



Scottish Birds

published by the
SCOTTISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB



VOLUME 35(1) MARCH 2015

Scottish Birds

Established in 1958.

Published quarterly by:

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club,
Waterston House, Aberlady,
East Lothian EH32 0PY.

Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk

Phone: 01875 871330

www.the-soc.org.uk

www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub

twitter.com/ScottishBirding

Editors:

Co-ordinating editor

Ian Andrews

Peer-reviewed papers

Dr Stan da Prato

Assisted by:

Dr I. Bainbridge

Dr M. Marquiss

Dr J.B. Nelson

R. Swann

Articles, news and views

Jimmy Maxwell

Dr Stuart L. Rivers

Harry Scott

Editorial correspondence:

c/o SOC, Waterston House,
Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.

Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk

To advertise in *Scottish Birds* or
obtain back issues, please contact
Waterston House.

Designed and typeset by:

Pica Design, 51 Charlton Crescent,
Aboyne, Aberdeenshire AB34 5GN.

Email: pica@pica.co.uk

Printed by:

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

Front Cover:

Fulmar, Fair Isle, June 2014.

© Rebecca Nason

ISSN 0036-9144

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

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

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

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club; Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

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

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

Join us...

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

Annual membership rates*

Adult (aged 18 and over)	£ 32.00
Family (2 adults & all juniors at same address)	£ 43.00
Junior (aged 17 or under)	£ 12.00
Student (in full-time education)	£ 12.00
Unwaged (in receipt of state benefits)	£ 12.00
Concession (pensioner)	£ 24.00
Joint Concession (at same address)	£ 31.00
Life	£ 620.00
Life family (at same address)	£ 930.00

For non-UK addresses, there is a £15 supplement to all categories to cover postage.

* 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



Scottish Charity Reg. No.

SC 009859

Scottish Birds 35:1 (2015)

- 2 President's Foreword C. McInerney

PAPERS

- 3 The status of the Gannet in Scotland in 2013–14 S. Murray, M.P. Harris & S. Wanless
19 A review of the status of breeding Black-necked Grebes in Scotland M. Holling

SHORT NOTES

- 26 Changes in numbers of wintering Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes in south-west Scotland
P.N. Collin
28 A dead Osprey chick in a double-shelled egg J. Savory, D. Bennett & T. Lightley
30 Red-backed Shrikes breeding in Moray in 2013 M. Cook

OBITUARIES

- 32 James Stewart (1926–2014) T. Delaney & K.S. Macgregor

ARTICLES, NEWS & VIEWS

- 34 A year in the life of Mousa: island nature reserve jewel W. Miles
42 NEWS AND NOTICES
44 Bird Photography Code of Practice D. Tipling
48 Artist's Profile: Lucy Newton
50 I thought you knew! A. Hogg
54 BOOK REVIEWS
56 RINGERS' ROUNDUP
61 2014 - a record breaking year on Fair Isle D. Parnaby
67 Marsh Warbler in first-winter plumage - SBRC identification criteria M.S. Chapman on behalf
of the Scottish Birds Records Committee
78 Booted Warbler, Torness, 11–23 October 2014 - first record for Lothian I.J. Andrews & M. Eden
82 Scarlet Tanager, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 6–9 October 2014 - the first Scottish record K. Gillon
85 Cetti's Warbler, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 12 October 2014 - the second Scottish record C. Scott
87 Black-billed Cuckoo, North Ronaldsay, 23 October 2014 - first record for Orkney M. Warren
89 Spotted Sandpiper, Inverallochy, October 2014 to January 2015 - first record for North-east
Scotland P.A.A. Baxter, S.J. Baxter & M.B. Cowie

SCOTTISH BIRD SIGHTINGS

- 92 1 October to 31 December 2014 S.L. Rivers

PHOTOSPOT

- BC Water Rail D. Main



President's Foreword

The Club journal, *Scottish Birds*, has been running in its current format since June 2009. It is fantastic, with an excellent blend of scientific papers, notes, news and descriptions of Club activities, which together showcase the SOC and its members in a wonderful way. The editorial team, led by Ian Andrews, does a huge amount of work to create each issue and I am sure I speak for all members when I offer my fulsome thanks to them. Certainly, I eagerly look forward to the next issue and all copies are carefully stored on my bookcase! Of course a major part of a journal is the quality of the articles that it publishes, and the editors are very grateful to all authors for their submissions.

Can I therefore, on behalf of the editors, make a

request to members to consider contributing to *Scottish Birds*. The journal is very inclusive and welcomes all submissions. If you have an article or note, or anything that you think would be of interest to other members, please contact Waterston House.

To update members on the conversion of the SOC to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO): following support for this at the AGM, the Club's solicitors Morton Fraser made an application to OSCR, the Scottish Charity Regulator, and we have recently received preliminary approval. More work still has to be done, but we are hopeful that the conversion will occur on schedule at the end of the financial year, in late March 2015. I thank Alan Fox for taking a leading role in this process.

