number of years ago in Aberdeen and I recall him bouncing very animatedly up and down using a pointer on a musical scale on the screen showing the differences in song between juvenile and adult Bullfinches. He was equally enthusiastic in his talk on Sunday morning. This time it was wrens. There are about 80 species and they have long complex breeding seasons. Peter and his co-workers looked at the genus *Thryothorus* in Central America. This comprises about 23 species and by looking at the songs and DNA, they suggest that this could be divided into four genera.

He identified seven singing styles consisting mainly of male and female overlapping duets. In some the male initiates the duetting and then the male and female will alternate. In one style, in the Plain-tailed Wren, the song is in four parts with up to seven birds all taking part. Very complex. In another less complex style, Peter suggested that the male "just bores the female into submission!" This was all illustrated with very clear recordings and sonograms of the songs.

Why do birds duet? There are a number of theories including territorial advertising, contact calls and to synchronise reproduction. However, Peter thinks it is probably jointly territorial and mate guarding. In the Plain-tailed Wren, for instance, where up to seven birds can be involved singing, these are probably members

of a family group (they are co-operative breeders) defending their territory.

He then went on to describe some experiments done on captive birds. Males and females were in cages and parts of songs were played and the responses and speed of the responses noted. They also varied the tempo of the recordings. A male can tell from a female's response, the sex of the bird, whether it is his mate, the song type, and can reply with the appropriate song type and timing - all within half a second!

This was a fascinating talk and showed how much we are all missing when most of us use bird song primarily as a means to identification. It was also very entertaining - full of little quips like, "watching Plain-tailed Wrens duetting with steam coming out of their bills".

Alistair Duncan

Isle of May Young Birders - a quartet of speakers

Radina Atanasova, Daniel Gornall, Marion Watson and Catherine Wilkinson gave a very polished presentation on their experiences during the inaugural training week in the Isle of May 'Young Birders project' which has recently been launched by the IoM Bird Observatory Trust with financial support from the SOC. For one week in early July these four students, along with Harry Martin and

Justin Gillings, stayed in the newly improved Low Light and were coached in birding skills by Stuart Rivers, Mark Oskien, Mark Newell (CEH), Carrie Gunn (CEH) and David Pickett (SNH). The 16–25 years olds contributed fully to the life of the Observatory by providing detailed records for the Daily Census and Migration Logs - finding the first dispersing finches of the autumn. Other activities included learning how to use the Heligoland traps and moth trapping.

Seabird research made a great impression as the trainees got hands-on experience in ringing tern and gull chicks, Storm Petrels and colour-ringing Shags. Puffins kept them busy with activities including rescuing pufflings which had become 'lost' in the super-luxuriant vegetation found on the Isle of May in 2014 (a consequence of the mild wet winter and a low rabbit population), mist-netting adults to obtain information on food supplies, and 'puffin grovelling' to extract chicks from burrows for ringing and weighing. Pufflings, which were described as 'little buggers' which fight, bite and scratch ... obviously left a big impression on these developing ornithologists. It was clear from their lively talk that they thoroughly enjoyed their stay on the Isle of May. The social life involved eating alfresco outside the Obs, intra-island rounders match and quizzes with CEH and SNH staff. The



Plate 302. The Isle of May young birders (left to right: Radina Atanasova, Daniel Gornall, Marion Watson and Catherine Wilkinson). © *Stuart Rivers*

match was suspended while looking for the ball when it went down a rabbit hole and what happened in the social life was not revealed as 'what happens on the May stays on the May'.

I recently read a Chinese proverb which stated "If you wish to plan for ten years plant trees; if you want to plan for one hundred years plant people". It is to the credit of the IoMBO Trustees and SOC Council that they are investing in youth. From the evidence of this contribution to the conference, the venture has got off to a flier.

(See pages 324–327 for a fuller account of this training development)

David Jardine

As usual, the following coffee break between speakers gave delegates the chance to visit the different stands. Art work displays were from Keith Brockie, Laurie Campbell, Fran Knowles, Eric McCabe and David Palmar. Also represented were BTO Scotland, Isle of May young birders, Perthshire Society of Natural Science, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Second Nature, the SOC shop and Subuteo Books. Then to the last lectures of the day.

Tackling raptor persecution across Europe - Ian Thomson

As Head of Investigations with RSPB Scotland, Ian has the unenviable task of concentrating on dead rather than live birds. The issues he faces at home are the all too familiar - land-management problems of poisoning, shooting and nest destruction. With large areas of suitable habitat, any absence of raptors gives rise to suspicion, especially as some species have been increasing and becoming more familiar. Abroad, where most raptors are migratory, persecution is much more significant. Ian gave the audience a summary of the situation in three countries - Georgia, Hungary and Malta.

Georgia is a bottleneck for migratory raptors. Over a million birds pass through each season, of which up to 10,000 of these are shot. This is arguably a sustainable cull for the common species but critical for others. Attempts are being made to change this slaughter by alerting the populace to the benefits of wildlife tourism. Not only can this reduce mortality, but it also brings



Plate 303. Ian Thomson discusses a point with Chris McInerney. © Jimmy Maxwell

valuable monetary resources into communities. Hunters, falconers and young people need to be targeted, and then the effectiveness of these moves monitored.

In Hungary, hunting is mainly of mammals, but a growing Pheasant-rearing industry has meant that raptors are being increasingly targeted. Indiscriminate illegal poisoning of mammal predators also affects raptors, just as it does in Scotland. It is hoped that an EU project to engage communities will lower the risk, especially to the increasing Imperial Eagle population. Already, wildlife tourism is increasing but, at the same time, a fall in raptor prey numbers (in the form of *Susliks*) needs to be addressed. Fortunately, Hungary has well-developed raptor programmes such as nest-box schemes for Red-footed Falcons, Sakers and Kestrels, often in conjunction with power companies whose pylons provide suitable sites for boxes. One future problem may be the EU CAP which could turn wildlife-friendly farmland into the industrial-type farms of western Europe.

The last of Ian's examples was Malta, where cultural and political attitudes oppose any moves towards conservation. EU Birds Directives are being flouted openly and no action taken. Hunting is embedded in the culture, and indiscriminate shooting of all species, not only raptors, is rife. However difficult it may be to

change these attitudes, Ian ended by pointing out that, when migrants reach North Africa, the situation becomes even worse, with little that anyone can do, and it's a dangerous place to work in. Ian's presentation was as excellent as it was disturbing, but, although the task ahead seems almost insurmountable, there were clearly signs of hope, however small.

Norman Elkins

From pylons to castles: the return of Perthshire's Ospreys - Keith Brockie

Keith's potted history of the return of local Ospreys was a perfect Sunday morning conference talk. A good chance to think back to the exciting early days when the birds were beginning to re-colonise the area, sit back and enjoy views of the Perthshire countryside and marvel at the antics involved in reaching many of the nests to ring the young. Few of the audience will forget the video of Keith dangling on a rope near the top of a dead pine to reach a nest out on a limb.

Early colonisation was slow. Although the first chicks fledged at Loch of the Lowes in 1969, it was not until after 1982 that the population 'took off' reaching 47 pairs by 2000. In the early days there was a lot of unwelcome attention from egg collectors. Trees had to be protected with razor wire and at one stage soldiers, including the SAS, were co-opted to help guard the nests. One egg collector descended a tree with a clutch of eggs, to be met by four commandos, who promptly escorted him to the local police station.

Although most nests are in trees, many pairs are now building on electricity pylons. As well as being impressive feats of engineering by the birds, this presents serious access problems for ringers, and in some cases Scottish Hydro workers, have brought down the chicks.

Local Ospreys have moved elsewhere, with a Perthshire-born bird in the first pair to nest in Wales in 2000, and a Welsh female returning the favour by nesting at Crieff in 2014. Colour-ringing has enabled Perthshire birds to be recorded in Spain and Portugal and in Senegal, but recent use of satellite trackers is yielding much more detail of their migrations.

Roger Hissett

To end the conference there were one or two items to cover - first being the new business of Branch Awards. These would be given to branch members deemed to have given special service within their areas. The first of these were as follows and were heartily congratulated:

Ayrshire - Angus Hogg and Henry Martin; **Borders** - Graham Pyatt and James Lough; **Central** - Cliff Henty; **Clyde** - Valerie Wilson and Iain Gibson; **Dumfries** - Bobby Smith; **Fife** - Ian Cumming, Elizabeth Wiffen and David Waddell; **Lothian** - Rosemary Davidson and Keith Macgregor; **North-East Scotland** - Jane Reid, Graham Cooper and Nick Picozzi

The 200 Club winners were then announced with due acknowledgement to the founder/organiser, Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, for her hard work. The winners of the raffle were drawn by Wendy. The most sought-after of the prizes was for four nights DB&B, which the Grant Arms Hotel generously donated. Members were suitably encouraged and raised the splendid sum of £404.

Chris McInerny then concluded the conference by thanking all the prize donors, the stands contributors, all the organisers of the conference, especially the main speakers and lastly the delegates themselves for attending this year and making the event so successful.

The sun continued to shine all morning and promised a pleasant journey homewards for all.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 304. Keith Brockie getting wired up. © Jimmy Maxwell

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Borders: Mr K. Farquhar, **Caithness:** Miss C. Metcalf, **Central Scotland:** Ms K. Greevy, Mr P. McDonald, **Clyde:** Mr B. Elliot, Mr J. Hutton, Miss F. McLean, Mr C. Postlethwaite, Dr D. Roy, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr L. Allcock, Mr & Mrs C.J. Clark, Mr D. Darrell-Lambert, Mr S. Edge, Mr J.R. Hatton, Mr J. Hodson, Mr & Mrs J.I. Killicoat, Mr A. Kinghorn, Mr J. Martin, Mr S.G. Plimbley, Mr M. Rayment, Ms E. Saunders, Mr M. Scott, Mr M.J. Shepherd, Mr G. Shorrock, Mr H. Stanier, Mr G. Taylor, Mr J. Tookey, **Highland:** Ms M. Campbell, Mr M.J. Denman, Mr & Mrs D. Line, Mr D. Macdonald, Mr J. Picton, **Lothian:** Mr D. Allan, Mr & Mrs R.C. Baptie, Ms K. Fielding & Mr S. Heritage, Mr & Mrs G. Gardner, Mrs S. Gibb, Mr I. Hunter, Mrs H. Jones, Mr S. Killeen, Mrs E. MacRae, Mr & Mrs A. Maltman, Ms K. McCreagh, Ms S. McLaughlin, Ms E. Reid, Mr P. Robertson, Mr K. Scott & Ms C. Mitcheson, Mrs S. Spencer, Mrs S. Truswell, Mr F. Walters, Miss L. Walters, Miss C. Williamson & Miss J. Hemming, Mr & Mrs R. Young, **Moray:** Mr D. Benison, **North-East Scotland:** Dr A. Weston, **Stewartry:** Mr J. Warren.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **August:** 1st £30 Stan Denney, 2nd £20 Mrs C. Craig, 3rd £10 Keith Macgregor. **September:** 1st £50 P.W. Speak, 2nd £30 A. Sidaway, 3rd £20 J. Walker, 4th £10 Mrs Jenkins. **October:** 1st £30 M. Nicoll, 2nd £20 N. Elkins, 3rd £10 P.M. Slater.

Details on how to join can be obtained by writing to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

Events

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Saturday 21 March 2015, University of Glasgow (Western Infirmary Lecture Theatre). See programme and booking form enclosed.

A date for your diary: Coll Bird Festival, 24, 25 & 26 April 2015 (see page 305; more information will be available on the Coll Bunkhouse website www.collbunkhouse.com in due course).

Waterston House

Art Exhibitions

- Chris Rose, showing until 14 January
- Group XII Textiles, 17 January to 18 February
- John Busby & Howard Towll, 21 February to 1 April
- Paul Bartlett, 4 April to 20 May

New management committee member

The Club's management committee gained a new member in December. Doreen Main (Lothian branch secretary) is a long-standing SOC member and brings to the team many years of management experience, gained through her career with the civil service and involvement in running various local clubs and societies. Doreen replaces Keith Macgregor, who has served on the committee since 2008 and whose commitment and contribution has been greatly appreciated. For Council and office bearer appointments, please see the 2014 AGM summary on page 314.

WANTED! Volunteer Bookshop Manager at SOC HQ, Aberlady

The Club receives regular and often sizeable donations of second hand natural history books. Any titles that we already have in the library are sold in the bookshop area in the foyer at Waterston House and a selection of more specialised titles are sold at the spring and autumn conferences. Sales from these books help to generate funds for the Club and we are seeking someone who can manage this process and help us enter the online arena (namely Amazon and AbeBooks) in order to maximise the fund-raising potential of these gifts to the Club. Can you help? Or do you know anyone who would relish the challenge?

What's in it for you?

- As a book enthusiast, get first sight of new second hand titles that come in!
- Be part of a small friendly team at HQ
- The knowledge that you are helping to bring the SOC bookshop - which has been operating for over 70 years - into the 21st Century!

Time commitment

Flexible, to suit. Ideally, initially, one full day per week, based at Waterston House.

Tasks include

- Creating descriptions of books (focussing on the more specialist series) - some progress has already been made with this.
- Assisting the Hon Librarian with the pricing of books
- Setting up and managing seller accounts on Amazon and AbeBooks
- Uploading title details and images on Amazon and AbeBooks
- Dealing with sales enquiries and coordinating dispatch of purchases
- Keeping stocklist up to date

Skills & Experience

A good knowledge of natural history books, particularly ornithology (including series such as Wayside & Woodland, New Naturalist, Poyser and the important 19th century books) - ideally an avid bird book collector or ex-dealer, experience of online selling, and IT proficiency (web, email, MS Office).

Depending on how the project takes off, in terms of level of sales, we would envisage

enlisting the help of additional volunteers, with the Bookshop Manager assuming a coordinating role to ensure the appropriate systems are in place for responding swiftly to sales enquiries and the timely dispatch of purchases.

Think you might be interested? Please contact: Wendy Hicks, Office Manager, Waterston House, Aberlady. Tel: 01875 871330, Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk

David Parnaby - a new member of SBRC

SBRC welcomes David Parnaby as new member of SBRC, replacing Mark Chapman for the Northern Isles region. David brings much experience to the committee, being the current warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory, and previously having worked at the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve in North-east Scotland.

SBRC would like to acknowledge its gratitude to Mark for his work over the period of his tenure. Mark has contributed a great deal to SBRC, and we wish him well.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC

Branch updates

Stewartry branch secretary: Joan Howie's Email is: joanospreys1@btinternet.com

Tayside branch secretary: Brian Brocklehurst's Email: brian.brocklehurst1@btinternet.com

RSPB Medal awarded to BTO for the Bird Atlas 2007-11

SOC Council is delighted to acknowledge and congratulate the BTO for the award of the RSPB Medal, its most prestigious award, for the publication of the Bird Atlas 2007-11.

The SOC was a partner, under the leadership of Bob Swann, in the coordination of volunteers that provided the field work to visit all 10-km squares in Scotland during both the breeding season and during the winter. This allowed the recording and counting of birds, the resulting data of which was processed to produce maps that formed the basis of the Atlas. This book will be an important and essential document, describing changes in bird numbers and distribution in the UK, and informing conservation approaches for years to come.



Plate 305. The Club's second hand bookshop at Waterston House, Aberlady, 2014. © Dave Allan



Plate 306. The RSPB Medal was awarded to the Atlas Team in Birmingham on 25 October 2014 (left to right: Rob Fuller, Iain Downie, Brian Caffrey (BirdWatch Ireland), Miranda Krestovnikoff (RSPB President), Dawn Balmer, Simon Gillings & Bob Swann). © BTO

We congratulate all those SOC members who contributed to this work, and salute the BTO for its production.

Chris McInerney, on behalf of SOC Council

Borders branch secretary (inside back cover): as already published in SB 34(2) should be: Neil Stratton, Heiton Mains, Main Street, Heiton, Kelso TD5 8JR, tel 01573 450695. Email: neildstratton@btinternet.com

Corrections from Sept issue

We apologise that a number of email details published in SB 34(3) were out-of-date or contained errors:

Val Wilson's email for the SOC Clyde Grapevine (page 253) should be: val.wilson38@btinternet.com

The contact for purchasing the *Arran Bird Atlas* (page 258) should be (no hyphens): alanandjillhollick@gmail.com

Ayrshire branch secretary (inside back cover): Anne Dick's email should be: a_m_dick@btinternet.com

Central branch secretary (inside back cover): as already published in SB 34(2) should be Neil Bielby, 56 Ochiltree, Dunblane FK15 0DF, tel 01786 823830. Email: n.bielby@sky.com



Plate 307. The joint SOC Tayside/Angus & Dundee Bird Club outing to RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve in North-east Scotland on 24 September 2014 was a great success and well supported. It was the first outing by the group when a coach was hired. A total of 58 species were recorded thanks in part to the RSPB staff at Strathbeg, who were most helpful on the day. © Bob McCurley



Plate 308. The SOC stand at the British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland, 2014. © Stuart Rivers

British Birdwatching Fair, 15–17 August 2014, Rutland Water Nature Reserve

J. CLEAVER

Every August around 25,000 visitors from across the UK and further afield make their way to the chocolate-box village of Rutland, Leicestershire, for the annual British Birdwatching Fair (now in its 26th year). Travelling south from Waterston House were Dave Allan (Events' Co-ordinator) and I. Also joining us on the SOC stand across the weekend was Ian Thomson, Vice-President of the Club.

Preparing for Rutland had been a relatively stressless affair, which of course prompted the inevitable self-doubt and questioning... 'are we forgetting about something?'. But with three Scottish Birdfairs under our belts, the Club now has a cupboard-full of professional-looking, bright and branded events resources and literature at the ready for such appearances.

For fear that my 10+ year-old Golden Chariot (Ford Ka) would not make the 600-mile round trip, Dave's car was instead laden with signage,

books, leaflets, sample issues of *Scottish Birds* and, crucially, sandwiches. The journey down was a relatively quick one and high on caffeine, we reached our picturesque destination late in the afternoon.

Ian had arrived before us and had already taken care of most of the heavy lifting, carting the numerous banners and boxes over to the soon-to-be-transformed grassy patch that would house our stand for the weekend. It took a few rounds playing 'Tetris' with the tables to get things looking just right, but aside from arranging banners and laying out leaflets holders, there wasn't much more we could do to prepare for the next day. So, we retired to our very comfortable Premier Inn in Grantham, nervous and excited for the following morning's activities!

As with every birdfair I've attended, there was no time for breakfast on Friday morning as we

hurtled along to Rutland Water, via Melton Mowbray (pie country). Debuting our new SOC sweatshirts, Ian, Dave and I quickly set to work finishing off the stand. As soon as the opening whistle sounded at 09:00 a constant throng of visitors piled into the marquee eager to browse and it never really seemed to let up. Indeed Friday proved to be our busiest day at the fair, Sunday our quietest.

This was my, and Dave's, first time at Rutland and as foretold, it *was* a 'production', on a scale quite unimaginable! A staggering number of countries were represented at the event, with birding tours being offered on every continent. There was no end of new and diverse products to whet ones appetite, interesting people to speak to, and holidays of a lifetime to dream about. The whole place had a real buzz about it!

Neither Ian, Dave nor I had felt able to gauge how well the SOC would be received, or how successful the event would be for us overall, bearing in mind we hadn't held a stand there for over five years. It was, however, the first Rutland Birdfair we'd attended armed with the digital version of *The Birds of Scotland*. This, alongside the draw of a pristine hard copy of the book up for raffle (and our new Crested Tit pin badge!), attracted a steady stream of folk to our stall, to whom we were then able chat to about the Club and our role monitoring and recording Scotland's wild birds.



Plate 309. The SOC team deal with visitors to the stand, Rutland, 2014. © Stuart Rivers

We received an incredibly warm welcome from visitors and fellow stallholders alike and it was lovely to have so many Club members and friends drop by over the course of the weekend to lend their support and offer encouragement. Thank you very much if you did so!

Although the stand represented our main presence at the fair, we had also been very fortunate to secure two speaker slots in the lecture marquee over the weekend. As such, artists Darren Woodhead and Keith Brockie spoke in association with the SOC, about Painting in Watercolours and Perthshire's Ospreys, respectively. As predicted, both delivered charming introductions to subjects close to their hearts and we are very grateful to Keith and Darren for agreeing to talk on the Club's behalf, at such a high profile event.

No doubt this helped contribute to our success at Rutland Birdfair and I'm delighted to report that by the end of Sunday, we'd made 20 new memberships for the SOC (a warm welcome to those recent joiners - thank you very much for your support!) alongside roughly £200 in pin badge and raffle tickets sales.

My personal thanks to my fellow companions on the stand, Dave and Ian. Both put in an incredible amount of effort in to the planning, preparation and execution of this event, to ensure that the Club benefitted as greatly as it could. Our thanks also to the rest of the team at Headquarters and Honorary Librarian, David Clugston, for facilitating and supporting our presence at the fair.

Our top tips for any first timers planning to attend next year? Do it! But book your accommodation early, buy a weekend ticket, wear trainers, start off with an empty backpack, bring a hand sanitiser and finally, leave the bank cards at home!

The 2015 British Birdwatching Fair will take place on 21–23 August

Jane Cleaver, SOC Development Officer

Young Birders' Training Course, Isle of May, 5–12 July 2014

R. ATANASOVA, J. GILLINGS, D. GORNALL, H. MARTIN, M. WATSON
& C. WILKINSON



Plate 310. The six participants of the Young Birders' Training Course, Isle of May, July 2014. Left to right: Marion Watson, Catherine Wilkinson, Radina Atanasova, Daniel Gornall, Justin Gillings & Harry Martin. © Harry Martin

Earlier on this year, the SOC working in partnership with the Isle of May Bird Observatory, launched an exciting new opportunity for six young people to participate in a week-long, sponsored training course being run by the SOC and the Isle of May Bird Observatory, on the May (see *Scottish Birds* 34(2) March 2014).

The course had been designed for participants to gain valuable experience in various activities to help them progress with future involvement in wildlife recording and conservation. The invitation for applications was circulated widely across Scotland and to major universities, the press, local recorders, bird observatories and partner organisations. The SOC received in a large volume of very high calibre applications from budding ornithologists across the UK, and even a couple from the continent. The Club asked the participants to keep a diary of their island adventure and an account of their daily activities follows.

Saturday 5th & Sunday 6 July

We arrived in time for the official opening of the observatory refurbishment and received a warm welcome to the Isle of May, aided by bright blue skies and Puffins bobbing all around us on the flat, calm sea.

Settling in, we felt privileged to be staying in such comfortable accommodation and seeing the history of bird recording at the observatory inspired us to go out and record birds on the daily census as accurately as we could through the week. We also had a tour of the four Heligoland traps and spent some of Sunday walking the traps as part of the daily census. Having a group of us meant we could keep the pressure while flushing the trap and have observers round the trap telling us where the birds were. It was beautifully sunny on the Saturday evening and, dodging the breeding gulls, we went down to Alterstanes to watch Guillemot chicks take their first leap off the cliffs into the sea. The night wasn't over yet, however,

as we stayed up to listen to a Storm Petrel tape lure - our only recorded music for the week! In the small hours of the morning, we caught three birds and saw their match-stick-thin tube noses.

Monday 7 July

Little did I imagine that two days later I would be sitting in a cliff-side hide being assured that it was firmly cemented into the ground. It was fascinating learning about the data that could be collected from cliff watches about individual breeding birds, especially the Guillemots.

When we went to ring Puffin chicks near Holyman's Road in the afternoon, I was surprised by how stable the soil was because it had been so dry recently and the vegetation held the soil together. The Puffin burrows were very long, so we had to lie down and stick our arms right into the burrows to be able to reach in to the back, not knowing what might be inside!

Marion Watson

Tuesday 8 July

It was a very early start for all of us on Tuesday morning for our first activity of the day - Puffin

Plate 311. The best time to photograph Puffins is in the wee hours of the morning with the beautiful dawn light - even though it's not always welcome getting up that early in summer, especially after late nights trying to catch Storm Petrels! © *Harry Martin* (harrymartinphotography.co.uk)

netting. All of us got a good bit of exercise from running down to the net to find the fish dropped by an unsuspecting Puffin flying in to it on its way back to the burrow. We each got a chance to ring a Puffin that morning too which was very special! In the afternoon we made tern shelters at Fluke Street and checked the moth traps as the weather had brightened up. Dan and I went for our tern watches during this time which involved us watching for signs of predation by gulls at the tern colony - thankfully there was nothing. We then had a lazy evening watching Fulmars at Burnett's Leap before tea.

Catherine Wilkinson

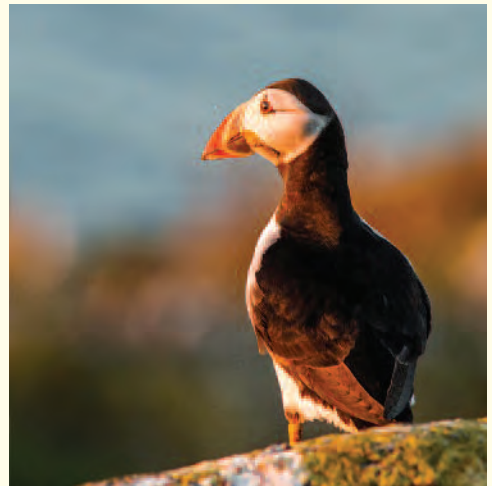


Plate 312. Setting up the Puffin net at 04:30, Isle of May, July 2014. © *Stuart L. Rivers*

Wednesday 9 July

Wednesday morning saw all six of us up and about early for a walk around the island. Although we turned up nothing new or particularly unusual, a Peregrine swooping down over Fluke Street had us all smiling from ear to ear. A talk on bird topography and identification preceded just one of the highlights of the week - tern chick ringing. This involved walking carefully through the Arctic Tern colony, plucking chicks from the vegetation to be ringed while under constant 'fire' from the adults above - a noisy and challenging scenario! Since it was a scorching hot day, and there was no water for showers, everyone decided on a quick dip into Kirkhaven harbour and a rather chilly North Sea! To top this off an intra-island rounders match took place in the evening, and concluded (probably incorrectly) as a draw.

Harry Martin

Thursday 10 July

You will be amazed to see us sticking our heads in the ground with our legs high in the air. We are doing Puffin grovelling! We are checking the development of the fledglings. It's a fight. They are brave little buggers that bite and scratch. Don't be fooled by their cute look!

After this task it is Shag ringing time. For comparison, they look big and scary but are not aggressive.

In the afternoon I did my tern watch, looking for gulls that prey on the tern chicks. We ended the day visiting the south fog horn and the Beacon.

Radina Atanasova



Plate 313. Harry is still pulling the little Puffins out of their deep, muddy burrows, while Holly is already ringed one, Isle of May, July 2014. © Stuart L. Rivers



Plate 314. Daniel ringing a docile Shag chick, Isle of May, July 2014. © Stuart L. Rivers

Friday 11 July

After a brilliant week on the island so far, Friday was our last full day and it didn't disappoint! We started by heading out with the Fluke Street staff (see last paragraph) to ring some gull chicks on the north plateau. Carefully making our way through the colony we grabbed any chicks we came across, distinguished whether they were Lesser Black-backed or Herring Gulls, and ringed them appropriately. We finished the morning with a total of about 50 gulls ringed. After some lunch, Stuart talked to us about how the data in the logs were used to produce reports, trends and graphs, interesting stuff! Kittiwake ringing was scheduled for the afternoon. After a couple of failed attempts, Mark Newell managed to successfully pluck a total of three adult birds off their nests. Each was then ringed/processed and we watched as a geolocator was fitted to one of these amazing birds, in order to work out feeding ranges. On the way back to the Obs a quick scan of Kirkhaven for the Bridled Tern felt necessary, but we had no luck. After our final dinner it was time for the annual pub quiz down at Fluke Street, a very funny night and a great way to end a great week!

Daniel Gornall



Plate 315. This gull chick decided to leave its mark on Daniel's shorts before being released! © *Stuart L. Rivers*

Saturday 12 July

Last day of our adventure... We are preparing our luggage and doing some last cleaning of the observatory.

We are all rushing to our colleagues at Fluke Street, eager to see them before we leave. Living on a 45 ha island with only c.20 people made the place feel like home - everyone knows each other, everyone is helpful and friendly. We met so many interesting people from whom we learned exciting bird facts, we played games together in the free hours and made friends.

Thank you to everyone involved for giving us this opportunity and making our summer unforgettable!

Radina Atanasova

Thanks are given to course organisers and leaders - Jane Cleaver (SOC), Pam Moncur, Mark Oksien and Stuart Rivers (latter all Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust), and to all the 'Fluke Street team' on the island: David Pickett (SNH Reserve Manager), Bex Outram (SNH Assistant Reserve Manager), Sarah Harrison, Holly Pickett and Beccy Wallbank (latter all SNH volunteers), Mark Newell (IoMBOT and CEH Seabird Research Projects Manager) and Carrie Gunn (CEH).

Look out for details of the next Young Birders' Training Course in future issues!

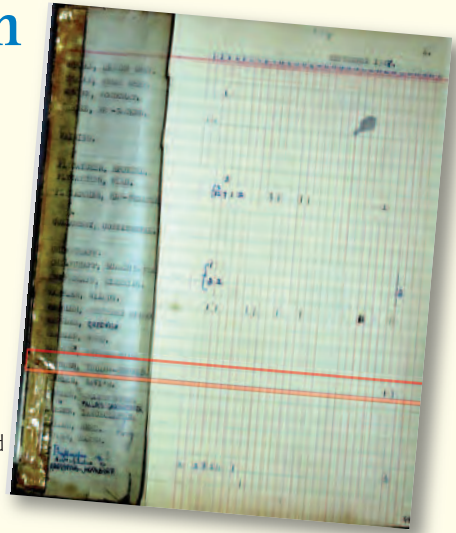


Plate 316. Participants, leaders and helpers on the Isle of May, July 2014. Left to right: Dave Pickett, Mark Oskien, Justin Gillings, Holly Pickett, Harry Martin, Beccy Wallbank, Mark Newell, Daniel Gornall, Marion Watson, Catherine Wilkinson, Carrie Gunn, Radina Atanasova with Stuart Rivers seated in front. © *Stuart L. Rivers*

The Fair Isle Migration Project – analysis of Fair Isle Bird Observatory’s long-term migration data

W. MILES, E. MEEK & J. REID

Plate 317. The original paper logbook from September 1948 and the page showing the first counts for Yellow-browed Warbler, outlined in red (plus counts for several other warblers, shrikes, Waxwing, flycatchers and Goldcrest). © W. Miles



A grand challenge facing ornithologists is to understand how populations of migrant birds are changing in the face of climate change and other forms of environmental variation. Fair Isle is a world-renowned hotspot for migrant birds. Most of the migrant species which land on Fair Isle every year are travelling within the Western Palaearctic-Afrotropical migration system, a network of major migration flyways that extend, for some species, all the way from Arctic Europe to the southern latitudes of Africa.

Every year since 1948, Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT) has conducted daily migration census counts during the main spring and autumn migration periods. From April to June, and from August to the end of October, the three census areas of Fair Isle ('North', 'South-east' and 'South-west', which collectively cover the whole island) have been walked by the wardening staff, all migrant bird species have been counted, and total daily counts have been compiled and entered into the daily log. This process is ongoing and on a good day for migrants can be incredibly exciting, with observations from visitors to the observatory welcomed and included.

The Fair Isle migration dataset is very valuable due to its duration (67 years spanning 1948–2014), the fact that all migrant species have been counted across the full spring and autumn periods, the high level of daily coverage

of the entire recording area (i.e. the whole island), and the fact that the methodology has been relatively consistent across years and across days within each year (e.g. no bias due to increased weekend counting). Historically, all the census data were stored in paper log books (see Plate 1). These books provide a fascinating historical record, but do not facilitate easy data extraction or analyses. However, with the help of generous support from the SOC, the entire dataset has recently been digitised, meaning it can be efficiently analysed and is now ready to reveal its secrets.

In August 2014, the Fair Isle Migration Project began. This is a new, collaborative and jointly-funded project between FIBOT and the University of Aberdeen to carry out scientific analyses and presentation of the Fair Isle migration dataset. The first phase has involved initial data preparation, exploration and pilot analyses. The next phases and major objectives are to undertake full-scale, multi-species analyses; to produce scientific papers, general interest publications and presentations; and to look for funding to continue the work.

The initial data exploration has already revealed some striking, if not unexpected, patterns. For example, during the last 60 years there has been a huge change in the occurrence of Yellow-browed Warblers on Fair Isle in the autumn. Figure 1 shows the grand total of all

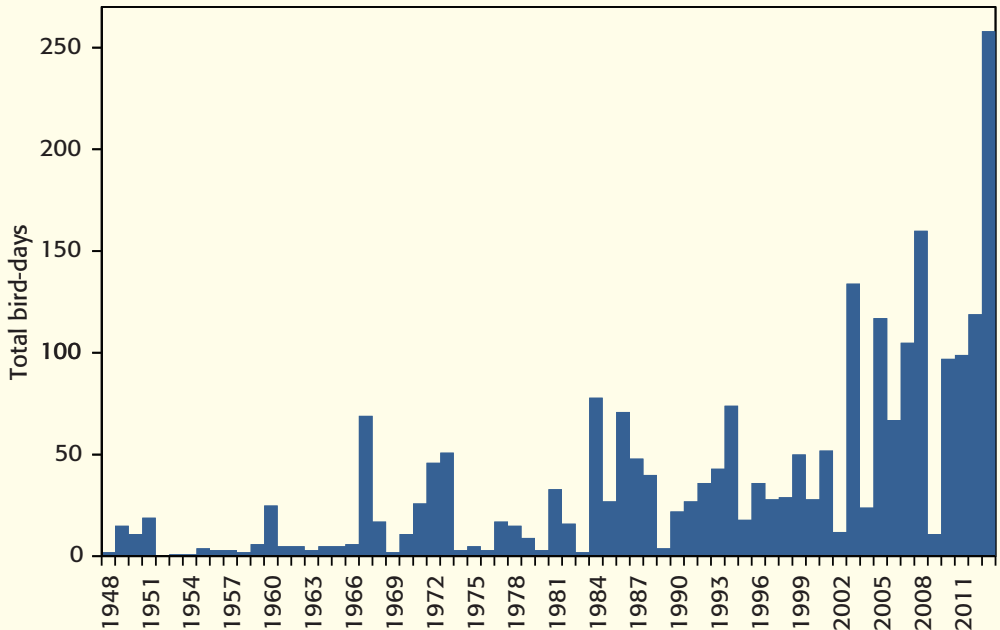


Figure 1. Change in the occurrence of Yellow-browed Warbler in autumn on Fair Isle during 1948 to 2013. Total bird-days = the grand total of all counts of Yellow-browed Warblers on all days in September and October for the given year.

counts of Yellow-browed Warblers on all days in September and October (autumn 'bird-day' totals) for each year from 1948 to 2013. Clearly, there is a compelling increase, with a total of 258 Yellow-browed Warbler bird-days in 2013 in comparison with just two in 1948.

To summarise, in addition to ongoing, rigorous collection and archiving of migration data, part of FIBOT's vision is to analyse the long-term Fair Isle migration dataset and contribute to the state of knowledge regarding changes in migratory bird populations (including species composition, numbers and phenology). The aim of the Fair Isle Migration Project is to achieve this, through high-quality scientific analyses of the dataset and presentation of results in primary scientific publications and as more directly accessible, general interest talks, notes and articles.

*Will Miles, Eric Meek & Jane Reid,
Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust*

Also see:

Riddington, R. 2013. Any divers, swans... a project to computerise the Fair Isle Bird Observatory daily log. *Scottish Birds* 33(4): 347–348.



Plate 318. Yellow-browed Warbler, Shetland, autumn 2012. © Roger Riddington

Hen Harriers at Langholm Moor

D. PALMAR



Plate 319. Male Hen Harrier sky dancing, Langholm Moor, 2014. © David Palmar (www.photoscot.co.uk)

The Langholm Moor Demonstration Project formed the subject of talks by Cat Barlow at the SOC Clyde branch and the Argyll Bird Club last year. The aims of the Project include habitat measures such as heather burning, legal control of predators such as foxes and crows, disease control by providing grouse with medicated grit, diversionary feeding of breeding Hen Harriers to limit eating of Red Grouse chicks, and scientific monitoring by ecologists.

In March I received an email from Cat saying "Come quickly - the harriers are sky dancing".

My wife and I therefore visited Langholm Moor for several days on each of three occasions during the spring of 2014, about ten days of fieldwork in total between March and June, on each visit spending most of each day parked on the moor road, and deliberately not leaving the road as this would have encroached on the territories of Schedule 1 species such as Hen Harrier and Merlin, and risked disturbing other birds too, such as Red Grouse, Black Grouse and Short-eared Owl.

Several times we saw Hen Harriers sky dancing or doing a food pass, but the displays often lasted only a few seconds and it was tricky to keep observing a wide area of sky over a long period with enough concentration to see them emerging from over the hill and react in time to take photos. Inevitably such necessities as eating meant that some potential shots were lost!

On some occasions the birds were flying in the distance against the moor, and it was more difficult to see and focus on them. I usually autofocus with a single focusing point, but often resorted to manual focus, or autofocus with manual focus override.