The Scottish Birdfair (Scotland's Big Nature Festival) will be running again this year in May, but with a change in venue being held at Musselburgh, in East Lothian. The SOC will be present at this important event; please see the announcement section for details.

Turning to bird recording, and the SOC Local Recorders' network, I'd like to welcome Ian Ricketts as the new Local Recorder for the Outer Hebrides (see inside back cover for contact details). Moving to the Clyde branch I extend my thanks to Val Wilson for the work she does as Local Recorder, but also in running the grapevine. This daily email service passes on bird sightings to branch members and has been a great source of information. Val has recently upgraded the service to Mailchimp and the new messages look very professional. Perhaps other branches might consider using such a system; they are a great way to pass on information and to keep in touch with members. If any branches are interested, please contact Jane Cleaver at Waterston House who will be happy to help.

As I write, we have just had the second fall of snow in Glasgow this winter. Such conditions change bird behaviour and movements. The brightness caused by the snow has resulted in Robins singing in my back garden through the night, and I watched the unusual sight this morning of a Pied Wagtail feeding on the busy pavement at Byres Road. Let us hope this cold snap does not last and that milder weather comes soon.

Best wishes to all in 2015.
Chris McInerny, SOC President



Plate 2. Bass Rock, the world's largest Gannet colony, 23 June 2014. © S. Murray

The status of the Gannet in Scotland in 2013–14

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

All 16 Gannet colonies in Scotland were counted in 2013–14. Combined colony totals indicated that Scotland currently holds 243,505 apparently occupied sites (58% and 46% of the east Atlantic and world populations, respectively). Numbers were divided very unevenly between the colonies with Bass Rock (now the world's largest colony), St Kilda and Ailsa Craig together holding 70% of the Scottish population. Gannets started to nest on Barra Head, Berneray in 2007 and breeding may now be regular on Rockall. Numbers at St Kilda, Sule Stack and Scar Rocks were stable, but all other colonies had increased, some spectacularly. Overall the Scottish population increased by 33% between 2003–04 and 2013–14 at an average rate of increase of 2.9% per annum. Although the Gannet appears less vulnerable to climate change than many other UK seabirds, the proposed construction of major offshore wind farms close to colonies in the North Sea and the imminent ban on fishery discards, could pose future threats to this species.

Introduction

Decadal counts of the number of Gannets *Morus bassanus* at colonies in Britain and Ireland have been made since the 1980s (Murray & Wanless 1986, 1997, Murray *et al.* 2006). At the time of the last census in 2003–04, Scotland had 14 gannetries containing 182,511 apparently occupied sites, which represented 58% of the total for the east Atlantic and 44% of the world populations, respectively (Murray *et al.* 2006). Numbers at most colonies were increasing and new gannetries had been founded at Sule Skerry (2003) and Westray (2003). However, the overall rate of increase of the Scottish Gannet population appeared to have slowed compared to the previous 20 years. Given that widespread declines of seabird species have been reported at Scottish colonies since 2000 (Miles 2013), the 2013–14 Gannet survey provided an ideal opportunity to assess the current status of one of Scotland's most iconic species.

Methods

Aerial surveys of St Kilda, the Flannan Isles, Sula Sgeir, Sule Stack and Sule Skerry were made in 2013 under contract to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and full section-by-section details of these counts are given in Wanless *et al.* (2015). Further aerial surveys of Scar Rocks, Ailsa Craig, Hermaness, Troup Head and Bass Rock were made in 2014 in collaboration with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). Other observers counted Foula in 2013 and Barra Head (Berneray), Rockall, Westray, Hermaness (land and sea count), Noss and Fair Isle in 2014. The counts of the Bass Rock and Scar Rocks are documented in detail in Murray *et al.* (2014b,c) and the current paper concentrates on the counts of colonies not detailed elsewhere and gives an overview of the state of the Scottish population in 2013–14.

The 2013–14 survey was carried out using similar methods to those adopted in 1984–85 and refined in 1994–95 and 2003–04. Thus, where possible, colonies were photographed from the air and the numbers of apparently occupied sites (AOS, a site occupied by one or two Gannets irrespective of whether nest material was present) were counted. Although non-breeding birds in ‘club’ areas are easily distinguished when counts are made from the land or sea, they can cause problems during aerial surveys. In practice, most non-breeders fly off in response to the aircraft; those that remain are usually obvious due to (a) the irregular spacing of birds/pairs compared to site holders/nest holders, and (b) the lack of guano that makes the club areas less white than breeding areas. In 2013–14 visits were made to check colony boundaries and the locations of clubs at St Kilda, Flannan Isles, Sula Sgeir, Troup Head, Hermaness, Bass Rock and Ailsa Craig.