The images were taken with a Canon EOS 1D MkIV with a 500 mm lens with a 1.4x extender, giving a focal length of 700 mm. As a result of the extreme focal length of this equipment, all the photos could be taken from a vehicle on the moorland road.

I had previously tried to photograph Gannets and Ospreys diving using the camera's maximum speed of ten frames per second. Because the SLR mirror returns every frame and blanks out the image for a fraction of a second, it was very difficult to see what I was photographing at this frame rate. Although I had got away with 10 frames per second previously, for the sky dancing I had to be able to follow the bird more closely, so I set the camera to eight frames per second. As well as being able to see better, this also meant that I could take as many raw photographs as were needed to show the sequence of actions without either filling the camera's buffer and causing a pause in the sequence, or indeed taking so many photographs that duplication was inevitable and a lot of editing would be needed. The shutter button was held down continuously, so the exposure and colour balance was the same for

each shot, which aids the process of combining the images seamlessly. The other crucial aspect, which could not be planned, is that for once, the sky dancing and food pass took place at right angles to the camera's line of sight, meaning that the birds were at near enough the same distance from the camera, so the shots remained in focus. I could have set the camera to follow focus, but have never had much luck with that setting for birds, as the camera tends to lock on to the background when the subject is small, as it is almost impossible to keep the central focusing point on a flying bird hundreds of metres away.

The decision to use eight frames per second proved correct, as there was enough separation in the 27 positions of the bird to include every shot taken and place the bird in the composite image exactly where it was in each individual shot. This was done in Photoshop by saving each raw file as a tif, and combining the backgrounds from three or four of the images into a panorama which showed the ground and the sky, and three of the harrier positions. Next, a manual selection of each harrier and a recognisable bit of ground was made of all the other shots, then feathered, and the selection was copied and pasted as a separate layer into the panorama in the correct place. When all the birds were in place, the layers were flattened into the final image. It is thus possible to see that the bird slowed down when going up and at the top of its path - not very surprising, but interesting to see!

The first image was taken at 07:59:36 on 2 June, and the last of the 27 images was taken

at 07:59:39, so it took three seconds for the bird to do one iteration of a sky dance, from halfway down, to fully down, then up and halfway down again. You have to be quick, or you miss the whole show!

The composite image of the food pass was created from eight raw images. The first image was taken on 19 April at 15:23.00 and the eighth at 15:23.01, so the whole action took a second! One of the difficulties of photography from a distance is that there is a lot of atmosphere between the camera and the subject, and if the air is disturbed this can result in fuzzy images taken by equipment which is working perfectly well. When each image is examined at 100%, with a critical eye it can be seen that they are not entirely sharp. However, by combining the images, as well as being able to illustrate the action sequence of the birds during the food pass, a by-product was that an acceptable degree of sharpness was obtained in relation to the bigger size of the panorama.

Photos of all the species mentioned (and more) on Langholm Moor can be seen on my website at www.photoscot.co.uk. You can click on the red dot for Langholm Moor, or search for Langholm Moor, or for Hen Harrier. Langholm Moor in the spring is definitely worth a visit. My thanks go to Cat Barlow for her cooperation and help. She has just told me that 47 Hen Harrier chicks were fledged on the moor this year, which is fantastic!

David Palmar (www.photoscot.co.uk)



Plate 320. Hen Harrier pair food pass, Langholm Moor, 2014. © *David Palmar (www.photoscot.co.uk)*



Storm Petrel monitoring work on Priest Island reveals a steady population decline

H. INSLEY & S. ELLIOTT

Plate 321. Priest Island from the air, Wester Ross, Highland, July 2010. © Hugh Insley

Regular monitoring of the Storm Petrel population on their Priest Island reserve by RSPB was first started in 1999 as the result of an initiative by Pete Mayhew, senior conservation manager for North Scotland region, and Kenna Chisholm, the then site manager. Priest Island is an uninhabited island in the Summer Isles off the west coast of Scotland (Figure 1). As reported in *Scottish Birds* in December 2000, a tape-response survey across the whole island in 1999 suggested a population of 4,400 AOS (apparently occupied sites). Those figures were subsequently recalculated using the 'du Feu method' (du Feu *et al.* 1983) to produce a revised population estimate of 4,947 (95% confidence interval 4,257–5,911) AOS, making it one of the largest colonies in Scotland.

The effort needed to carry out the 1999 survey prompted us to look for an alternative less demanding method of monitoring the Storm Petrels and after some exploratory mist-netting, and with the help of Mike Hounsome, a mark/recapture project was established in 2001 which has been maintained annually

since alongside the tape response survey which has been done every five years, with the fourth repeat in 2014.

A string of papers has resulted from this work with the latest (Insley *et al.* 2014) published in *Ringing and Migration* in June, 2014 reporting on the first 12 years' results.



Figure 1. The location of Priest Island in outer Loch Broom, Wester Ross, Highland.

The mark/recapture work involves up to 11 ringers and helpers visiting the island for three nights between 12th and 20 June each year and using between two and four 18 m mist-nets to catch the birds at a site ('site 1') in the south-west corner of the island, which the tape response work had shown to have one of the largest concentration of breeding birds. The timing of the visits was worked out to minimise the inclusion of wandering pre-breeding Storm Petrels, which other work had shown to arrive in Scottish waters around three weeks after the return of established breeding birds (Fowler & Hounscome 1998). For the same reason, the use of tape lures to attract the birds was avoided because these have been shown to attract the wandering pre-breeders rather than the breeding adults which any attempt to monitor a breeding colony needs to be focussed on.

Since 1999, the mist-netting on Priest Island has resulted in around 16,500 captures of Storm Petrels and the year on year recapture rate has steadily risen to around 40% giving one of the most robust mark/recapture data sets available for any bird species. These data have enabled estimates of the population being monitored at the capture site, but not the whole island population, though we believe that the capture site population provides a good proxy for the whole colony. The results over the first 12 years of the project suggest a steady decline in the number of breeding pairs at the site (Figure 2).

Although what the mark/recapture study measures is different to the five-yearly tape-response surveys there is some agreement between the two sets of results and it will be interesting to see the result of the 2014 tape response work, and whether this continues to confirm the monitoring being done through mark/recapture.

Over the 12 years for which we have estimates, the population as measured by mark-recapture appears to have declined to 3,584 (s.e. 437), a reduction in numbers of more than 50%. Each year, on average, about 12.6% of the estimated population is captured and about 31.6% of the captures are recaptures from previous years but this figure has been rising in most years and is now about 40%. These are high figures compared with most mark-recapture projects, so the estimates are likely to be reliable.

As well as estimating the population being monitored the mark/recapture data allow us to estimate the survival of the Storm Petrels each year. Mark/recapture survival rates estimate mortality and emigration, which is another reason for trying to exclude wandering pre-breeders so far as possible, so that we are estimating the survival of the breeding birds. We know that once established as breeders in a colony Storm Petrels become extremely site faithful, and very few of the birds we ring are trapped elsewhere, reflecting the low proportion of wanderers in our catches.

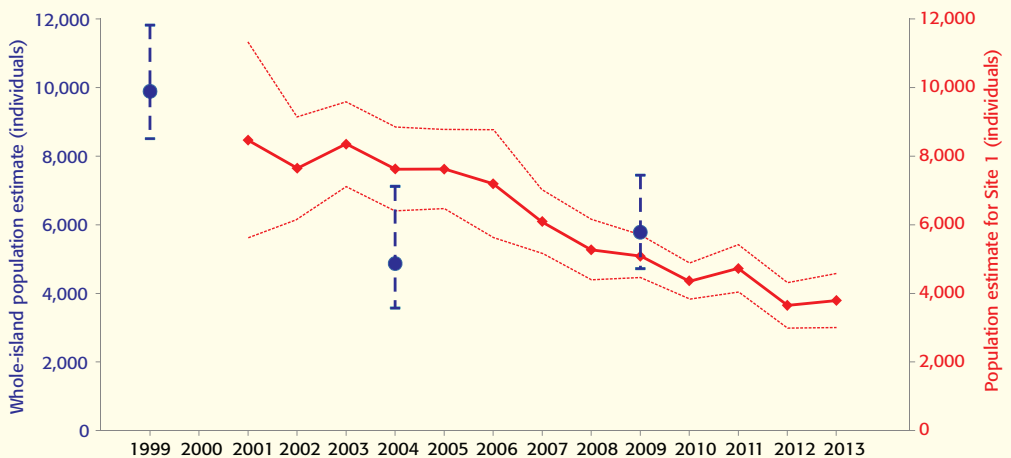


Figure 2. Priest Island Storm Petrel population estimates, 1999–2013. Circles = mark-recapture estimates at 'site 1' only. Diamonds = playback response estimates for the whole island, both with 95% confidence intervals.



Plate 322. Terry Fountain extracting a stormie from the mist-nets on Priest Island, June 2011. © Hugh Insley

Storm Petrels are very long-lived birds, something that is remarkable for such a small pelagic species which migrates to the South Atlantic and back each year, with all the perils entailed. The oldest marked bird we have found so far at Priest was one recaptured in June 2014 which had been ringed on the island in July 1981. At 33 years old, this bird sets a new British longevity record for the species. Most Storm Petrels do not start breeding until they are three or four years old, and most of the birds ringed on the island are adults, so this individual was possibly at least 36 years old. Given that Storm Petrels winter in the South Atlantic, this individual is likely to have travelled 700,000–800,000 km just on migration during its lifetime. A distance roughly equivalent to a journey to the Moon and back!

Adult annual survival rate for Priest Island birds was fairly constant between 2003/04 and 2011/12 at about 0.8. A survival rate of 0.8 indicates a further life expectancy of 4.5 years. This means that a pair would have to produce 0.44 of a recruit per year in order to replace themselves in their lifetime. Without good estimates (we have no means to estimate these in the absence of accessible nests such as exist in the next boxes at Mousa in Shetland) of juvenile and sub-adult survival it is not possible to say whether the Priest Island population is capable of producing 0.44 of a recruit per year, but the declining population estimate would indicate that it is not, and that it is a lack of recruitment to the colony which is responsible for the apparent decline.

Although many ringers are now catching Storm Petrels around Scotland the majority of these are wandering pre-breeders being attracted to nets by sound lures. Few other breeding colonies are being monitored in the way described here though Robin Ward and a team from the Treshnish Isles Auk Ringing Group are doing so on Lunga off Mull. There the decline apparently taking place at Priest Island does not appear to be happening, so the next stage is to try and understand why and this is something that Matthew Carroll and Mark Bolton in the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science are working on. Using the results from Lunga, as well as Priest Island and Banneg Island in Brittany where breeding birds are also being systematically trapped they are looking for relationships between oceanic variables and survival. The outcome of that may reveal whether this is a local problem or something beyond the influence of local management.

Monitoring the Stormies out on Priest has its highs and lows. Handling around a thousand Storm Petrels over three nights is always a high, and each year we try to share the experience with other birders. Artists have become a speciality of our groups and among those whose company we have enjoyed have been Katrina von Grouw, Darren Woodhead and James McCallum. During the mark recapture work we become as nocturnal as the Storm Petrels, setting up our nets as darkness falls after 23:00



Plate 323. Storm Petrel sketch © James McCallum



Plate 324. Hamish Sinclair landing a ringing party on Priest Island, June 2011. © Tim Hounsome

hrs, and working hard until the light starts to rise over the north-eastern horizon just before 03:00 the next morning, although in early June the sun barely drops below the horizon. Even in early June the weather can be violent enough to test all but the toughest of tents. Over the years that we have been doing the work we have had four tents destroyed during summer gales. One of the luckiest breaks we had was to find in the morning after one such gale, that although our ringing tent had been swept into the nearby loch, the precious and irreplaceable ringing sheets containing all our hard earned data had been pinned to the ground under the collapsed ringing table. We have never left the ringing sheets in the tent since! For the first 12 years, we were taken out to the island from Old Dornie by Hamish Sinclair on his prawn boat *Albatross*. With the ever increasing complexity of the bureaucracy which surrounds transporting people on boats, Hamish handed us on to Andy Holbrow, who for the last two years has looked after us on his ex Royal Navy dive boat *Lady Nichola*. Both Hamish and Andy are superlative seamen and we have never missed a trip in spite of some tricky conditions for landing our party and all the gear needed for four or five days on

Priest Island where there are no facilities at all. After four days of basic survival and tolerating midges on Priest Island, a Sunday morning coffee and freshly warmed croissants served up from *Lady Nichola's* galley is to die for.

Hugh Insley & Steph Elliott

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Confirmation that Arctic Canada is the breeding area for the majority of Purple Sandpipers wintering in Scotland and Ireland



R.W. SUMMERS & K. COLHOUN

Plate 325. The Hudson Strait, Canada, where Scottish- and Irish-wintering Purple Sandpipers spend the autumn to moult and prepare for their trans-Atlantic migration in early winter. Cape Dorset, Baffin Island, Nunavut, Canada, May 2012. © Jennifer Provencher

You might think that we know where most of the wader populations wintering in Britain and Ireland come from. This is mostly true and, thanks to ringing, we have a good idea of the breeding grounds for most waders. However, for the Purple Sandpiper, we have up until recently not known where most of the winter population breeds. Purple Sandpipers come from three different breeding populations. About a quarter belong to a short-billed population that originates from Norway, and they winter mainly in eastern Britain. Small numbers also come from Svalbard. But, the origin of the most abundant, long-billed population had not been established. We have tantalising evidence which suggests their origin, in the form of two ringing recoveries in southern Greenland (one in October and one in June), showing that a Nearctic origin was likely.

Advances in technology mean that it is now possible to attach tiny data loggers (1 g geo-locators) to small birds. These record light and time, from which it is possible to obtain approximate latitudes (from day length) and longitudes (by comparing local noon with GMT noon). During 2010 to 2012, the Highland Ringing Group and Irish ornithologists deployed 50 geo-locators on Purple Sandpipers in northern Scotland and south-west Ireland to establish their migration routes and breeding grounds. Twelve birds were re-trapped in following years and the geo-locators removed for data download.

The analysis showed that the birds left between 25 April and 2 June, with those that staged in Iceland leaving earlier (median last date in Scotland or Ireland = 13 May) than those that

flew directly to Greenland (last date = 1 June). Those that staged in Iceland stayed there for an average of 10 days before heading to Greenland, joining the birds which flew directly. The median arrival date for all birds in Greenland was 30 May. After a week in south and south-west Greenland, they crossed the Davis Strait to southern Baffin Island, arriving in the first days of June. This is when we 'lost' the birds because geo-locators do not work in continuous daylight. They need the transition of light and dark at sunset and sunrise to estimate locations.

Once the light/dark regime restarted in late July, by which time breeding would have finished, most birds were in southern or western Baffin Island (Foxe Basin) and along the Hudson Strait between southern Baffin Island and Quebec/Labrador. One bird was on Devon

Island for a few days before moving down to west Greenland where it would have moulted. The others moulted in Baffin Island and along the Hudson Strait. Locations were then erratic during the equinox (late September) when all parts of the globe receive similar day lengths. However, the birds were still in roughly the same locations after the autumn equinox, and they did not start to leave Baffin Island and Labrador until late October. The median date of departure was 5 November and the last left on 20 November, presumably forced out when the sea froze. All but one flew directly across the North Atlantic, covering the 3,500 km in two and half days. One bird stopped in southern Greenland for 20 days before leaving Greenland on 13 December. The last bird to migrate was the one that moulted in south-west Greenland, leaving on 26 December and arriving in Scotland on 29 December.

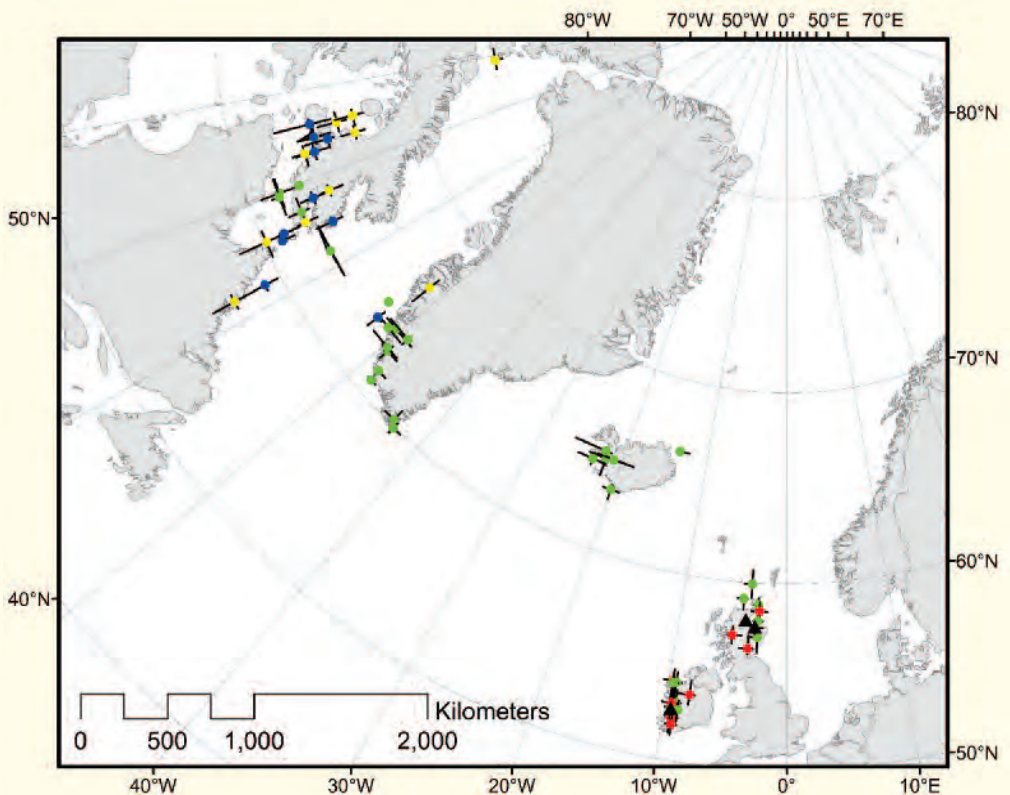


Figure 1. Median latitudes and longitudes (with interquartile ranges shown by horizontal and vertical lines) of geo-locations for Purple Sandpipers prior to departure from northern Scotland and Ireland, whilst staging in Iceland and Greenland, and during moulting and prior to departure from Canada and Greenland. Green symbols - spring records, yellow - post-breeding and prior to the autumn equinox, blue - after the autumn equinox and prior to winter migration, red - winter, triangles - marking localities.



Plate 326. Purple Sandpiper, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, March 2014. © Ron Summers

It is remarkable that Purple Sandpipers wait until November and December before migrating, when most other sandpipers leave the Arctic in August and September. Other waders feed largely on insects, so they have to migrate south when insects become less available after the first snows. On the other hand, Purple Sandpipers are also able to feed on mussels and winkles living on inter-tidal rocky shores in the Arctic, so are able to exploit these food resources until the sea freezes.

A notable aspect of the return migration was that none staged in Iceland. Why should this be? When you look at the weather patterns in the North Atlantic, it is noticeable that depressions (low pressure systems) in spring tend to occur south of Iceland, so that if birds go via Iceland they skirt the northern flank of the depressions, and can make use of the anti-clockwise wind-flow. In early winter, however, the depressions tend to be over Iceland, so it is more expedient to use the wind-flows on the southern flank of depressions and fly across the Atlantic in a single flight.

It is clear that geo-locators have proved to be a powerful tool in determining the routes and timing of migration and have identified important staging areas (south-west Iceland and south-west Greenland) and moulting areas (Hudson Strait). They did not give us the exact breeding locations but they must be in the Arctic islands of eastern Canada, including Devon and Baffin Islands, which are known breeding areas. The geo-locators also showed that Purple Sandpipers wait until early winter before taking a non-stop trans-Atlantic flight to Scotland and Ireland where they spend the rest of the winter.

The study was financed by the Highland Ringing Group and the Heritage Fund (Ireland).

A full report of the study was published in: Summers, R.W., Boland, H., Colhoun, K., Elkins, N., Etheridge, B., Foster, S., Fox, J.W., Mackie, K., Quinn, L.R. & Swann, R.L. 2014. Contrasting trans-Atlantic migratory routes of Nearctic Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima* associated with low pressure systems in spring and winter. *Ardea* 102.

Ron Summers & Kendrew Colhoun



Plate 327. Some birding highlights from September 2013. © Jonnie Fisk

Next Generation Birders A. KINGHORN

Where are all the young birders? This question is one that I heard on a few occasions when I was growing up. I decided that I should probably go and look for other birders in the UK that were of a similar age, so where better to start than the internet! I discovered BirdForum and subsequently a 'Young Birders' birding thread, two notable names kept appearing on that thread: Zac Hinchcliffe and Jonathan Scragg, both Lancashire birders. I got to know them both fairly well and after a number of years an increasing amount of young birders joined the thread. Eventually Jonathan Scragg got in touch and suggested that an official 'Young Birders' group should be started on Facebook. The group was born out of a joint effort between Jonathan Scragg, Zac Hinchcliffe, and me through adding friends and birders who we knew who were of a similar age range. The group matured slowly and our popularity spread until our membership reached a point where 'young' had become a somewhat vague definition to describe the group. As a result, the group underwent talks amongst its membership of how we should rebrand ourselves. After much discussion the consensus was that we should be known as the 'Next Generation Birders', the acronym being NGB. It seems to have somewhat stuck ever since!

So who are NGB? Although it sounds rather cliché the aim of the group is to find and encourage the next generation of birders. A

passing interest in birds is great, and we fully encourage this, however our aim is to get people passionately involved with birds, to encourage people to get serious about birds and birding, every aspect of interest in birds is welcome, from bird ringing right the way through to twitching. If you are interested in anything to do with birds and are serious about it then we want to hear from you! The age range of the group is 13 to 25 years old, we have members from around the world but our most active members are from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, however we do have members in Germany, Portugal, America, South Africa, Sweden, and Australia to name just a few. The great news is that NGB is free to join and very easy to find! Simply go onto Facebook or Twitter and look for us, on Facebook simply search for 'Next Generation Birders' and on Twitter search '@NGBirders', we will soon have a snazzy website as well! The group has a committee that is voted in each year by the membership in the form of a diplomatic process, the current roles span from marketing through to trip organiser and everything in-between.

We are delighted the SOC have begun to get involved and support the cause of NGB, we look forward to a bright and prosperous future of working with the SOC. So if you are a young passionate birder aged between 13 and 25 we really do hope you get in touch with us soon!

Andrew Kinghorn

Tree Sparrows – in name only

J. MAXWELL



Plate 328. Pair of Tree Sparrows. © Lang Stewart

In the course of Clyde SOC survey work, further to the 2007–11 Atlas coverage, I've been travelling extensively around Lanarkshire. The farms in each tetrad became an obvious focus, being the predictable source of varied bird activity and also of local wildlife knowledge. I have been surprised and encouraged by the prevalence of so many House Sparrow colonies around the farm buildings when by all accounts the species seemed to have been in severe trouble.

On visiting a farmhouse near Stonehouse (Plate 329) well into May this year, I met the farmer who explained that this building was no longer inhabited but that he owned and worked another farm just along the road. He was really interested in the birdlife of the area and remarked on the presence of the House Sparrows, owl pellets in one of the sheds and the Swallows which had just arrived. He pointed out a round hole cut in a sliding barn door and explained it had been cut to facilitate the



Plate 330. Swallow access. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 329. The farmhouse near Stonehouse, Clyde. © Jimmy Maxwell

Swallows' access. I later saw them streaking in and out with no reduction of speed or apparent reaction to the narrowness of the opening. However, as we spoke, I was beginning to pick up the high-pitched sounds of not House but Tree Sparrows from the surrounding hedges. I asked permission to have a look at the group of trees around the farm for possible nesting holes.



Plate 331. Rone nester. © Lang Stewart

The building which fronted on to the road (Plate 332 [with arrows]) afforded the most nest holes. Two were under the loose slates giving very narrow squeezing entrances. One was in under the rone where further along a House Sparrow was living, very obviously a larger bird - there was no obvious interaction or friction between the two species. The fourth Tree Sparrow was under the coping stones of the gable edge and could enter either there or at the other side through a gap in the gable itself (Plate 333). Apart from two under the main house rone and another round at the rear of the house, the last



Plate 332. Outer building. © Jimmy Maxwell

The trees were mostly Scots Pine and the others had no obvious holes, so my attention returned to the farm itself where I discovered that the Tree Sparrows were actually using holes and cracks in the various buildings. BWP mentions that occasionally the species does nest in man-built structures. Some of the birds were bringing in a variety of plant fibres and hair etc for nest-lining, others were only coming and going very occasionally and I guessed that the females of these pairs were probably already incubating. I found gender roles difficult to identify as male and female of this species look so alike.



Plate 333. Gable access to nest. © Lang Stewart

two of the nine pairs had nested above the swallow-hole in the sloped metal roof edging, where you could look up and just make out the rough hay structures through the narrow gap, including an extra one there which belonged to another House Sparrow.

This little Tree Sparrow colony seemed very gregarious and the birds spent lots of time at the early building stage sitting on top of the roadside beech hedge in little chattering groups huddled closely together. In Clyde generally, Tree Sparrow breeding pairs declined in the

1990s and in the 2008–11 Atlas, the species in Lanarkshire shows very sparse breeding density compared to the east of Scotland. There are many successful nest-box colonies but a little further south in the Dungavel area, such a scheme, supporting 32 pairs, was deserted by 1995 and in recently covering many tetrads there, I have not recorded the species. To find nine pairs together in such suitable accommodation was encouraging, interesting and an absolutely enjoyable experience.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 334. Tree Sparrow with roots. © Lang Stewart

FIELD NOTES



Plate 335. Lesser Black-backed Gull with Feral Pigeon prey, Edinburgh, August 2014. © John Tookey

Lesser Black-backed Gull preying on Feral Pigeon

I took these photos on 12 August 2014 from the roof garden of a flat in Simpson Loan, Quarter Mile, Edinburgh. I had noticed Lesser Black-backed Gulls chasing Feral Pigeons and this one caught a pigeon in mid-air, landed on the edge of the roof garden balcony and proceeded to eat, finally flying off with its prey. This wasn't a one-off event as I saw a number of attacks over the period of a week, but it was the only successful kill I witnessed. I spoke to the BTO and they had heard of it happening in Barrow-on-Furness, where Lesser Black-backed Gulls have established a nesting colony.

John Tookey

Both Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls have increased in towns. This has led to complaints about noise, mess and even gulls swooping on people when the gulls have young nearby. A search of the Internet will produce several example of gulls attacking town pigeons In Britain and abroad. There is one record in Glasgow from 2001 of an unspecified 'gull' killing pigeons in George Square. There are even some video clips such as one of a Yellow-legged Gull taking a pigeon in Cannes, France in 2011. Another attack by a Yellow-legged Gull and Hooded Crow took place in St Peter's Square in Rome in January 2014 when two children standing beside the Pope released two white doves, though both birds seemed to escape. This behaviour is well worth recording, though future records should be sent to local bird reports. Eds.



Plate 336. Hanging flower baskets, North Berwick, East Lothian, July 2014. © Rosemary Oberlander

Woodpigeons roosting and nesting in hanging baskets

Woodpigeons have become much more common in towns and show little fear of people. In North Berwick this has led to a problem for the voluntary group that maintain hanging baskets along the High Street over the summer. In 2013, I noticed three baskets had damaged early plants in them. As the baskets are watered early in the morning when the street is quiet, it became obvious that the problem was due to Woodpigeons roosting in these baskets and squashing plants; trailing plants and the ones in the centre were unaffected. In 2014, eight baskets were used by pigeons. There were 90 baskets in all there, but some seemed to be more desirable than others as a shopkeeper witnessed a squabble between two birds in the basket opposite her shop. The birds showed no fear of people and sometimes only flew when the watering lance was put onto the basket. They were also often to be seen sitting in the baskets during the day.

When the baskets were taken down in early October 2014, we found that pigeons had tried to nest in three of them. In one case, a young bird flew out when the basket was unhooked.

*Rosemary Oberlander, 5a York Road,
North Berwick EH39 4LX.*



Plate 337. Woodpigeon in hanging flower basket, North Berwick, East Lothian, August 2013. © Rosemary Oberlander



Plate 338. Woodpigeon nest in hanging flower basket, North Berwick, East Lothian, October 2014. © Rosemary Oberlander



Plate 339. Juvenile Woodpigeon in hanging flower basket, North Berwick, East Lothian, October 2014. © Rosemary Oberlander



Artist Profile: Chris Rose

Plate 340. Chris Rose at work with King Penguins, 2010.

Like most artists, I had a passion for drawing and painting from a very early age. My father was a freelance artist and designer and my brother, sister and I were always encouraged to draw and paint, producing our own greetings cards for the family. My brother also showed artistic talent, but, being six years older, was far more accomplished than me. This infuriated me and the frustration at my own inadequacy drove me to practise with even greater vigour and determination, which was no doubt an important factor in my early artistic development. In addition to this artistic drive I have had a lifelong interest in wildlife, no doubt kindled by my early experience of the wildlife in Uganda, where I was born and lived until the age of six. My parents are also interested in natural history, and I found inspiration within their book collection, most notably in the *Reader's Digest Book of British Birds* illustrated by Raymond Harris Ching and in Thorburn's *Birds and Mammals*. These, together with the cover paintings of the RSPB's *Birds* magazine by artists such as Gillmor, Tunnicliffe and Shackleton fired my enthusiasm for painting wildlife. Then, in my late teens, I travelled to London on the recommendation of a friend to see an exhibition by an artist I was unfamiliar with - Robert Bateman. Bateman's work was a revelation. His huge paintings of wildlife within landscapes with daringly bold, often unusual, compositions almost knocked me



Plate 341. Gentoo and bergy bits. © Chris Rose

off my feet. I spent an entire afternoon staggering around the gallery in open-mouthed wonder. The gallery staff of this prestigious London gallery eventually had to almost forcibly eject the long haired, jeans-wearing, spotty youth (who seemed to have his mouth permanently open) in to the street at closing time.

Wise parents counselled that a career in art was too risky to be considered seriously and I headed to Nottingham University to study biology. After graduating with a respectable 2:1 but initially unable to find work as a biologist, I

was offered a post as illustrator for the Dorset Heritage Coast Project for one year. During this year I learnt much about illustration and design but most of all I learnt that there was nothing else I wanted to be in this world than a wildlife artist. With a second-hand, wooden drawing board bought for £15 and a rudimentary set of paints, brushes, pens and pencils I embarked on a career that would take me to far-off lands and that would introduce me to some wonderfully interesting and talented people, many of whom I am pleased to now call friends.

In 1983, I spent three months back-packing through India and Nepal, bird watching and sketching. The studio pictures that resulted from this trip were accepted for the Society of Wildlife Artists' (SWLA) annual exhibition at the prestigious Mall Galleries the following year and I was lucky enough to be elected to membership of the society. In 1986, I was fortunate to win the 'British Birds' *Bird Illustrator of the Year Award*, an accolade that propelled me into the world of bird illustration. This led me to contribute illustrations to many books such as *Birds of the Western*

Paelearctic, the *AA Complete Book of British Birds* and in 1993 I spent three months in Malaysia working on a new bird book for the region. More recently I have contributed illustrations for the *Handbook to the Birds of the World*, the astonishingly ambitious, and successful, sixteen volume *magnum opus* that redefines the meaning of 'handbook'.



Plate 343. Purple Sandpipers. © Chris Rose



Plate 342. Beachcombers. © Chris Rose



Plate 344. Storm passing - Wandering Albatross. © Chris Rose

After a very long, hard slog I have recently completed the artwork for *Robins and Chats of the World* - a new identification guide from publishers Christopher Helm (Bloomsbury), due out in 2015. I painted all 62 colour plates for the book, covering nearly 150 species of this most interesting and attractive group. And it only took me 25 years! Barely out of short trousers when I started, I have witnessed the coming and going of two authors and a stalling of the project for about five years while a replacement was sought. Since I began the project new races have been identified, and even new species discovered, while others have been re-assigned to completely different genera, and one group removed from the family altogether - there were originally 64 plates! This has involved much re-painting on my part. When I began the book the internet had only just been invented and home computers were as rare as Rufous-headed Robins (you'll have to buy the book to find out what they look like!). For many robins and chats there was very little if any readily available photographic reference for the more secretive and little-known species, particularly those skulking in the dark jungles of deepest Africa and South-east Asia. While I had access to skins of pretty much all of them through the Natural

History Museum, I had no way of knowing what they actually looked like alive; what their jizz or character was. Much of it was a stab in the dark informed by birders' written observations and the occasional field sketch by an artist who had seen them. All that changed with the internet - and so did the plates as I embarked on extensive alterations and re-painting of some of the figures in the light of a wealth of new photographic evidence. It will soon be out there and I'll leave it to you to judge the result, but it has been quite a journey and I have vowed it will be my last illustration project, ever! Partly in response to *Robins and Chats* I decided it was time to be a grown up about art; to abandon illustration and to try to make a living purely from painting.



Plate 345. Barnacles. © Chris Rose

Over the years I have exhibited paintings widely in the UK and abroad, including America, France, Singapore and Japan, and have travelled with the Artists for Nature Foundation as part of an international group of artists to the Bierbze marshlands of Poland, the Extremadura in Spain and to the dry forests of northern Peru and Ecuador. The aim of these trips was to highlight the beauty and fragility of what were then little known regions and to raise awareness of the need for their conservation.

In 2010, I embarked on a five-week expedition to the sub-Antarctic Island of South Georgia aboard a 20 m yacht with fellow artist John Gale. Our aim was to sketch and paint the extraordinary wildlife and landscapes of this remote archipelago. Eighteen months later we held an exhibition at a prestigious Mayfair gallery in London, aimed, in part, to raise funds and awareness for the RSPB's *Save the Albatross* campaign.

While conservation often underpins the motives behind my work, my desire to paint wildlife, particularly birds, stems from a deep fascination and respect for the natural world and a wish to share my excitement for the subject through my paintings. Like any artist I am driven by an unstoppable desire to paint. I may be inspired by light, colours or the patterns which are found in



Plate 347. Chris Rose in his studio, 2009.

nature, even in the most ordinary and often overlooked corners of the landscape. Equally it could be the joy of seeing a particular bird that has me diving for the pencils and brushes. Whatever the motivation to paint, and it may not always be an easy life, I wouldn't swap it for the world.

*Chris Rose SWLA,
Newtown St. Boswells, Scottish Borders.*



Plate 346. Heading north - spring Dunlin. © Chris Rose

BOOK REVIEWS

The book reviews published in *Scottish Birds* reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC. All the books mentioned in our reviews are available to borrow from the George Waterston Library.

Best Birdwatching Sites: Scottish Highlands (2nd Edition). Gordon Hamlett, 2014. Buckingham Press, Peterborough, ISBN 978-0-9569876-5-5, paperback, 288 pages, £18.95.



The standard now expected of birdwatching site guides has improved beyond measure since I bought my, now tattered, copy of John Gooders' *Where to Watch Birds* and this volume excels. Coverage is, broadly, from Perthshire and Loch Laggan northwards but excludes the Islands, save Mull and Skye. Some 200 sites, from the highest tops to the coast, are grouped into 27 tours with clear directions and maps, although more detailed OS maps will still be needed for some sites. I have checked the detail of sites I know well and find it clear and accurate, but I am embarrassed by how many featured locations I don't know personally: I trust this book and am encouraged to explore further, which surely speaks for itself.

Background information about the sites - be it historical, geomorphological or mythological - is peppered with mention of teashops where one can combine views of birds, squirrels or pine martens with the enjoyment of fine cakes. A section on 'Driving in the Highlands' may seem superfluous to many SOC members, but how often have we felt aggrieved when we have pulled into a passing place on a single-track road and an oncoming car has failed to acknowledge our courtesy, usually through ignorance of local custom

rather than deliberate rudeness?

A perennial problem with such guides is which species to mention - users will want to know where they are likely to find the Scottish specialities such as Capercaillie or the best sites for breeding seabirds and these are covered very well. Over-egging site accounts with extensive lists of birds only ever recorded once or twice is likely to lead to disappointment, but the author adopts a reasonable balance in mentioning those species which are the equivalent of the four numbers in the lottery win, but not the £1M tickets!

Some sensible comment on crossbill identification is provided - firm identification depends on obtaining sound recordings of calls for analysis. It's your personal choice if you want to ascribe a sighting to one of the three species lacking wing-bars but the Highland Records Committee, for one, now demands more stringent proof than subjective assessment of bill size.

On behalf of the Local Recorders concerned I repeat the author's plea for all users of this fine book to submit their records - even some frequently visited sites are poorly monitored in bird reports because everyone assumes that someone else will make a report.

Peter Gordon

The North American Bird Guide (second edition). David Sibley, 2014. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, ISBN 9781472909275, paperback, 599 pages, £25.00.

Having lived in Seattle, USA, for two and half years I very much

appreciated the appearance of the first edition of the *Sibley Guide* in 2000. It moved the quality of North American field identification



guides up quite a few notches, both through the quality and extent of the plates, showing birds of different ages, and both flying and stationary, but also in the detail of the text. Proof of the need for such a high quality publication is shown by the fact that the guide has so far sold over 1.5 million copies worldwide; and that it was made by a single author, David Sibley, is amazing. The *Sibley Guide* was and remains the best field guide to North American birds.