Prior to the current survey counts were done by marking AOS either directly on colour prints, or after projecting colour transparencies onto a flat white surface. However, in 2013–14, digital cameras were used for the aerial surveys and the downloaded images were counted on computer screens using either Photoshop or Paint Shop Pro 7 software. This enabled images to be viewed at different magnifications and colour contrasts and each AOS was blocked out with a dot using the paintbrush option. Dot colour was changed after every 100 AOS to facilitate keeping a rough tally of the total and a tally counter was used to keep an accurate running score. Counts were made independently by two or more experienced counters, without knowledge of totals recorded by the other counters, to prevent subconsciously counting high or low because of prior information. Elsewhere, counts were made directly in the field, sometimes augmented by photographs taken from the sea or land. In these cases, the unit was the apparently occupied nest (AON, one or two birds at a site with nest material present). Sites with a chick, but no obvious nest, were included in this category. Neither count unit provides an unbiased estimate of the number of breeding pairs, nor is it strictly correct to equate occupied sites with pairs, as some sites may be held by a single bird for at least a year (Nelson 1978). The unavoidable lack of cross-colony standardisation makes it impossible to calculate a grand total for Scotland in terms of a common unit. Our estimates of the Scottish population, and the east Atlantic and world totals, are therefore, a combination of totals of AOS at the majority of colonies and a few counts of AON. No correction factors were applied to either unit, and for convenience the grand total, is expressed as AOS. Surveys were mainly carried out in June or July, except for Barra Head (May) and the Hermaness aerial survey (August).

Replicate counts during this and previous censuses indicate that within and between observer errors are typically between 5–10% (Murray & Wanless 1986, 1997). Differences between counts made in 2003–04 and 2013–14 of <10% could, therefore, potentially be due to observer error rather than real changes in numbers. Accordingly, changes of <10% were assumed to indicate no significant overall change and an approximately stable population. For all colonies images were checked to pinpoint any major changes in colony extent or nesting density between surveys. Unless otherwise stated, counts from 2003–04 and 2013–14 are directly comparable.

To set the 2013–14 results in context, all counts since 1900 known to us can be found in the papers listed in the references and are plotted in Figure 2 (colonies established prior to 1930) and Figure 3 (colonies founded since 1930).

Results

All 14 gannetries that were active in Scotland in 2003–04 were occupied in 2013–14, a new colony has become established on Barra Head (Berneray) and breeding on Rockall appeared to have become more regular (Figure 1). Below we present the 2013–14 counts in detail and summarise the current status of each colony in terms of changes since 2003–04 and in some cases over the longer term.

Scar Rocks (established in the 1930s, numbers stable, colony probably full)

An aerial survey on 23 July 2014 indicated that there were 2,376 AOS on Scar Rocks, a total that was almost identical to that in 2004 (2,394 AOS). Careful scrutiny of the images indicated that there is very little unoccupied, suitable nesting habitat left and the colony is probably at, or very close to, maximum capacity.

Ailsa Craig (occupied since the 16th century, increasing)

Counts by three observers of images taken on 16 June 2014, were highly consistent (range: 32,503–33,132 AOS) and gave a mean total of 33,226 AOS (Table 1). At face value this suggested an increase of 22% since 2004. However, the 2004 count was unusual in that in contrast to most of the other Scottish gannetries, numbers on Ailsa Craig had declined since the previous survey in 1995. Inspection of the 2004 photographs revealed that the decrease seemed to be due to a decline in breeding density throughout the colony, most notably in the almost empty areas apparent within Section 9/10/11. The overall total for 2014 is very similar to the 1995 figure suggesting that the population has recovered from the 2004 decline (Table 1) (Plate 3). However, detailed comparisons of the section totals for 1995 and 2014 indicate that numbers in some areas remain low, notably sections 4 & 5, 6 and 8 on the west side of the island. The most pronounced increase has occurred in sections 19 & 21 along the upper slopes at the southern edge of the colony. The reason for these marked differences is unknown. Some limited abstraction of boulder spoil has been carried out at both north and south quarries in recent years and Ailsa Craig has been free of rats since 1991 (Zonfrillo 2001). Both these operations could potentially have impacted on the Gannets, the former by possibly deterring recruitment to parts of the colony, the latter by making conditions in cliff top areas more attractive. However, Ailsa Craig has a long history of marked and unexplained fluctuations in numbers (Nelson 1978) so any interpretation of these changes must remain speculative. The colony's difficult terrain makes detailed population studies challenging, but increasing the frequency at which aerial surveys are carried out might help resolve some of the uncertainties.

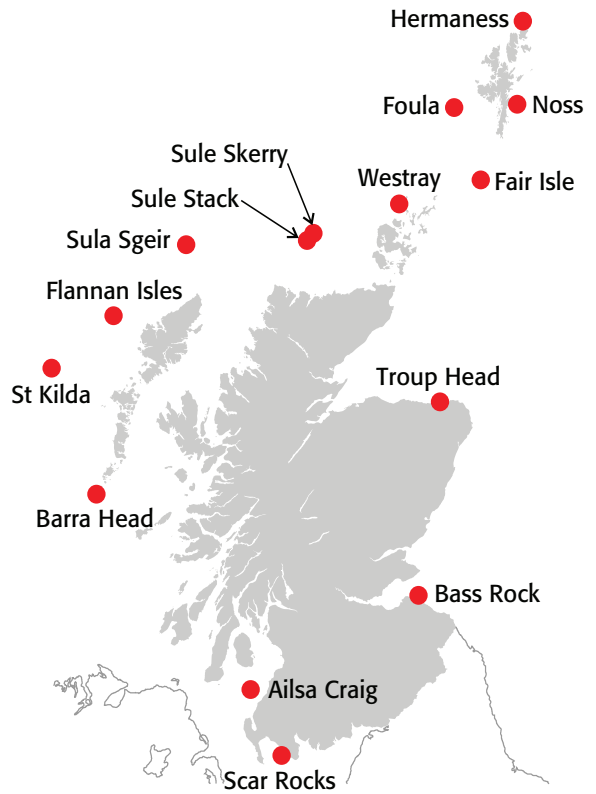


Figure 1. The locations of Gannet colonies in Scotland, 2013–14. Rockall is located 300 km west of St Kilda.



Plate 3. Ailsa Craig, the gannetry from the south-west, 16 June 2014. © S. Murray

Table 1. Counts (AOS) from aerial photographs of Ailsa Craig in 1995, 2004 and 2014. The count sections are shown in Murray & Wanless (1997).

Count section	5 August 1995	6 June 2004	16 June 2014
1	946	1009	1374
2	187	85	59
3	441	245	269
4 & 5	1877	1222	1139
6	2097	1333	1578
7	954	809	1202
8	4300	2711	3279
9,10 & 11	11959	10338	12634
12	140	157	148
13 & 14	1994	1411	1845
15 & 16	2263	2279	2283
17	21	38	57
18 & 20	1439	981	1138
19 & 21	3660	4279	5880
22	0	0	0
23	177	236	341
Total	32455	27133	33226

Barra Head (Berneray) (established 2007, increasing)

The first record of Gannets breeding on Barra Head was a bird on a nest on the south cliffs in 2007. Subsequent records have been one nest (2008), two nests (2010), four nests (mid-June 2011), two chicks near fledging (August 2012) and seven nests on 11 May 2014 (details from M. Forrest in litt., J. Love in litt.).

Rockall (colonised 1992, occupied intermittently, increasing)

The first confirmed breeding on this wave-swept rock was of a single nest with an egg on 19 June 1992 (Belaousoff 1993). There have been three further confirmed breeding records (nests and eggs found), the most recent on 1 June 2012 when there were four well-built nests, one with an egg and eight trace nests (Hancock in Murray *et al.* 2014a). N. Hancock, who was resident on the rock between 4 June and 17 July 2014, counted 28 occupied sites including three nests with eggs, 13 other well-built nests and 12 trace nests. Thus it would appear that Gannets now attempt to nest on Rockall in most years. However, successful breeding seems highly unlikely since the breeding sites are very vulnerable to bad weather. For example during a severe gale on 1 July 2014 waves broke over Hall's Ledge (Plate 4) sweeping away all the nests, even those on the summit. While Gannets may persist in attempting to breed on Rockall the colony's vulnerability to storms would seem to make it highly unlikely that it will ever produce chicks.



Plate 4. Rockall, Nick Hancock (left) on Hall's Ledge, 4 June 2014. There were six Gannet nests on the summit, 12 on Hall's Ledge and 10 elsewhere, all were swept away in a severe gale on 1 July. © A. Smith

St Kilda (occupied since at least the 17th century, numbers stable, but space for expansion)
Together the three components of the St Kilda gannetry (Boreray, Stac Li and Stac an Armin) have been the largest colony in the east Atlantic for the last 100 years. However, numbers have shown little overall change in the three aerial surveys carried out in 1994 (60,428 AOS), 2004 (59,622 AOS) and 2013 (60,290 AOS) (Plate 5). Despite the fact that there would appear to be plenty of unused, suitable nesting habitat the population seems to be stable and has been overtaken by Bass Rock (see below).



Plate 5. Boreray, St Kilda. This group of breeding Gannets on the east face of Clagan na Rosgachan have grown from a single AOS in 1959 to 671 AOS in 2013. This is one of the few areas where numbers have increased over the last 50 years. © *S. Murray*

Flannan Isles (established around 1969, increasing rapidly)

An aerial survey made on 19 June 2013 found 5,280 AOS, an increase of 91% since 2004. The presence of very large numbers of non-breeding birds and plenty of apparently suitable nesting habitat, suggest the population will continue to grow rapidly.

Sula Sgeir (occupied since at least the 16th century, increasing after a previous decline)

An aerial survey made on 18 June 2013 found 11,230 AOS, an increase of 22% since 2004. The colony is the only one in the UK that is still exploited for food with c.2000 well-grown chicks ('gugas') harvested each year. In 2004 there was concern that numbers were declining, but the 2013 count indicates that the population is now increasing and there would appear to be ample space for further colony expansion.

Sule Stack (occupied since at least the 18th century, numbers stable, colony probably full)

An aerial survey made on 18 June 2013 found 4,550 AOS, almost identical to the count of 4,618 AOS in 2004. There have been no changes in numbers or colony extent since at least 1994 which suggests that the rock is fully occupied.