This new edition contains significant improvements, including 600 new paintings, 115 new species added, all the maps updated, and the original artwork digitally re-mastered for better reproduction. Folk who already own a copy of the first edition can decide for themselves whether they need or want to get this new edition, but I urge anyone who does not already have a North American guide to buy it. It's the best. Period.

Chris McInerney

Tweet of the Day. Brett Westwood & Stephen Moss, 2014. Saltyard Books, London, ISBN 978-1-84854-977-7, hardback, 284 pages, £25.00.

Many will be familiar with Radio 4's *Tweet of the Day*, broadcast just before the start of the 6 a.m. *Today* programme. Conceived as a radio version of a Twitter 'tweet' it

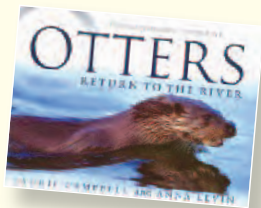


provides a two minute 'biopic' of a bird species, accompanied by sound recordings of the songs and calls. This book provides a written version of the 300 or so broadcasts, arranged by the month. After an introductory account about how *Tweet of the Day* was conceived, and the purpose of bird vocalisations, the remainder of the book provides a couple of pages about what happens to birds in each month and the species accounts, most of which cover just less than a page each, accompanied by small graphic black-and-white vignettes.

The main issue I have is that the book lacks the principal element of the broadcasts, the actual bird sounds, the real twitters, as it were. While the facts presented are interesting, perhaps more so to a lay person, the fact that the book does not provide the actual sounds makes the written accounts somewhat lacking in impact. If a CD had been provided, it would make a much more complete publication. Of course I could have played one of my several CDs of bird calls, but it does seem that a trick was missed by not providing sounds to accompany the texts. The book is interesting and can be recommended, provided you have a bird sounds CD!

Ray Murray

Otters: Return to the River. Laurie Campbell and Anna Levin, 2014. Birlinn, Edinburgh, ISBN 978 1 78027 206 1, paperback, 128 pages, £14.99.



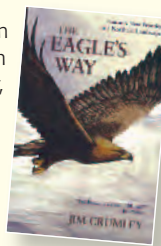
This delightful book, with a foreword by Sir John Lister-Kaye,

is divided into separate, intertwining strands; a year of wildlife watching on the river Tweed, Laurie Campbell's home beat from childhood, and his experiences of photographing Otters elsewhere in Scotland, all interspersed with Anna Levin's first hand experiences of the thrill of Otter watching with such an expert. This format allows the book to inform on past, present and hopeful future interactions between Otters and humans, Otters and wildlife not just on the river Tweed but elsewhere in Scotland. It also demonstrates just how much accumulated knowledge and skill it takes to be a wildlife photographer of Laurie Campbell's calibre. All complemented by superb photographs through the times of day, the seasons and the weather - vivid details to wide landscapes, but especially the iconic Otters, in all their captivating charm, intelligence and beauty. Now, post-pollution, they are perhaps more part of the living tapestry of Britain's mainland wildlife - watching us as we try watch them.

Alix Middleton

The Eagle's Way. Jim Crumley, 2014. Saraband, Glasgow, ISBN 978-190864347-6, paperback, 176 pages, £12.99.

The latest title from acclaimed Scottish nature writer, journalist and broadcaster Jim Crumley is his first book dedicated to eagles.



It contains his account of experiences, observations and interactions with both Golden and White-tailed Eagles throughout Scotland. He remembers an encounter on Mingulay when a strange-looking rock on the shore morphed into a White-tailed Eagle, his very first! Written in his accustomed poetic, easy flowing

style he puts forward his theory that there is an invisible highway stretching from the Tay estuary in the east to Mull in the west. During his research along the route he found ancient nest sites on lochs and islands, wondering if these may once again be used by White-tailed Eagles as they journey across Scotland. Do the introduced White-tailed Eagles have an inherited race memory which draws them along the same routes and even perching rocks used by ancestors, even though they have never seen these places before? How will both eagle species interact and adapt to living and competing with each other and will White-tailed Eagles eventually outnumber Golden Eagles as they did many thousands of years ago? Probably most importantly, as populations grow, humans also have to learn to live with this apex predator as well as them with us!

With a modicum of raptor knowledge you may not learn many more facts about eagles in this book but I found it a very entertaining read for those long winter nights and it makes you ponder what exciting eagle stories have still to unfold in the coming years?

Colin Shaw

Robert Gillmor's Norfolk Bird Sketches. Robert Gillmor, 2014. Red Hare Publishing Ltd, Cley, ISBN 978-1-910001-03-5, softback, 64 pages, £15.95.

I am sure many of you will have admired Robert Gillmor's outstanding linocut artwork over many decades, in RSPB magazines, greetings cards, Collins *New Naturalist* book jackets, posters, stamps and, recently, in *Cutting Away* published by Langford Press in 2006. In 1998, he moved from Reading to Cley in Norfolk, and this delightful new book is full of over 140 of his pencil, ink or watercolour sketches (all reproduced at actual

size) of mainly water birds done in the last two decades along the north Norfolk coast.

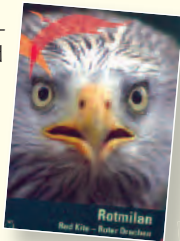


In his introduction Gillmor describes his approach to sketching in the field and the vital part this plays in the preparation of his linocut prints. His sketches are often loosely done, they successfully illustrate birds in a variety of active and resting poses, and his skilful application of watercolour enhances many of them. Some of the best are of Avocets and Shelducks and with Spoonbills he shows how sketches progress to the final print composition. Many other species are represented and to me this charming book is great value for its modest price.

John Savory

Rotmilan - Red Kite. Bernd Nicolai, 2012. Förderkries Museum Heineanum, Halberstadt, Germany, ISSN 0947 1057, softback, 88 pages, €9.50.

This slim, well-produced exhibition handbook, bilingual in German and English, also contains much data concisely summarised. Germany holds half the world Red Kite population, centred on Sachsen-Anhalt, in mainly flat arable land, with breeding extending into urban areas. Spain, France and the UK are now the other European countries with the greatest numbers, no great surprise to those who drive the M4 or M40. German numbers are in slight decline due to competition from other introduced species (e.g.



Egyptian Goose, Raccoon). The four-page reference list numbers about 100 journal papers.

John Law

Other recent acquisitions to the George Waterston Library

Wildlife though the Year: encounters with birds, animals and plants. Tim Sharrock, 2014. Published by J. T. R. Sharrock, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, ISBN 978-1-291-66252-8, paperback, 160 pages, £9.95.

This book demonstrates the wide range of natural sights and sounds that can excite anyone with an inquisitive outlook to life with a collection of 50 articles originally published during 2002–13 in the Bedfordshire County Life Magazine; scattered with puzzles and quiz questions to entertain the reader.



Wildlife Quiz Book. Tim Sharrock, 2014. Published by J.T.R Sharrock, Fountains, Park Lane, Blunham, Bedford MK44 3NJ, ISBN 978-1-291-81321-0, paperback, 150 pages, £9.95.



This book contains a total of 1,500 fascinating assorted questions, all relating to wildlife, full of variety and arranged as easy, moderate or hard. The answers are explained in detail and there are hundreds of fascinating facts.

The Birds of London. Andrew Self, 2014. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-9404-1, hardback, 432 pages, £50.00.

The book describes the status, distribution and history of every species on the regional list and is the first comprehensive avifauna for the London area ever published.



Running Wild. Mike Tomkies, 2014. Whittles Publishing, Dunbeath, Caithness, ISBN 978-184995-123-4, paperback, 171 pages, £18.99.

Containing 16 pages of colour photographs this book describes more adventures of Mike Tomkies in his quest to film wildlife, particularly birds. It also contains some quite awe-inspiring descriptions of filming Golden Eagles in their nests and the triumphant filming of the White-tailed Eagles on Mull.



OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

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

Isle of May

Following completion of the upgrade of the Low Light accommodation used by the Observatory, the 'official re-opening' of the new facilities took place on 5 July 2014. Around 60 persons attended the event, and Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust Chairman, Ian Darling, gave a short speech to describe the work done and give thanks to those involved in the task, with Mark Oksien of IoMBOT specifically acknowledged for his huge contribution in overseeing the upgrade and liaising with the contractors. He also thanked all those individuals and organisations, including the SOC, who had donated money towards the Redevelopment Appeal. Ian also introduced the principal guest of honour, Ian Ross, Chairman of



Plate 348. Ian Ross cutting the cake. © Stuart Rivers



Plate 349. Re-opening day. © Stuart Rivers



Plate 350. New solar panels. © Mark Oksien

Scottish Natural Heritage who addressed those present about the importance of the Observatory's role and contribution to the research and conservation and education activities carried out on the island. He completed the ceremony by cutting the cake specially prepared for the event, and those present were then able to inspect the Low Light and see the additions and improvements for themselves and chat to loMBOT committee members involved with the upgrade.

The day also marked the start of the first SOC-loMBOT collaborative scheme the 'Young Birders' Training Course' which commenced once the re-opening event was over - see p324 for details of how the six participants got on.

There is still a certain amount of 'external' work to be done for the Observatory, new paths and a 'patio area' have been created around the NW side of the building, and in August the installation of solar panels to provide a level of electricity in the Low Light was undertaken. The next major task is to improve the storage capabilities for the water supply, with work due to commence in March next year - volunteers



Plate 351. SOC ladies. © Stuart Rivers

welcome! So a lot has been achieved - 2014 actually marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Observatory, and as part of our celebration of this and to underpin our promotion of the Observatory and its work in the future, a new, modern logo is being designed - more of that next time.

Stuart Rivers

Fair Isle

It's true that there is never a quiet year on Fair Isle, but with one of the best seabird breeding seasons of recent years, an amazing ring of rarities in the spring, the highest ringing total for 14 years, record-breaking visitor numbers, two additions to the island list (Glossy Ibis and Bridled Tern) and a year list that, at the time of writing at the start of November, is only one away from equalling the all time Fair Isle record of 217, 2014 will go down as a memorable one indeed!

The Obs is all shut-down and packed up for the winter now and Susannah and I would like to thank all of our staff, volunteers, guests and the Fair Isle community for making 2014 so successful. With 2015 rapidly approaching, it's worth noting that vacancies for staff and volunteers should appear on our website during December, whilst bookings are already filling up for next year, so don't leave it too long if you want to join in the excitement of what is bound to be another interesting year.

David Parnaby

North Ronaldsay

With the tourist season and prime birding periods nearing their ends, there are many words which could be used to describe the last six months at NRBO, but 'hectic' is probably the best one! Since the last spring round-up the team has marched forward with new ideas, further developed existing projects, been joined by many new faces and we've even seen a few good birds along the way!

After early falls in April, came the expected arrival of summer visitors as common migrants pushed through on easterly winds and with them came some great quality. The headline makers were a Red Kite in April, Spotted Sandpiper and Yellow-rumped Warbler in May and a Scops Owl in June, all were just the second North Ronaldsay records! There was also a good number of the more regular rarities including Rustic and Little Buntings, Subalpine Warbler, Short-toed Lark and Pectoral Sandpiper while Long-tailed Skua passage was detected for the second spring in succession plus there were Wrynecks and Red-backed Shrikes in the good numbers we've become accustomed to.



Plate 352. The new (T5) Heligoland trap is almost finished and it has a vast range of catching possibilities, from pipits, wheatears and wagtails, to sheltering more unexpected migrants and even Snow Buntings. © Mark Warren



Plate 353. Just one of a host of top quality rarities recorded on North Ronaldsay this autumn - Blue Tit. © Mark Warren

After working hard on its content during the winter, our third Bird Report was printed professionally for the first time and distributed during the spring, while storm damage to our largest (and oldest) Heligoland trap ate into some of the 'birding-time' during the early part of the year too. We clearly didn't mind the re-wiring work though as plans were quickly drawn-up for an ambitious new 'double-dyke' trap on the west coast. Foundations and the timber structure were in place by July and by the time the autumn migration hit full flow in September, 80% of the wiring was complete. We managed to get three sacrificial crop fields sown, all of which provided cover and food for autumn migrants. We also held a summer prize draw, giving away a week's stay at the Observatory while Kevin and Alison represented the Bird Observatories Council at the Rutland Bird Fair in August. In the same month, building work on the flagstone room (part of the original Twingness croft building) began and over the winter this will be completed to provide the islanders with their own grocery store once again.

Summer distractions included a smart, summer plumage Grey Phalarope which spent a month on the isle from mid-June while Pacific Golden Plover and Roseate Tern were recorded in July - both species have now been represented in three of the last four years. It has also been a pleasant change to have some seabird work to do in-between the summer trap building and tree weeding and the ornithological highlight for most staff and visitors this year has been the turnaround in Arctic Tern fortunes. While the glory days of some 20 years ago are still some way off, it was fantastic to see adult birds pouring past the observatory carrying fish, followed by the ringing of over 400 chicks and a minimum of 300 successfully fledging - let's hope there's more to report on this partial recovery next year. It was also another great year for the Tysties with a record 105 chicks ringed and Fulmars did well once again. Most wader species and gulls also returned positive fledging figures once more and now we're in autumn, House Sparrow flocks are everywhere - the food source our crops are providing having clearly benefited clutch sizes and survival rates.



Plate 354. Eyebrowed Thrush, another of the North Ronaldsay highlights this autumn. © Kevin Kelly

While there have been some staff difficulties this year, the addition of three volunteers at various stages has proved priceless. Laila Aranda Romero (May–September), Sara Macias (June–November) and Kitty Mermagen (August–October) have all contributed greatly to the year's successes in particular helping to boost census coverage during the autumn to levels approaching 70–80%. We thank them for their efforts and all will hopefully report their experiences in the forthcoming 2014 bird report - and we're not talking about the grand North Ronaldsay bake-off!

With a few weeks of the autumn still to go, we've seen a few widespread arrivals and the 2014 roll-call for this, the most eagerly anticipated period makes for mouth-watering reading. To name but a few: Great and Balearic Shearwaters, American Wigeon, American Golden Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper, three Red-necked Phalaropes, Hoopoe, Daurian Shrike, two Rose-coloured Starlings, Paddyfield Warbler, two Short-toed Larks, up to six (yes six!!!) Olive-backed and two Pechora Pipits and four Little Buntins have been recorded so far. The standout bird though for the writer has to be the stunning, never to be forgotten male Blue Tit on the west coast - with just five previous island records, all coming in 1988, of all the birds

mentioned in this round-up only the Scops Owl (with the first record coming in 1892) hadn't appeared here in so long! There was also a certain Eyebrowed Thrush, just the 21st British record although being an adult male it was arguably the finest specimen ever to be recorded in this country - but there was one of those on North Ronaldsay in 2009...

Perhaps the only negative point to report has been a quieter season with fewer visitors this year, in particular birdwatchers during both the key migration periods and the summer months when there's still plenty of variety on offer. It's been a superb birding year but there's always room for visiting birders and with daily coverage levels often being as low as 20% due to other commitments it often feels like the island under-achieves - who knows what birding gems we've missed in this classic year? So, if you feel like joining the North Ronaldsay party in 2015 we'd love to see you. We're now taking bookings and there's an accommodation discount for 'Friends of NRBO', there's always something to see and the food, hospitality and even our cakes are pretty good too...

Mark Warren, NRBO

Email: markwarren1980@hotmail.co.uk



Plate 355. Snowy Owl, Cairngorms National Park, September 2014. © Robert Ince

Snowy Owls - recent sightings in Scotland

M. COOK

The thrill of encountering a Snowy Owl in the dramatic landscapes that these spectacular birds inhabit is one of the most memorable experiences in birding. They breed on exposed Arctic tundra or high mountain plateaux, adopting a partially migratory or nomadic lifestyle in winter, depending on prey availability, weather severity and, perhaps, winter darkness. In some years, populations erupt southwards, occasionally bringing a few birds as far as Scotland.

Snowy Owls were rare here in the early part of the 20th century, with only about 30 Scottish records during 1900–60. Nearly all were in winter although single birds summered in the Cairngorms in 1940 and in 1952–53. An influx of new birds took place in the 1960s and 1970s. A few pairs were present in summer, culminating in the well-documented period of breeding on Fetlar during 1967–75. Records of new arrivals declined in the 1980s although single birds intermittently spent the summer months in the Cairngorms in the 1980s and 1990s (M. Pennington in Forrester *et al.* 2007).

In his account in *The Birds of Scotland*, Mike Pennington drew on all records available to the end of 2004. This article reviews the Scottish records during the period 2005–13.

Despite being a large and apparently conspicuous bird, the accurate documentation of Snowy Owl occurrence is far from straightforward. Only records accepted by British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) have been included in this review. Assessing the true number of individuals and allocating sightings to the same or to different individuals is not easy. The BBRC annual reports are peppered with the phrase 'presumed same' but the increased popularity of photography should make such judgements easier in some cases.

During 2005–13, 41 Snowy Owls are judged to have been new arrivals in Scotland (BBRC reports). Of these, 17 have been on St Kilda and 13 in the Outer Hebrides. Only six were in the Northern Isles, where three were in Orkney, two in Shetland and one on Fair Isle (see Figure 1).

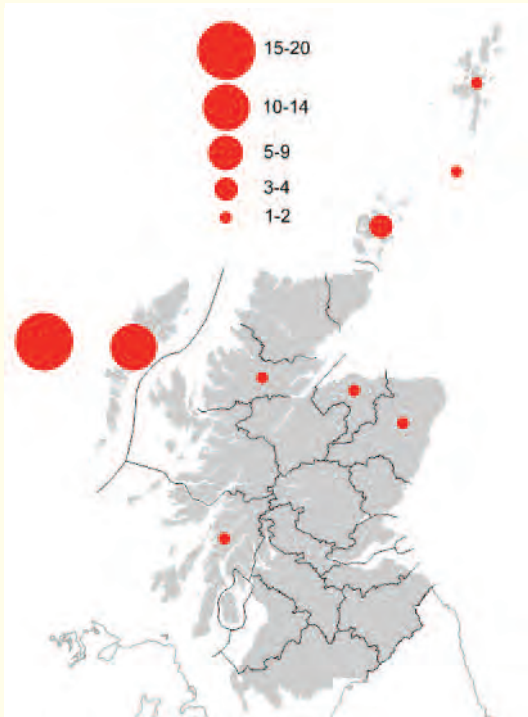


Figure 1. Distribution of Snowy Owl arrivals in Scotland during 2005–13. Note that the St Kilda records have been separated from those in the rest of the Outer Hebrides recording area (contra *BS3*).

This westerly bias, and decline in the importance of the Northern Isles, contrasts sharply with the situation prior to 2005 when the Northern Isles, along with the north-east of the Scottish mainland, received large numbers of records.