Sule Skerry (established 2003, increasing rapidly)

Breeding was first confirmed in July 2003, when 15 pairs with eggs or chicks were found on the west side of Stack Geo (Blackburn & Budworth 2004). In 2004, 57 AOS were counted from aerial photographs. The survey on 18 June 2013 indicated that the colony had increased 30-fold with a total of 1,870 AOS.

Westray (established 2003, increasing rapidly)

A count from the land on 16 June 2014 found 751 AON (Bell 2014), a 50-fold increase from 14 AON on 21–22 June 2004. In 2012 there were 623 nests (Meek 2013).

Foula (established in the mid-1970s, probably increasing)

A count made from the sea by S. Gear on 10 June 2013 found 1,226 AON. Checks made from the land on 7 July showed additional adult plumaged birds on other ledges although no obvious signs of breeding behaviour were noted. The 2013 count indicates that the colony has increased by 33% from 919 AON in 2004. However, the 2013 count was slightly lower than the total in 2007 (1,370 AON, SNH unpublished data.). This suggests that currently the colony may not be growing, but an aerial survey would be useful to check this.

Hermaness (established around 1917, increasing)

An aerial survey of the colony on 15 August 2014 achieved close to complete photographic coverage of the offshore skerries and the main cliffs. Two independent counts of the photographs gave totals of 25,609 AOS and 26,245 AOS respectively, and a mean of 25,927 AOS. Fortuitously, SNH staff had counted the colony earlier in the season (9 June–17 July) using the same methods as in 2003 (a direct count of nests (AON) from fixed vantage points, supplemented by boat counts of areas hidden from the land). Their initial land/sea count was given as 27,033 (Heubeck *et al.* 2014), but detailed comparison of the counts with those from the aerial survey showed that there had been double counting of some areas that were difficult to delimit from the land and sea and a corrected total of 24,885 AON was substituted (Pawley 2014). The aerial survey total would also have been higher had



Plate 6. Hermaness showing the site of the 2003 winter landslide. Breeding Gannets on Soorie Face (left) were unaffected, but a large number of nests were destroyed in a summer landslide on Saito (right), 15 June 2010. © RCAHMS

we not been able to exclude the majority of non-breeders present on the cliffs, which are a well documented feature of this colony. This was mainly due to the ground checks made by J. Swale at the time of the land count, who scrutinized the air photographs for both non-breeding birds and hidden ground. This approach worked well, with each count in effect validating the other. Given this, we have used 25,580 AOS (the mean of the land count and the mean of the two aerial counts Table 2) as the colony total for 2014, a 64% increase over the 15,633 AON in 2003.

Table 2. Counts of Hermaness (AON & AOS) from land and sea in 2003 & 2014 by SNH and an aerial survey in 2014, of AOS, by RCAHMS.

Count section	26 June & 26–27 July 2003	9 June–17 July 2014	15 August 2014
Method	Land photographs & counts and sea counts	Land photographs & counts and sea counts	Aerial photographs
Greing	109	141	141
Humla Stack	580	1175	1266
Humla Houll	629	1128	664
Burra Stack	641	930	1020
Clingra Stack	317	951	750
Flooda Stack	38	304	393
Neap North	1190	997	1526
Neap-Soorie	3873	6370	7315
Soorie-Geo Saito	2606	4410	3362
Neapna Stack	550	511	511
Soorie Stacks	60	83	83
Saito	1941	1984	2242
Tipta Skerry	0	0	289
Rumblings East	869	1767	2111
Rumblings West	nc	95	176
Vesta Skerry East	1745	3457	3151
Vesta Skerry West	485	582	927
Total	15633	24885	25927
Mean for 2014		25580	

Noss (established 1914, increasing)

A whole colony count made from the land and sea in June 2014 found 11,786 AON (Denton *et al.* 2014), an increase of 36% since 2003 (Table 3). The count follows well-established methodology in place since 1992 and each of the five counts made since then by SNH staff have shown progressive increases at both section and colony level.

Table 3. Counts (AON) from land and sea of Noss in 2003, 2008 and 2014 by SNH.

Count Section	8–14 June & 9–30 July 2003	June 2008	11 June to 2 July 2014
Cradleholm	4	8	41
Holmoless	93	115	126
Holmoless to Geordie's Holes	2008	2212	2254
Geordie's Holes	70	65	239
Rumblewick	355	384	379
Rumblewick Face	320	450	581
Cuddack's Geo	3	9	56
Noup South	2850	3048	3667
Noup East	709	860	937
Noup North	965	1124	1253
Rump South	885	938	1259
Rump North	387	537	793
Geo Heogatoug	3	17	201
Total	8652	9767	11786

Fair Isle (established 1974, increase since 2004, but may currently be declining)

A land and sea count is carried out annually by Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust staff. The 2014 count was 3,591 AON (Parnaby & Hatsell 2014). This represented a 92% increase over the 1,875 AON count for 2004, but was well down from the peak count of 4,085 nests recorded in 2011. This recent decrease would appear to be genuine, but Fair Isle is a difficult colony to count and switching to an aerial survey would help resolve uncertainties.

Troup Head (established 1987, increasing rapidly)

The Troup Head gannetry was photographed from the air on 30 June 2014. Photographic coverage of all the breeding cliffs was complete, apart from one small area that was subsequently checked during a field visit to identify club areas and non-breeding groups. Since this was the first aerial survey of this colony, boundaries of count sections were delimited to tie in with prominent, named coastal features and ideally should be used in future aerial surveys (Plates 7 & 8). Two independent counts gave totals of 6,581 and 6,332 AOS respectively, a mean total of 6,456 AOS. The field visit highlighted that very large numbers of non-breeding club birds were present, particularly at the western end of the colony. Counts of these areas on the aerial photographs estimated that there were at least 1,816 club birds ashore at that time. Section counts were 1,278 AOS in A (Troup Head-Thirlet Point), 1,839 AOS in B (Thirlet Point-Mercury Heugh), 655 AOS in C and 2,684 AOS in D (Mercury Heugh-Ignet Craig). The cliffs on either side of the currently occupied sections appear to offer ample space for further colony expansion and the Gannets are clearly colonising broad ledges that are occupied by Guillemots *Uria aalge*. Comparing the 2014 total with a land and sea count of 1,547 AON on 1 July 2004 suggests an increase of over 300%. However, due to the difference in counting units this value is likely to overestimate the increase. Other recent counts from the land and sea using AON are 1,810 AON on 23 May–26 June 2009 (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/smp/>), 2,787 on 7–9 June 2010 (D. Goulder/RSPB & R. Mavor/JNCC) and 2,885 AON on 15–25 June 2013 (Anderson 2013). Given the current size and complexity of the Troup Head gannetry, switching to an aerial survey augmented by land checks to establish boundaries of the club areas would seem the most effective way of monitoring changes in numbers.



Plate 7. Count sections A and B between Troup Head and Mercury Heugh. Note non-breeders on the upper grass slopes of section A, 30 June 2014. © RCAHMS



Plate 8. Troup Head count sections C and D between Mercury Heugh and Ighnet Craig (not shown), 30 June 2014. © RCAHMS



Plate 9. Bass Rock from the north-east. Jetty and landing top left, 23 June 2014. © S. Murray

Bass Rock (occupied since at least the 15th century, increasing)

An aerial survey was carried out on 23 June 2014 in ideal conditions (Plate 2). Two independent counts gave 75,829 and 74,690 AOS respectively, a mean total of 75,259 AOS, indicating an increase since 2004 of 57%. This made the Bass Rock the world's largest colony of Gannets (Murray *et al.* 2014b), relegating St Kilda (60,290 AOS in 2013), and Bonaventure Island in Canada (47,669 AOS in 2011) to second and third places respectively (Chardine *et al.* 2013, Chapdelaine & Rail 2014). There is now little suitable, unoccupied nesting habitat on the upper parts of the rock, but since 2009 large numbers have congregated on the rocks around the landing area (Plate 9) with many apparent pairs showing pre-breeding behaviour (M. Sheddan pers. comm.).

Table 4. Summary of counts of Scottish Gannetries in 2013–14 and changes since the 2003–04 survey. The rate of change for the total Scottish population was calculated assuming that the combined colony counts had all been made 10 years apart.

Colony	Year	AOS/AON	Year	AOS/AON	% change	% per annum change between counts
Bass Rock	2004	48065	2014	75259	+57	+4.6
St Kilda	2004	59622	2013	60290	+1	+0.1
Ailsa Craig	2004	27130	2014	33226	+22	+2.0
Hermaness	2003	15633	2014	25580	+64	+4.6
Noss	2003	8652	2014	11786	+36	+2.9
Sula Sgeir	2004	9225	2013	11230	+22	+2.2
Troup Head	2004	1547	2014	6456	+317	+15.4
Flannan Isles	2004	2760	2013	5280	+91	+7.5
Sule Stack	2004	4618	2013	4550	-1	-0.2
Fair Isle	2004	1875	2014	3591	+92	+6.7
Scar Rocks	2004	2394	2014	2375	-1	0
Sule Skerry	2004	57	2013	1870	+3181	+47.4
Foula	2004	919	2013	1226	+33	+3.3
Westray	2004	14	2014	751	+5264	+48.9
Rockall	2004	no check	2014	28	?	?
Barra Head	2004	0	2014	7	new colony	new colony
Total	2003–04	182511	2013–14	243505	+33	+2.9

Table 5. Latest world population estimates of the Gannet. *France has two other colonies with a total of only three pairs. The Irish total is provisional.