Assessing age and sex is often difficult without prolonged and close views; within the relevant nine BBRC reports, the age or sex of Snowy Owls is described in 13 different ways, indicating the problems involved with a correct attribution. Of the 32 birds to which a sex was attributed, 22 were males (including eight adult males) and 10 were females (including only one aged as adult). Adult male is by far the most readily identifiable plumage and it seems surprising that such a high proportion of the birds which appeared in Scotland during 2005–13 should have been adult males. Of 17 birds seen on St Kilda, four were adult males so, whether by intention or accident, it is clearly not only inexperienced immature birds which undertake long sea crossings or become disorientated by poor weather.

With respect to age, 11 birds were considered to be adult at the time of arrival (with no sex attributed in two cases), 12 were immature and the remaining 18 could not be aged with certainty.



Plate 356. Snowy Owl, Cairngorms National Park, June 2014. © *Pete Gordon*

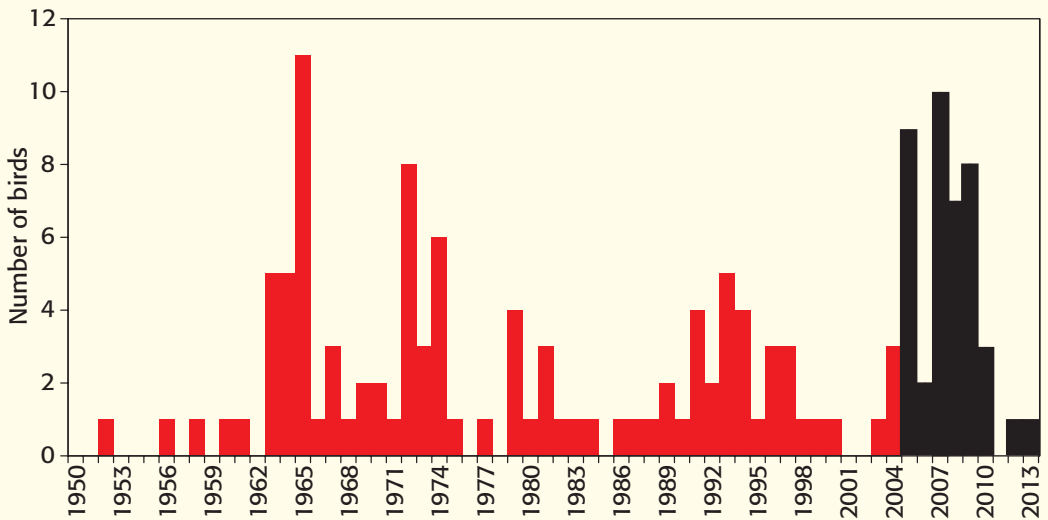


Figure 2. Annual occurrence of Snowy Owls in Scotland during 1950–2013 (post *The Birds of Scotland* records (2005–13) are highlighted in black).

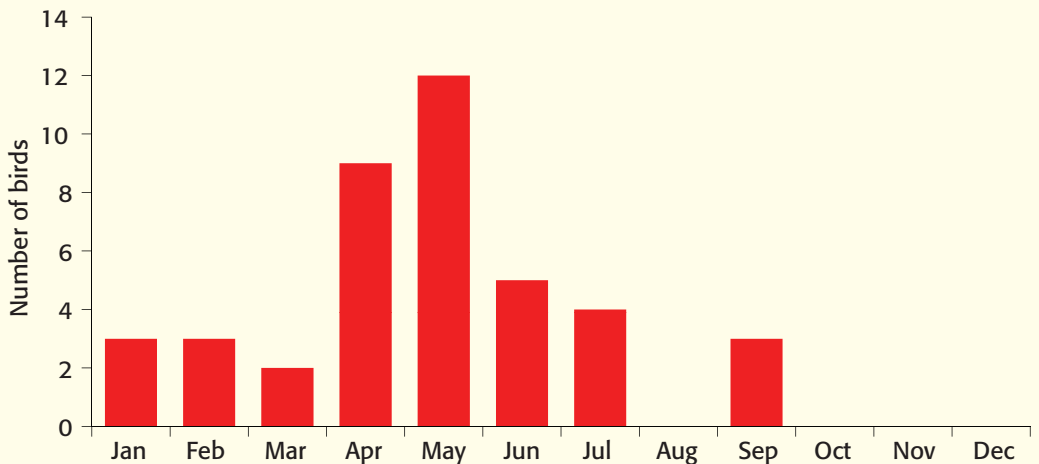


Figure 3. Seasonal arrival of Snowy Owls in Scotland during 2005–13.

During 2005–13, the number of ‘new’ birds recorded 2005–07, 18 during 2008–10 and only two during 2011–13 (see Figure 2). This situation is largely influenced by events on St Kilda where 15 birds were found during 2005–09 (with six in 2007 alone) but only one during 2010–13.

Arrival dates have been focussed in the first half of the year, with 34 birds in the January–June period and only seven thereafter. April (with nine records) and May (12) account for half of the records (see Figure 3). In view of the remote

countryside often occupied by Snowy Owls, some of the apparent arrival dates must be suspect as birds might remain undetected for some time - especially during the winter period when birders are less likely to visit such places.

Estimating the months when long-staying birds are present in Scotland is also fraught with difficulty. Some accepted records of ‘presumed same’ birds include lengthy periods when the bird went unrecorded. For example, an adult male on North Uist was considered to be the same bird as one there in May–June 2012 and April–May 2013 despite the lack of records on

intervening dates. Did this bird remain undetected for 30 months of a three-year stay?

Assuming that long-staying birds remain in Scotland during periods when they are unrecorded, then the monthly presence of Snowy Owls during 2005–13 is as shown in Figure 4. If only the months when birds were seen are included then the pattern is similar, with peak seasonal occurrence during April–July, but with far fewer birds involved.

Assessing the length of stay is again problematic. Of the 41 arrivals, 20 were seen only in the month of discovery, with nine birds staying into the following month and three remaining for three successive months. The remaining nine birds remained for longer periods and, assuming ‘presumed same’ birds were in fact present but undetected in Scotland during periods when they went unrecorded, five birds stayed for over one year. The longest stays were 26 months in Lewis from May 2009 to July 2011, and 37 months in North Uist from April 2010 to May 2013 (and 49 months if a 2014 record currently pending with BBRC is considered to be the same North Uist bird).

The presence of five individuals on St Kilda between 24 May and 6 August 2007 provided the opportunity for detailed study of their roosting habits and diet. St Kilda Field Mice and Puffins formed by far the most important part of the diet as revealed by pellet analysis (Miles & Money 2008). In 2014, pellets were collected by Robert Ince from the bird on the Cairngorms plateau. When these have been analysed, the comparison with pellets collected from the male Snowy Owl that summered on the Cairngorms plateau in 1980 and the female that summered there in 1987 (Marquiss *et al.* 1989), as well as those from St Kilda, will be interesting - as will possible conservation issues relating to other species which breed on the plateau.

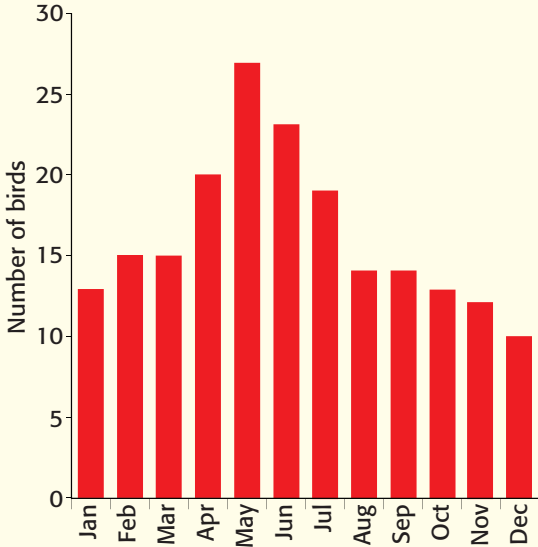


Figure 4. Monthly presence of Snowy Owls in Scotland during 2005–13.



Plate 357. Snowy Owl, Cairngorms National Park, September 2014. © David Main



Plate 358. Snowy Owl, Cairngorms National Park, May 2014. © Robert Ince

There is nothing to suggest that a repeat of breeding in Scotland is likely in the near future, but birds continue to turn up in suitable habitat and the possibility remains. Any Snowy Owl occupying suitable habitat during the breeding season should certainly be given space and peace. While viewing from a distance may not be harmful, irresponsibly close approach for photography is likely to be a damaging source of disturbance. Although many bird news outlets have a responsible approach to such a situation, it cannot be assumed that this will always be the case. Having learned in autumn of the presence of a Snowy Owl in the Cairngorms during summer 2014 (from the BBRC 'work in progress' file), Rare Bird Alert commented that "we only ever withhold bird news when the bird in question is actually breeding, so if we'd known about the Snowy Owl at the time we would have sent the news to our customers". So in the absence of a nest, any territory-holding pair of Snowy Owls in Scotland may not receive the degree of privacy to which it is entitled.

Additional records

2013; still under consideration by BBRC:

Orkney: 1 near Blackhamar, Rousay 3 July

2014; under consideration by BBRC, or yet to be submitted:

Shetland: 1 Clevigarth, Mainland 14 February

Highland: 1 Forsinard 15 May

1 between Kyle of Tongue and Loch Eriboll 5 July

1 male between Elphin and Lochinver 25 August and north-east of Loch nan Cuaran 20 September

Caitness: 1 adult male Camster windfarm 15–26 October*

Outer Hebrides: 1 male Orasaigh Island, Grenitote and Sollas, North Uist c.3–12 May

Moray & Nairn: 1 Cairngorms 19 May–17 October*

Angus & Dundee: 1 Glas Maol 11 April

*final date to be established



Plate 359. Snowy Owl, Cairngorms National Park, September 2014. © Richard Somers Cocks

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Ian Thompson, Jim Williams, Jon Cook, Nick Littlewood, Pete Gordon, Rob Fray and Sinclair Manson for providing information about recent Snowy Owl records in their respective recording areas.

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Plate 360. Greenish Warbler, Tynninghame, Lothian, June 2014. © Ian J. Andrews

Greenish Warbler, Tynninghame, 7–22 June 2014 - second Lothian record

C.N. DAVISON & K. GILLON

Saturday 7 June was a day lacking anticipation and the 'team' was already one down, so the empty notebook as the tide rose at Tynninghame was no surprise. Returning to the watch point at the mature pines near the Hedderwick Burn, I told KG I was going to determine the outcome of the Long-tailed Tit and Blackcap nests I'd previously located in a bramble clump upstream. As I was inspecting the successful Long-tailed Tit nest, I became aware of a bird song that I couldn't reconcile with anything I had heard before. I listened to several registrations before alerting KG. We returned and puzzled over the identity of the mystery singer.

The song was very distinctive and some aspects appeared familiar. After three or four short sharp introductory notes the song ran together to become a trill, which ended in a flourish up and down in pitch. The trill reminded me of Serin or perhaps some aspects of Goldfinch song. The song can be heard on three video clips posted on Ian Andrews' YouTube website: www.youtube.com/channel/UCNc0UKNL1jrCUqXZ2Jf1OuA

KG was first to suggest a *Phylloscopus* warbler and Greenish then became one of the more obvious choices. The bird was remaining high in the trees and moving around considerably.

Eventually we both managed brief, distant views largely against the light and were entirely unimpressed by what appeared to be a rather dull *Phyllosc.* Nevertheless, Greenish was now the most likely candidate. We were aware that in the poor light and with the weather expected to deteriorate, we had only a brief window to clinch the identification. We managed to rouse Calum Scott from his slumber and forced him to play recordings over the phone, however we were unable to actually hear any over our mobiles. Eventually, I remembered that I had Greenish Warbler song on my phone the whole time (some idea of creating a 'greenish call' ring-tone)! This sounded more like it. By now, CS had arrived, but the weather had deteriorated, with dark cloud and a fine rain that looked set to remain for the rest of the day. A breeze had also sprung up and the bird had reduced the frequency of its song. It had also moved further away before returning to the original site.

By now the bird was impossible to locate, and we elected to leave and return early the following morning. We anticipated that it would not move on overnight due to the poor weather, and that it would sing afresh with an improvement in the weather as expected for the next day.

It was with great relief that we could hear the bird singing as we arrived at the burn next morning. The bird was much easier to locate now and, in the better light, proved to be more attractive than when originally seen.

A small Chiffchaff-sized *Phylloscopus* warbler, with greeny grey-brown upperparts and whitish-grey underparts. A faint but clear yellowish-white wing bar created by pale tips to the greater coverts and a long thin pale yellowish supercilium were visible in good light. The base of the bill was yellow, most obvious when it sang.

With the identification now confirmed we released the news via Kris Gibb's effective Birding Lothian grapevine, and through Birdline Scotland. The bird was last reported on 22 June, its protracted stay providing many observers with an opportunity to hear the species in song for the first time.

The bird favoured a clearing through which the Hedderwick Burn meandered, surrounded by mature mixed deciduous (Sycamore) and coniferous (Scots Pine) trees. It used a number of these as song perches, returning at intervals to the same branches. It was a reasonably vigorous singer, but could disappear on occasional forays upstream, into more dense woodland, where it was difficult to locate.

Our feeling was that unless singing it would be nigh on impossible to locate, and it is



Plate 361. Greenish Warbler, Tynninghame, Lothian, June 2014. © Colin Davison

reasonable to speculate that it spent its full summer on this territory, perhaps even completing its body moult before departing.

The habitat around the Hedderwick Burn appears ideal for Greenish Warbler as described in BWP: "prefers fringes, clearings, or open stands to denser growth" and "arboreal and tolerant of coniferous, broad-leaved and mixed forest" (Cramp 1992).

Rather surprisingly, this was only the second record for Lothian, the only previous record involving one at Barns Ness from 21–25 August 1983 (Andrews 1986).

The usual range of Greenish Warbler stretches from Eastern Europe through western Asia to Mongolia, stretching south to Afghanistan. The European boundaries have been expanding westwards, in fits and starts, from the early 20th century. Greenish Warbler now breeds sporadically in Germany, Sweden and Norway, and regularly in the eastern Baltic countries (Fraser *et al.* 2007). The only previous record of a territorial bird in Scotland was at Aberfeldy (Perth & Kinross) from 21 May to 26 June 1983 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The whole population winters in the Indian sub-continent. Spring adults in Britain are likely to be overshoots on a SE–NW orientation. However, the vast majority of Scottish Greenish Warbler records are of first-winters, and they tend to occur within a predictable time window, between mid-August and late September (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

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Colin Davison & Keith Gillon,
Musselburgh, East Lothian.

Scops Owl on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 15 June 2014

M. WARREN

The island of North Ronaldsay is distinctly lacking in trees, so it's no great surprise that with its mix of Sycamores, fuchsia and blackcurrant and sheltered two-metre-high wall, rarities are often found in the mist-nets at the Observatory's ringing site at Holland House. Whilst there obviously is some 'effort' required, I've always thought of finding a bird like this as being a bit like cheating, anyone can be the lucky one to find a bird caught in one of the nets whereas birds can turn up everywhere on North Ron and I prefer to 'thrash it out' in the Iris beds, thistle fields and work the walls and graft a bit for my finds. But anyway, in order to maintain the site's constant effort, we have a ringing rota and every three days I take my turn at the nets, so on 15 June I 'cheated', but there was maybe a little grafting (1% perhaps) involved.

It was a particularly calm morning and once a brief rain shower had passed and a second cup of tea drunk I had most of the nets open by 06:00. After a blank first net-round and time spent enjoying the long-staying singing Marsh Warbler, I decided to walk underneath the sycamores (this is the 1% grafting bit) as I do at least once each time I'm on duty as many a Nightjar has been found this way. Worth a shot, especially as a male had been present just two days previously and there's a decent path to scan the underside of the canopy for warblers. Halfway through, I flushed something at about head height which almost looked like a large, brown bat. "That's no Nightjar" I muttered to myself as a certain species of owl became quickly embedded in my thinking and I started sprinting through the trees after it. Inevitably, I stumbled over a branch and while picking myself up off the floor I could see it, in the bottom panel of the net. In a crumpled heap on the floor, I identified the Scops Owl, but it wasn't in my grasp yet and after a few more

seconds of panic came great relief when a set of mini talons clamped onto my hand!

So I was the lucky one that day, and once all interested parties had been summoned from their beds, I quickly processed the first Scops Owl to be ringed by NRBO. It was of the 'rufous' form and had a fascinating, cryptic plumage, and with its small ear-tufts and facial features had an expression a bit like a little devil! Photographs were taken and it was released back into the garden, where after resting for an hour within a wall it returned to the sycamores to roost (and remain hidden) in peace for the rest of the day. This represents the second record of the species for the isle, but none of us were around to see the first - found at the lighthouse in 1892! I'd been lucky enough to see two previously (Fair Isle 2006 and Cornwall 2002) but it was a British 'lifer' for most and I couldn't resist returning to the gardens at dusk to wait for it to come out and hunt or perhaps even call. With the Marsh Warbler still singing in the background, it appeared just after mid-night and after a few circuits of the front garden disappeared behind some buildings not to be seen again.

The Scops Owl was one of the highlights of a superb spring on North Ronaldsay which included the island's second occurrences of Yellow-rumped Warbler and Spotted Sandpiper. Even more interesting was the presence of a Scops Owl in Shetland a few weeks later - did the owl repeat the actions of the Yellow-rumped Warbler which had island-hopped to Shetland after being first seen on North Ronaldsay?

Mark Warren, NRBO

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Plate 362 (opposite). Scops Owl, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, June 2014. © Alison Duncan





Plate 363. Two-barred Crossbill (top right) with two Common Crossbill, Tynninghame, Lothian, June 2014. © Geoff Morgan

Two-barred Crossbills, Tynninghame, June 2014 - first record for Lothian

N. MILLIGAN

On 8 June 2014, I arrived in a wooded area of Tynninghame, East Lothian at 10:30 hoping to see a singing Greenish Warbler that had been found the previous day. The woods at the mouth of the Hedderwick Burn contain some mature trees including Scots Pines. Unfortunately, as I arrived at the site I was informed by the half a dozen birders present that the bird had stopped singing five or ten minutes previously and would therefore be very difficult to locate among the many trees that it was frequenting. Most of the birders then moved away and I and another watched and listened for the bird without success.

We were looking into the light and after about ten minutes I moved to the outside of the trees and followed a track to where I could access the site with the sun more or less behind me. As I was checking the trees for any small passerines,

I noticed some movement in the tops of a group of tall Scots Pines. I soon picked up what I took to be a female Common Crossbill moving about the highest sections of the trees. I then noticed a bright male crossbill nearby. I concentrated on looking at this and although I could see mainly the underparts as it fed on cones almost directly above me, it occasionally moved its position and it was during one of these movements that I thought I had seen a flash of white on its upperparts (I even asked myself the question!). Concentration levels suddenly shot up and, although it was sometimes surprisingly elusive, on one occasion when it turned almost upside-down, I saw two very prominent, white wing bars on each wing. It then moved quickly amongst the branches and I lost sight of it. I remember thinking at the time in a matter-of-fact way "ah, Two-barred Crossbill" - even though it was a species new to me.

The bird remained hidden in the dense cover of the trees, but after a few minutes, the other crossbills (there was another female present) started calling and the male came into view and perched on an exposed branch for about 30 seconds. Fortunately, I was ready for this and managed to get some photographs of the bird before it and the two others flew into another dense pine where they were impossible to see.

I waited for about ten minutes, but, unable to see the birds, I returned to my original position to inform the other birders (two more had arrived in the interim) of what I had seen. However, at this time the Greenish Warbler was singing and showing very well so for the time being, the crossbill was of secondary interest.

The Greenish Warbler then moved off and I then gave the others my account of the Two-barred Crossbill and showed them some photos of it on the back of my camera. Some of the group had seen this species before and reckoned that from the photos I had taken, that it looked "pretty good for a Two-barred". We then went to look for the crossbills, but, disappointingly, could not see or hear them.

After about 15 minutes, and having failed to see or hear the birds, I rather cautiously decided to put the news out on the local grapevine as a "probable" mainly because I was aware of Common Crossbills with wing bars and also because I had not noticed the white on the tertials nor heard the apparent diagnostic call. (Later, after researching the Common Crossbills with wing bars issue at home, there was no doubt that the male was a Two-barred as none of the Commons with wing bars in the various articles that I had read had anywhere near as much white on them as the Tynningame bird).

I stayed in the area for a further two hours but although I could occasionally hear the crossbills give their usual chattering call, frustratingly I was never able to see them again. Fortunately, the birds were heard calling a few hours later in the afternoon by Kris Gibb and Mike Hodgkin giving their 'piping' calls and in the evening the male and at least one female were seen by Geoff Morgan and Chris Rodger. This was followed the next day with Dennis Morrison seeing three birds (a male and two females) and Calum Scott finding seven birds present (two males and five females) the day after that. The presence of both



Plates 364–365. Two-barred Crossbills, Tynningame, Lothian, June 2014. © Dennis Morrison



Plates 366–367. Two-barred Crossbills, Tynninghame, Lothian, June 2014. © Chris Rodger & Mike Hodgkin

the Greenish Warbler and the Two-barred Crossbills in the same place ensured that many birders paid the area a visit. However, although the crossbills were seen by many, the birds were not seen by everyone that went to look for them and some successful observers spent many hours in the area before catching sight of them such was their unobtrusiveness when remaining quiet and feeding high in the trees. The birds were last seen in the evening of 10 June despite birders looking for them on subsequent days.

Description

If the upperparts are seen well, Two-barred Crossbill is not a difficult bird to identify. Both sexes respectively, are superficially like Common Crossbill, but may look smaller and slimmer and have two very prominent white wing bars on the median and greater coverts on overall blackish wings. The bar on the greater coverts is longer and broader than that on the medians and crucially, the white on the greater coverts becomes broader towards the inner wing. The tips of the tertials are white, but this is more apparent with some birds than others.

Head, breast, flanks and upperparts of a male are a rosy red colour and on this bird, appeared a lighter colour than the red of a male Common Crossbill that I had photographed a month earlier at Torness. The belly, under-tail coverts and underside of the tail are a light grey with

blackish streaking on the belly and black tips to the coverts. Again compared to the Common Crossbill seen well at Torness, the tail looked longer on the Tynninghame bird with a greater distance between the end of the under-tail coverts and the tips of the tail being apparent.

The bill of Two-barred is smaller and slighter than that of Common but this is a variable feature and there is a size overlap with Common making this feature probably of limited identification use in the field.

The calls of the various species of crossbills are diagnostic but this apparently requires either good experience of the group or field recordings. Two-barred calls are apparently higher pitched than Common and I noted at the time that I thought the calls seemed “more excitable” than those of Common that I could remember. (The birds were only heard to call as they flew from one tree to another, and not while they were feeding.) However, a feature for identifying Two-barred Crossbill in the field is their ‘piping’ call (apparently somewhat similar to a Northern Bullfinch) but as mentioned above I did not hear this although others with previous experience did so.

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Plate 368. Spotted Sandpiper, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, July 2014. © Davie Abraham

Spotted Sandpiper, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, 6–13 July 2014

D. ABRAHAM

On 6 July 2014, late in the afternoon, I was walking along the river in the Easter Braes area of RSPB Baron's Haugh Reserve where I was trying to digi-scope a Common Sandpiper. The bird I was following flew out of view behind a scrub covered island, so I moved further downriver to get to a position where I could partially see behind the island. I hadn't been there long when suddenly two sandpipers flew out from behind the island and landed directly opposite me on a small shingle patch, below the far bank. I quickly got onto them as they landed but could scarcely believe my eyes! I could see quite clearly that one of them was heavily spotted on the underside - a smashing, unmistakable, breeding-plumaged Spotted Sandpiper!

I quickly got the scope onto the birds and managed to fire off four to five photos before they flew out of sight behind the island again. I waited for around 40 minutes with no further sight of either of the birds - I had only viewed the Spotted Sandpiper for three minutes max - so I decided to move further upriver of the island in the hope I could see them from a different vantage point. Almost immediately, I relocated the Spotted Sandpiper, it was settled on a strip of muddy shingle on the far side of the river. Again, I fired off a few digi-scoped shots before yet again it flew behind the island and out of sight.



Plate 369. Spotted Sandpiper (with Common Sandpiper), Baron's Haugh, Clyde, July 2014. © *Davie Abraham*

I didn't manage to see it again that evening, but Jimmy Maxwell relocated it further downriver later on, which was a big relief to the selection of local birders who also then managed to see the bird that evening.

It went missing for the next couple of days, but I eventually relocated it on the river near Carbarns Pool on 9 July. It then remained in the Carbarns area early on the next morning, allowing me to photograph and video it for a couple of hours.

Description

Very similar in shape and plumage to a Common Sandpiper, though it had a shorter tail projection and the white underparts were heavily spotted with blackish-grey spots.

Its upperparts were sandy brown with mottled/marbled darker markings. The edges of its tertials were un-notched. It had a pale eye-ringing with a dark eye-stripe and thin white supercillium from its lores to the rear of its head.

In flight, the wing-bar was shorter than in Common Sandpiper and was restricted to the outer secondaries and inner primaries.

The bill was orangish, darkening near the tip and its legs were patchy orange and pale yellowish in colour.

On the morning of 10 July, it was very vocal and its call sounded like a quieter version of a Green Sandpiper.

This record constitutes the second record of Spotted Sandpiper for the Clyde recording area. The first was a single bird at Balgray Reservoir from 27 September to 2 October 1991.

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Plate 370. Spotted Sandpiper, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, July 2014. © *Davie Abraham*



Plate 371. Bridled Tern, Fair Isle, June 2014. © Roger Riddington

Bridled Tern in Scotland, June to July 2014

D. PARNABY & W. BARBER

Bridled Tern on Fair Isle, 16–19 June

Everyone has their bogey birds, species that they just can't seem to catch up with and I've had a few over the years. Rarely had an individual bird been as annoying though as the Bridled Tern at various sites on the British east coast in 2013. Having first turned up at my former workplace of the Farne Islands (Northumberland), I planned a weekend twitch from Fair Isle for it, only to be foiled by fog preventing me from leaving the island. Such a rare bird, behaving so ridiculously in such a wonderful location tempted me again though and a trip south visiting family and friends later in the summer was going to involve stopping off on the way to see it. The bird then chose the day I was travelling south to disappear and turn up on the Isle of May, before returning to the Farnes when I was back on Fair Isle and later moving to the Ythan estuary (a site about five miles from where I lived before moving to Fair Isle), where

one of the FIBO Assistant Wardens, Richard Cope, connected with it, despite only being there as his return back from holiday had been delayed! I had started to assume that it was something personal that this individual bird had against me, but in actual fact, it seemed that it had something far more special planned for me all along...

An incredible spring of rarities on Fair Isle had seen a run of megas (Cretzschmar's Bunting, Caspian Stonechat, Hermit Thrush, Calandra Lark, Collared Flycatcher and Moltoni's Warbler leading the way) and so, despite the north-westerly winds, the wardening team were confident of more good birds. Indeed, as we wandered towards Bunes to count the Arctic Tern colony, a quick 'sweepstake' of how many nests would be found saw RC guess, rather presciently, 'I don't think we'll get to count the terns, there's going to be something good found first'.



As we split up to begin the first sweep through the colony, an unfamiliar, but slightly Common Gull-like honking call caused me to look up into the small knot of Arctic Terns that had begun to mob us. To stay I was stunned would be an understatement, for just a few metres above our heads was a dark-mantled tern, with a white forehead. It's the first time I can recall that a rarity has left me truly lost for words, but I managed to attract the rest of the team's attention with a series of grunts and some frantic pointing and eventually my brain calmed down enough to realise that the call, the tapering supercilium extending beyond the eye and the contrast between the darker flight feathers and the mantle all pointed to the identification of the bird as Bridled Tern.

We started calling the rest of the Obs staff, guests and islanders as well as getting the news out so that Shetland birders could get the afternoon flight to Fair Isle (I'm not sure whether it's true that the usual flight path of the plane coming in over Bunness was changed due to the howls of protest from the Shetland birders worried the tern would be flushed!) and soon everyone was enjoying stunning views.

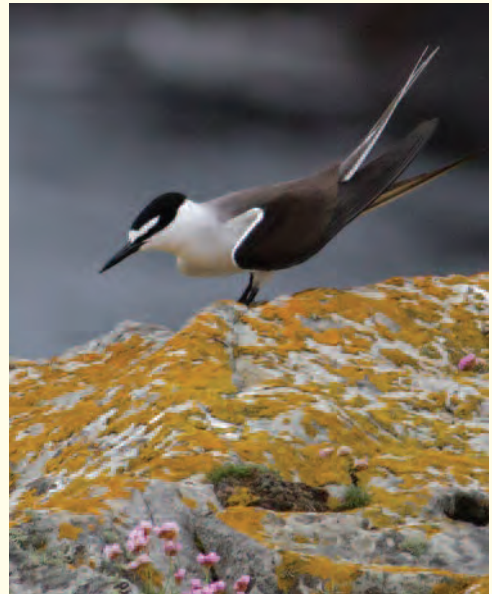
A very distinctive bird, it was typically unconcerned by being watched and would make regular passes over the small gang of people who turned up to see it, allowing the plumage details shown so well in the accompanying photos to be enjoyed. It was interesting to note the various thoughts on the bird's size, as the dark body perhaps made it look larger than it actually was, whilst its flight style was fairly distinct (being likened to a cross between a tern and a skua by some).

After having its advances spurned by the local Arctic Terns (it was seen display-flying and attempting to courtship feed them), it became more erratic in its appearances in following days, with 17th seeing an early morning visit to Bunness then a reappearance in the small colony at Shalstane (which also attracts a reasonable number of non-breeding terns) that afternoon, where it was seen again on the morning of 18th

and the afternoon of 19th (where it was briefly joined by a Laughing Gull found by visiting Shetland birders looking for the tern!). By 20th, the bird was back on the Farne Islands (which, a quick calculation would suggest, was a journey completed at a 17 mph average speed, allowing for just three hours rest overnight and taking the most direct line available).

Just four days later two Roseate Terns joined the colony at Shalstane briefly (just the fourth Fair Isle record of this species), whilst a Sandwich Tern (just about annual on the island) was recorded on 26th and made it a record-breaking year for terns on Fair Isle: the first time five species have ever been recorded in a single year. With a population of only around 100 pairs of Arctic Tern nesting in 2014, it seems incredible that a vagrant tern of the quality of Bridled Tern was dragged in (especially given all the other, larger colonies it then ignored between Fair Isle and the Farne Islands on its journey south), but birding can sometimes be very good like that and a self-found lifer on my own patch makes me quite glad in the end that I failed to catch up with it last year.

David Parnaby, Fair Isle Bird Observatory



Plates 372–375 (opposite). Bridled Tern, Fair Isle, June 2014. © Roger Riddington

Plate 376. Bridled Tern displaying to an out-of-shot Arctic Tern, Fair Isle, June 2014. © Roger Riddington



Plate 377. Bridled Tern, Port Seton, Lothian, July 2013. © Billy Barber

Bridled Tern at Port Seton, Lothian, 9 July

Although I no longer have my dogs which need their morning walk, over the summer I still enjoy a daily visit to the promenade in Port Seton, watching the birds on the foreshore. Relying on crutches and a buggy, this is an accessible site with good birds to see.

There was a slack tide when I arrived on 9 July and the birds were sitting far down on the rocks called the Wrecked Craigs. The weather was fine and warm, and there was no visible cloud. The rocks between the promenade and the harbour get very little foot traffic; the tourists and dog walkers tend to stay on the sand and rocks further east. I could see waders, gulls and terns lifting and settling again as the tide began to force them towards me.

Whilst watching the Sandwich Terns, I noticed one bird which had a distinctly different flight pattern. With binoculars, I could see dark wings and a slow effortless, buoyant flight. I moved my buggy over to get a better view, but from my height, it was difficult to get a clear shot through the handrails, so I manoeuvred down to the lower level.

At first I could not determine whether it was a Sooty or a Bridled Tern. I watched the bird for five minutes and suspected that it was a Bridled

Tern. At 12:20, I took some shots of the bird as it had conveniently settled on the nearby rocks (Plate 377). The bird was about 70 yards away and I used a Canon Powershot 50XS. The bird kept apart from the Sandwich Terns which were also present. After 20 minutes, the bird flew off and headed west towards Prestonpans.

On returning home, I checked with the *Collins Guide*. I was able to eliminate the Sooty Tern and confirmed it was a Bridled Tern. A text to the Birding Lothian grapevine was followed through with confirmation photographs. Soon after, I was told that Dave Allan was on his way to look for the tern around the harbour area. Unfortunately, despite people checking great lengths of the Lothian coastline that afternoon and evening, it couldn't be relocated.

So, I was pleased to hear that the bird had been seen again early the following morning at Seacliff, between North Berwick and Tantallon Castle. This is a fairly inaccessible spot for someone who uses crutches, so I was unable to get along to see the bird again myself. However, the photographs of the bird which soon appeared on the internet were a delight.

Billy Barber, Port Seton, Lothian.

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 July to 30 September 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.

A few rarities lingered from June, and there were a few new surprises in July. August had a series of westerlies, resulting in moderate numbers of Nearctic waders discovered in the north and west, while September produced a steady stream of eastern gems, and a few vagrant North American passerines. Unsurprisingly the Northern Isles picked up most of the prized birds.

Snow Goose: a white-morph was at Widewall, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9–10 September. **Ross's Goose:** one was at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 22–27 September. **Vagrant Canada Geese:** a presumed vagrant of one of the larger forms was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 28 September. **Egyptian Goose:** one was at Cambusmore GP (UF) on 20 July. **American Wigeon:** a drake was at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve (P&K) on 7 July, and presumed returning drakes were seen at Vane Farm/Loch Leven again from 23 September, and

Sanday (Ork) from 29th. **Ring-necked Duck:** a drake was at Murton Gravel Pit (A&D) from June to 4 August, with presumed returning drakes at Meikle Loch (NES) from 2–3 September and at Kyle of Durness (High) on 13 September. **Lesser Scaup:** one was at Loch Leven (P&K) on 8 July. **King Eider:** a female was noted at Basta Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 4th and 27–30 September, with an adult drake in Burghhead Bay (M&N) on 26 September. **Surf Scoter:** a female was among the scoter flock off Murcar/Blackdog (NES) from 1 July, and a male from 12th, with two drakes and a female noted from 24 July to 19 August, then two drakes still to 11 September, then a single drake on 16th, and a female again on 24–26 September. An immature drake was off Brora (High) on 21 September.

White-billed Diver: one was in Thurso Bay (Caith) on 19 July. **Cory's Shearwater:** singles flew past Lossiemouth (M&N) on 29 July and 14 August - only the second and third records for the area; one was seen off the Ardrosan–Broddick ferry (Ayr) on 20 August; one flew past Rubha Reidh (High) on 28 August, and one flew south past Barns Ness (Loth) on 14 September; **Great Shearwater:** one flew past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21 August; one flew north past St Abbs (Bord) and then at Barns Ness (Loth) on 21 September, with two seen off Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) also on 21 September and another off North Ronaldsay on 22 September. **Balearic Shearwater:** one was seen off North Ronaldsay

(Ork) on 19 July; one flew past Powillmount (D&G) on 3 August; one flew north at Saltcoats (Ayr), one flew south past Corsewall Point (D&G), and one was off Aird, Tiree (Arg) on 11 August; another flew north past Saltcoats on 17th; one south at Troon Harbour (Ayr) on 21st; one was seen off Peterhead (NES) on 30 August; one again from Saltcoats on 8 September, and one went north past St Abbs (Bord) on 21st. **Swinhoe's Petrel:** remarkably one of the two birds ringed on Fair Isle in 2013 was retrapped there on 9 July, and several times subsequently up to 31 July.



Plate 378. Swinhoe's Petrel, Fair Isle, July 2014. © Ciaran Hatsell

Little Egret: reported in good numbers from SE and SW sites, with nine at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 27 August constituting a new Scottish record count; also notable were five at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 8 September. **Great White Egret:** one was seen between Creetown and Palmure (D&G) on 7 August, and one was at the Hirsell CP (Bord) on 8 August. **Glossy Ibis:** the lingering bird at Loch Leven/Vane Farm RSPB Reserve (P&K) was noted intermittently to 20 August. **Spoonbill:** two were still at Findhorn (M&N) from June to 3 July, and again from 21–27 July at least, with three there on 6–23 August. Two were at Kincardine Bridge/Powfoulis (UF) on 12 July, and nearby at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve the next day; two were at Loch of Mey (Caith) on 18 July; one flew over Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 29 July. One was at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 24 August, with it, or another at Tynninghame (Loth) on 7 September; one flew over Lossiemouth (M&N) on 11 September, and was presumably the bird noted nearby at Findhorn from 16 September into October.