Country	Number of colonies	Year counted	Total AOS/AON	% NE Atlantic population	% World population	Source
Scotland	16	2013–14	243505	58.4	46.3	This survey
Ireland	6	2014	47754	11.4	9.1	Newton (2014)
Wales	1	2009	39293	9.4	7.5	Murray (2009)
Iceland	8	2013–14	37216	9.0	7.1	Gardasson (in press)
France	1*	2014	21545	5.1	4.1	LPO (2014)
England	1	2012	11061	2.6	2.1	RSPB (2012)
Channel Isles.	2	2011	7885	2.0	1.5	E. Morgan/Alderney Wildlife Trust
Norway	10	2013	6000	1.4	1.1	R.T. Barrett (pers. comm.)
Faeroe Isles.	1	1996	2340	0.5	0.4	Skov <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Germany	1	2014	656	0.1	0.1	J. Dierschke (pers. comm.)
Russia	1	1998	35	<0.1	<0.1	Y.V. Krasnov (pers. comm.)
NE Atlantic total	48		417290			
Canada	6	2013	108404		20.6	Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service (unpubl. data)
World total	54		525694	100	100	

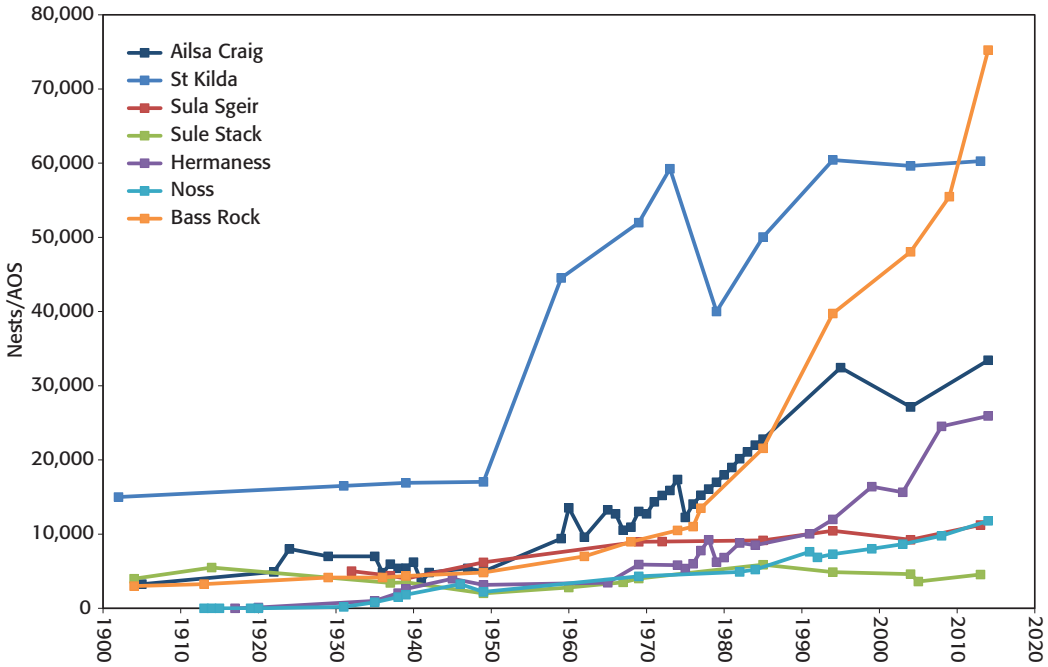


Figure 2. Counts of long-established (since before 1930) Scottish Gannet colonies between 1900 and 2014.

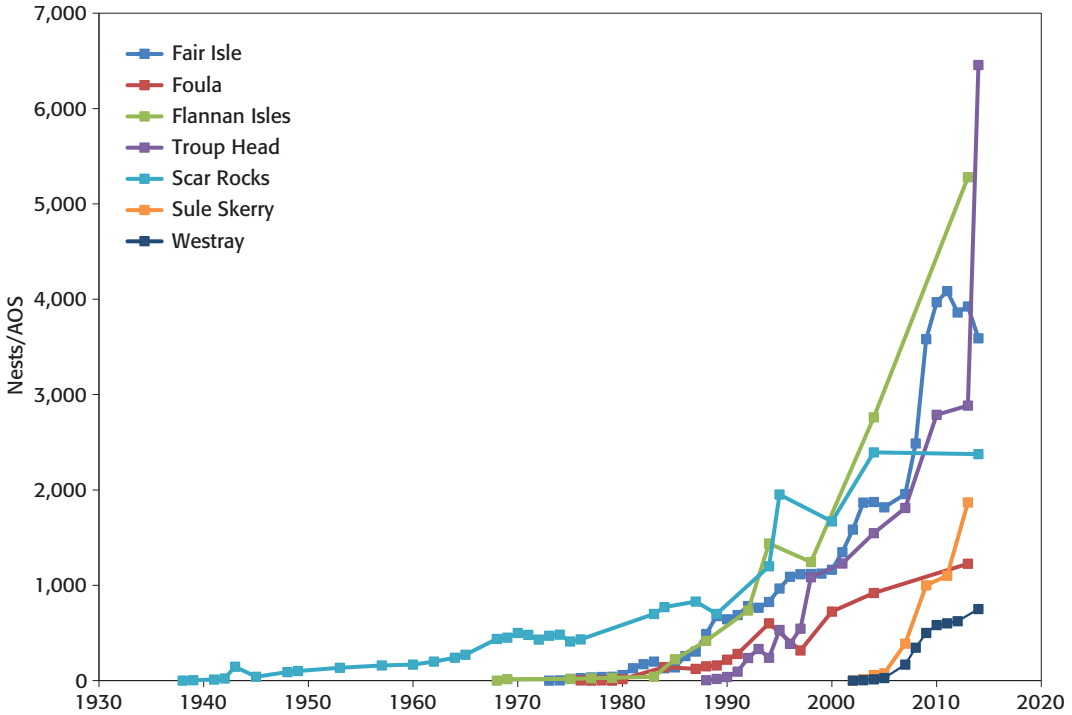


Figure 3. Counts of Scottish Gannet colonies founded since 1930 up to 2014.