Honey-buzzard: one flew over Finstown, Mainland (Ork) on 1 July; one was on Foula (Shet) on 6 July; one flew over North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7 August; one flew south over Aberdeen (NES) on 16 September, and a dark-morph flew over Dollar (UF) on 21 September. **Pallid Harrier:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 31 August; a juvenile was on Fair Isle on 8–17 September; a juvenile was on Foula (Shet) on 17th and 19 September; one at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 17th and 20 September and nearby at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 18–19th and 21st; a juvenile flew south over Fleck, Mainland (Shet) also on 21st, and a juvenile was at Quoyangry, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 September. **Red-footed**

Falcon: a first-summer male was seen near Dounby, Mainland (Ork) on 22nd and Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 27 July. **Hobby:** singles were at Lochindorb (High) and over Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 2 July; two first-summer males at Langholm (D&G) on 2–8 July, with one still to 10th; at Thirlestane (Bord) on 14th; at Airds Moss/Cronberry (Ayr) on 17 July; near Straloch (P&K) on 19 July; at Bridgend, Islay (Arg) on 22 July; at Forfar Loch and Kinnaber (A&D) on 12 August; at Forfar and Lunan Bay (both A&D) on 22 August, and at Auchmithie (A&D) on 27th. Further singles were at Scalasaig, Colonsay (Arg) on 14 September; on Burray (Ork) on 18 September, and South Ronaldsay (Ork) the next day; at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 28th, and at Millport (Ayr) and Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 29th. **Common Crane:** five flew over Boyndlie (NES) on 7 August; one was near Brechin (A&D) on 23 August; one was at Udale Bay (High) on 31 August to 8 September; one on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 12–14th and 20 September, and one near Glamis (A&D) on 30 September.

American Golden Plover: one in moult seen at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 11 August was subsequently noted on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15 August. A first-summer was on Tiree (Arg) from 3–13 September; one was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 14 September; one at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 20th; one at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 28th, and at Balevulin, Tiree on 30 September. **Pacific Golden Plover:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 23 July to 11 August. **White-rumped**

Sandpiper: one was at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 29–30 July, and one at Gott Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 31 August. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** one lingered at Haroldswick Pool, Unst (Shet) from 28 June to 8 July. One was at

Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 7–9 July; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 31 July to 1 August, one at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 4–8 August; two were reported at Dalmaca Pool, near Drongan (Ayr) on 11 August, and again on 17th. In September there were singles at Fair Isle on 3–6th; at Grutness, Mainland (Shet), at Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 4th; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 4–6th; at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 6–9th; one near Nairn (M&N) on 6–13th, and two juveniles at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 7th. Further singles were on Foula (Shet) on 8th and 10th; at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 9–14th; at Tynninghame Bay (Loth) on 9–14th, with one nearby at Broxmouth (Loth) on 11–16th, and one at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 10th. Three juveniles were at Ardkenneth/Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 14 September, with one still on 17th; one at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 20th; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–26th; a juvenile at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 24–27th; one at Loch Bee, South Uist on 25th, and one flew over Balgarva, South Uist on 30 September.

Temminck's Stint: singles were at St Andrews, Fife on 22 July, and at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 24–30 September. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 4–8 September; one on Fair Isle on 10–15 September; one at Ardivachar, South Uist (OH) on 10 September, with two at Kilaulay, South Uist on 12th, three there on 14th, and one still on 15th. Two were at Exnaboe/Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 14–23 September, with singles at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 18th; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 25–26th, with it, or another, nearby at Drums (NES) on 27 September to 1 October. **Great Snipe:** one was at Ham, Foula (Shet) on 24–27



Plate 379. Sabine's Gull, Lossie Estuary, September 2014. © David Main

September. **Spotted Sandpiper:** an adult in summer plumage was at Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve /Lower Carbarns, Clyde on 6–18 July. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was near Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 29 July. **Grey Phalarope:** the summering bird on North Ronaldsay (Ork) remained to 17 July. One was at Machir Bay, Islay (Arg) on 20 August; one at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 6 September, and one on North Ronaldsay on 27 September.

Pomarine Skua: early returning birds were one off Saltcoats (Ayr) on 3 July; one off St Abb's Head (Bord) on 23 July; singles off Powillimount (D&G) on 2nd, 3rd and 6 August; one off Rousay (Ork) and two past Barns Ness (Loth) on 6th; another past Powillimount on 11th; with singles off Seafield (Loth) on 18 August; over Aberdeen Harbour (NES) and at Barns Ness (Loth) on 19th, and at Chanonry Point (High) and Girdleness (NES) on 20 August.

Long-tailed Skua: relatively few early passage birds: one was seen

from Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 4 July, one passed Dunbar (Loth) on 15th, and one was in Gosford Bay (Loth) on 20 July. Two were at Burma Bank off Skye (High) on 5 August; one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 11 August; one off the Kennacraig–Port Ellen ferry (Arg) on 24th, with three past Rubha Reidh (Arg) on 28 August. **Sabine's Gull:** three were in Staffin Bay off Skye on 1 August, with two in the same area on 8 August, and singles there on 11th and 15 August. An adult was at Fraserburgh (NES) on 3 September; an adult at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 4th; a juvenile at Castlehill (Caith) on 7th; singles off the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry (High), off the Shiant Islands (High), and at Cairnbulg (NES) on 8th. A first-summer and two juveniles were noted near Burma Bank off the Shiant Islands (High) on 10 September, with singles in that area on 11–12th, and a juvenile and four adults on 14th. One was seen off St Abbs Head (Bord) on 11 September; one from the Oban–Barra ferry (Arg) on 13 September, two at Rona Bank off Skye on 14th; two off Rubha

Rheidh (High) and one at Rona Bank (High) on 15th; and five juveniles and an adult at Rona Bank on 16th, and five birds there on 17th. A juvenile was seen off the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry on 19th, with an adult past Barns Ness (Loth) the same day. A juvenile flew past Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 21st; a juvenile was in Spey Bay on 21–22nd; a juvenile was at Burma Bank on 24th; a juvenile flew past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 26th; one passed Nairn (M&N) on 28 September, with it, or another, off Lossiemouth that day.

Mediterranean Gull: seen in good numbers at all the usual sites, though one at Crossapol/Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 29–30 July was notable, and 13 at Barassie (Ayr) on 26 July is a new record site count in Scotland. **Ring-billed Gull:** the presumed returning adult was noted at Dingwall (High) from 8 September; a second-winter was at Kilpheder, South Uist (OH) on 27 September. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult on Foula (ringed in Italy) on 6 July, was found dead on

7th; one was at Bishopburn, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 16–23 July: an adult was at Brow Well (D&G) on 28–29 July, with it, or another, there on 18 August, and an adult was at Seton Sands (Loth) on 3–7 September. **Iceland Gull:** Unseasonal records included one on Fair Isle on 11–20 July, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 16 July. One was seen at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 11 August also Marwick. An adult was at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 29 August. **Kumlien's Gull:** one on Fair Isle on 13–17 August was unusual - and thought to probably involve the juvenile bird from the previous winter/spring. **Glaucous Gull:** a juvenile was found dead at Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 2 July; with other early birds at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 4 August, and at Marwick, Mainland (Ork) on 1 September. **Bridled Tern:** the returning 'Farnes bird' wandered to Port Seton/Seacliff (both Loth) on 9–10 July - the first record for the county. **Caspian Tern:** one was off Barns Ness (Loth) on 7 August.

Snowy Owl: the near adult male which over-summered on the Cairngorms plateau (High/M&N) was noted again from 22 July into October; a male was seen near Inchnadamph (High) on 20 September. **European Bee-eater:** one flew over Aberdeen (NES) on 9 July. **Hoopoe:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25–26 August; one at Veensgarth, Mainland (Shet) on 23 September; one at Catfirth, Mainland (Shet) on 25 September, and one at Crueton, Bressay (Shet) on 27 September. **Wryneck:** the first was one was on Fair Isle on 7 August, with about 20 more in the Northern Isles that month followed by a notable passage 'up north' into October. Peak counts were of five on Fair Isle on 29 August; two on South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 August, and two on North Ronaldsay (Ork)

on 17 September. The only records elsewhere were one at Barns Ness (Loth) on 6–8 September, and one at Boarhills, Fife on 21–22 September.

Red-eyed Vireo: one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 25 September. **Golden Oriole:** one was at Gleann, Barra (OH) on 22 September, and one at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 23 September. **Isabelline Shrike** (Daurian): an adult female was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15–20 September. **Red-backed Shrike:** an adult male was at Strathkanaird, near Ullapool (High) on 21 July; singles were on Fair Isle on 27th and 31 August; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29–31st, and at Northdale, Unst (Shet) on 30 August to 1 September. A first-winter was on Hirta, St Kilda (OH) on 5 September; one at Kilminning Castle, Fife Ness, Fife on 6 September; a first-winter on Fair Isle on 9–10th; one on Noss (Shet) on 17th; a first-winter at Toab, Mainland (Shet) on 18–23rd; another at Cruden Bay (NES) on 21st; one near Boddam (NES) on 22nd; one at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 22–29th; one at St Cyrus (NES) on 23–28th; and one on Sanday (Ork) on 28–30 September. **Lesser Grey Shrike:** a male remained at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) from June to 7 July. **Short-toed Lark:** one was on Fair Isle on 30 August to 6 September, with others there on 18th and 23–24 September, and one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 16–25 September.

Greenish Warbler: one was on Fair Isle on 6 August; one at Exnaboe/Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 7th, and another at Sumburgh Farm (Shet) on 11 August. One was at Bornish, South Uist on 3–4 September - the third for the Outer Hebrides; one at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 13 September; one at Breibhig, Barra on 18th; one on Foula (both Shet) on 19th; one at Sandwick, Whalsay

on 19–20th, and one at Lower Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 28 September. **Arctic Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 22 August; one on Foula (Shet) on 29 August; one at Sandwick, Whalsay (Shet) on 1 September; one on Foula on 3–5 September; one at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 20 September; one at Garth, Mainland (Shet) on 21–22nd, and one on Fair Isle on 22 September. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** the first of the autumn was at Toab, Mainland (Shet) on 10 September, with many seen daily on the Northern Isles from 14th into October and peak counts of five on Whalsay (Shet) on 19th, and Out Skerries (Shet) on 20–30th; nine on Fair Isle on 15th, and 13 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 16th. Elsewhere there were at least one in Caithness, two in Highland, 17 in Aberdeenshire, three in Angus, two in Fife, two on the Isle of May, eight in Lothian, two in Borders, and two on Barra (OH). Particularly notable were two at Auchie Glen (D&G) on 25 September. **Iberian Chiffchaff:** the bird at Rousay (Ork) remained from June to 7 July.

Barred Warbler: early individuals were on Fair Isle on 5–7 August, and on Out Skerries (Shet) on 8th, with two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 August. Birds were then noted through into October, with most records on the Northern Isles with peaks there in August of four at Norwick, Unst (Shet), 10 on Fair Isle on 31st, and three on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30th. High counts there in September were of three on Out Skeries (Shet) on 19th; three at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 22nd; five on Fair Isle on 11th, and five on North Ronaldsay on 19th. Elsewhere there were singles at Grenitote, North Uist (OH) on 1–3 September; at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 4–8 September, at Vaul, Tiree (Arg) on 6–8th; at Carinish, North Uist (OH) on 7th; at Balephuill, Tiree on 8th and 12th;

on the Isle of May on 8–11th; at Carnan Mor, Tiree on 9th; at Gleann, Barra (OH) on 9th; at Grenitote, North Uist on 10th, with two there on 11–12th, and one still to 22nd; at Bornish, South Uist on 11th; at ‘the Patch’, Fife Ness, Fife and at Vaults Wood, near Dunbar (Loth) on 12th, and at Collieston (NES) on 13th. Singles were seen at Kyle of Dumess (High) on 14 September, and at Skateraw (Loth) on 14–18th; on the Isle of May on 15th; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 16th; at lochdar, South Uist on 16–17th; at Morar (High) and at Kilminning, Fife Ness on 17th; at Ardmhor Plantation, Barra on 17–18th; at Kings Links, Aberdeen (NES) and near St Andrews, Fife on 19th; at Torness Point (Loth) on 21st; at Eoiligarry Church, Barra on 21st; at Carnoustie (A&D) on 21st; at Breibhig, Barra on 23rd; at Dumess (High) on 24th; at Thurso (Caith) on 27th; three on Barra on 28th, with one still on 29–30th.

Eastern Subalpine Warbler: two were at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 22–24 September, with one still present into October. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was on the Isle of May on 11 September, and one on Fair Isle on 22 September. **Icterine Warbler:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7 August, with another there on 26 August; one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 12–13 August; one on Fair Isle on 26 August; one at Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 30 August; one at Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 2 September; one at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 5–7 September, and one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 20 September. **Melodious Warbler:** one was at Ormiclate, South Uist (OH) on 23–25 August; one at Scarinish, Tiree (Arg) on 18–28 September, and one at Gleann, Barra (OH) on 22–29 September. **Booted Warbler:** one was at Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 10–15 August, and one at The Bu, Burray (Ork) on

30 August. **Paddyfield Warbler:** one was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 1 September; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4–10 September, and one on Fair Isle on 5th. **Blyth’s Reed Warbler:** singles were on Fair Isle on 14th and 16 August; at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 21st; on Foula (Shet) on 25th; at Kirkton of Logie Buchan (NES) on 30 August, and one at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 22 September. **Marsh Warbler:** two lingered on Fair Isle from June to 5 July, with one still to 17th. One was on Fair Isle on 15 August, and one at Gulberwick, Mainland (Shet) on 30 August. Singles were at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 17 September, and at Lund, Unst on 24–30 September. **Great Reed Warbler:** one was at South Ham, Bressay (Shet) on 20 September.

Waxwing: the only reports were of four at Stromness, Mainland (Ork) and at least one heard flying over Thurso (Caith) on 19 September. **Rose-coloured Starling:** one was at Forss, near Scrabster (Caith) on 17 July; a juvenile on North

Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6–17 September; one at Kelso (Bord) on 8 September; one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 9 September; one on Foula on 19–25th; a juvenile on Fair Isle on 20–29th, and a juvenile was at Balnakeil (High) on 23 September. **White’s Thrush:** one was at Durigarth, Mainland (Shet) on 29–30 September. **Swainson’s Thrush:** one was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 28 September. **Eyebrowed Thrush:** a male was on North Ronaldsay on 30 September. **Bluethroat:** all records were from September - two were on Fair Isle on 18–20th, with one on 21–22nd and 24–27th; two were on Foula (Shet) on 18–19th; one was at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 18th; a male at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 22–29th; one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 22–30th, and one on Sanday (Ork) on 30th. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** a female/first-winter was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 19 September. **Isabelline Wheatear:** one was seen at Scotvein, Grimsay on 29 August - a first for the Outer



Plate 380. Melodious Warbler, Tiree, Argyll, September 2014. © Jim Dickson



Plate 381. Red-breasted Flycatcher, Girdleness, North-east Scotland, September 2014. © Ian Hastie

Hebrides if accepted. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 8 September; a mini-influx to the Northern Isles and east coast brought two to Whalsay (Shet) and singles to Fair Isle, North Ronaldsay (Ork), Bulters of Buchan, Whinnyfold and Girdleness (all NES) and Craigeith (Loth) on 14 September, with further singles at Tarbat Ness (High), Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) and the Isle of May on 15th, with a high count of four on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15–17th. Subsequent records mostly on Northern Isles, but sightings elsewhere included singles at Girdleness (NES) on 18–19th; at Rattray Head (NES) on 18th, with two there on 19th; two at North Locheynort, South Uist (OH) and singles at Kilminning/Balcomie, Fife Ness, Fife on 19–21st; Eoligarry Church, Barra on 21st; at West Seaton Farm (A&D) on 22nd, on Barra on 26th, and near Greenhill, Tiree (Arg) on 30 September.

Yellow Wagtail: a notable count of 12 birds came from Barns Ness (Loth) on 10 August. **Citrine**

Wagtail: single juveniles were at Nigg Bay, near Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) on 28 August; at Barns Ness (Loth) on 28 August, and Howmore, South Uist (OH) on 31 August to 10 September; one on the Isle of May on 4–5 September; at Borve Point, Benbecula (OH) on 7th; a first-winter at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 12 September; a first-winter was at Balgarva, South Uist on 13th, and one flew over Fair Isle on 17 September. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were on Fair Isle on 17 September, and 21–24 September. **Olive-backed Pipit:** singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18–20 September, and Fair Isle on 21–22nd. **Pechora Pipit:** singles were at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 22–25 September, and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 September. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was at Rattray Head (NES) on 16 September; one on Fair Isle on 20–24 September, and one flew over Loch of Clumlie, Mainland (Shet) on 30 September.

Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll: one was at Veensgarth, Mainland (Shet) on 26–28 September.

Common Rosefinch: first in the period was one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 8 August, with one at Askernish, South Uist (OH) on 10 August; one on Fair Isle from 15 August, with four there on 27th, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19 August. Thereafter reported daily through to October, mostly from the Northern Isles, with high counts there of four on Unst (Shet) on 21 August; four on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25–30 August and 4 September; five on Fair Isle on 5 September; four at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 10 September. Elsewhere the only records were singles on the Isle of May on 27 August and 3–5 September, and at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 12 September. **Rustic Bunting:** the only report was of one at Halligarth/ Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 5 August, and which lingered into October - the first August record for Britain. **Little Bunting:** all records were from September - one was on Foula on 11–12th; one on Fair Isle on 16–20th; two were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17th, one still on 18th, and two on 19th; two were at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 17–19th, and one still to 23rd. Singles were at Cullivoe, Yell and Exnaboe, Mainland (both Shet) on 18th; at Skaw, Unst on 18th and 20–23rd; one at Fladdabister, Mainland (Shet) on 19th; three on Out Skerries (Shet) on 19th, with two still there on 20–23rd, one on 24–28th, and two on 30th; one at Burrarfirth, Mainland (Shet) on 20th; one at Westing, Unst on 21st; one at Baltasound, Unst on 26–27th; one at Eswick, Mainland (Shet) on 30th, and one on Fair Isle on 30th. **Black-headed Bunting:** one was at Sumburgh Quarry, Mainland (Shet) on 4 September, and one at Out Skerries (Shet) on 29th. **Yellow-rumped Warbler:** one was at Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 29 September, and nearby at Grutness from 30th into October.

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Plate 382. During July and August each year, large feeding flocks of Manx Shearwaters gather in the lower Clyde, from the island of Little Cumbrae southwards. Although it's possible to get close views of them from places like Troon and Maidens, they rarely come close enough to photograph. The paddle steamer *Waverley* offers a regular Monday afternoon sailing from Ayr, passing around Ailsa Craig, during the summer, and these give you a great chance to see one of our magnificent seabird colonies at close range.

It's largely a matter of hit-and-miss when you pass flocks of Manxies as to how they'll react to the approaching ship, but most (unsurprisingly) tend to fly off in a direction which takes them away from you. During July this year, having tried on various occasions to catch one flying towards me, I was lucky enough to spot one taking off and heading towards the vessel. My camera (a Nikon D300S with a Sigma 500 mm f4.5 lens) was readied, and this obliging individual chose to rise into the afternoon sunlight just off the starboard bow. For those interested in the settings, the ISO was set at 1600 and the shutter speed was 1/800.

It's important to 'occupy' an area on board where you can be sure that you're unlikely to be affected by obtrusive rigging or be nudged by other passengers (not always easy on a packed boat). However, the good forward view and extremely stable deck of the *Waverley* make it relatively easy to avoid other problems such as vibration. After that, you just have to hope for a sunny day and reasonably calm seas!

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