Total numbers in Scotland

The counts documented above were combined to provide an estimate of the total Scottish population in 2013–14. The overall total for colonies counted using AOS was 226,116 and the total for those counted using AON was 17,389 (Table 4). Combining these figures and expressing them as AOS (the dominant unit), gave a Scottish total of 243,505 AOS. Numbers were divided very unequally between the 16 colonies with the Bass Rock, St Kilda and Ailsa Craig together holding 70% of the Scottish population.

Discussion

After the last survey of Scotland's Gannets in 2004, we speculated that the sustained period of increase throughout much of the 20th century might be coming to an end. Thus, while between 1984–85 and 1994–95 the Scottish population had increased by 27%, an average growth rate of 2.4% pa, by 2003–04 these values had declined to 6% and 0.6% pa, respectively (Murray *et al.* 2006). Much of this change was attributable to the situation in the three largest colonies, with numbers stable on St Kilda, a marked slowing of the rate of increase on Bass Rock and a decline of 16% at Ailsa Craig. Set against these findings, two new colonies had been established in Orkney (Sule Skerry and Westray) and many of the small to medium sized colonies were still increasing, in some cases rapidly. Whilst the cause (or causes) of these contrasting trends was uncertain, the observed patterns were consistent with density dependent effects. Thus, changes were most marked at the larger colonies where competition for resources would be expected to be greater, particularly if conditions were further exacerbated by reduced food availability as a result of climate change and/or fishing pressure (Davies *et al.* 2013). In addition, evidence from British and Irish ringing recoveries suggested that adult survival rate had decreased, which would also potentially reduce population growth rate (Wanless *et al.* 2006).

However, the findings from the latest survey presented here, indicate that these concerns were unfounded since over the last decade the Scottish Gannet population has increased by 34% at an average rate of 2.9% pa. Of the three largest colonies only St Kilda has barely changed and indeed has been overtaken by Bass Rock, which is now the largest Gannet colony in the world. Numbers on Ailsa Craig have recovered and are now back to the level they were in 1995. A similar reversal of fortunes was also apparent at Sula Sgeir, with the 2013 total the highest of the four counts made here since 1985. This increase is particularly surprising given that up to 2,000 well grown Gannet chicks ('gugas') continue to be killed under license each year. Without detailed data on the demography of Gannets at this colony an objective assessment of the impact of the guga hunt and associated disturbance is impossible (Beatty 1992). However, it seems unlikely that the increase is driven by the colony's own production, but rather that it is due to immigration from neighbouring colonies, possibly St Kilda and Sule Stack, neither of which are currently increasing.

Favourable conditions over the last decade are also evidenced by numbers at most of the small and medium sized colonies increasing at varying rates, a new colony being established on Barra Head, and even Rockall far out in the Atlantic, has seen the largest number of nests yet recorded on it. Only numbers at Sule Stack and Scar Rocks are unchanged, but all the evidence suggests that this is due to lack of nesting space rather than poor breeding conditions. Although totals at the Shetland colonies of Foula and Fair Isle were higher in 2013–14 compared to 2003–04, it appeared that numbers might in fact have peaked during this period and thus the populations are now declining. However, taken as a whole the changes apparent in Scottish Gannet colonies are very much in line with those anticipated by comparisons of foraging activity in 2000 and 2009, that indicated that conditions had become more favourable (Davies *et al.* 2013). Thus, colony-specific trip durations were significantly shorter in 2009 particularly at the larger colonies and those in the North Sea. Improved conditions for Gannets contrasts markedly with the situation in many other Scottish seabirds where populations are declining and breeding failures are becoming more frequent (Miles 2013). While the cause, or causes, of these problems have not been fully ascertained, poorer

conditions as a result of climate change is a leading candidate (Russell *et al.* 2014). However, ironically, while Gannets seem less sensitive to climate change and over-fishing than many other seabird species, they may be more vulnerable to some of the proposed ways of combating these problems. Thus, Gannets have been identified as being at risk of collision mortality at offshore wind farms (Cook *et al.* 2012) and the granting of recent planning consent for major developments in the Moray Firth (Plate 10) and on the Bell Rock Bank, are likely to overlap with foraging areas of birds from Troup Head and the Bass Rock, respectively. If these developments do go ahead they could, therefore, impact on these colonies, although the magnitude and nature of effects are currently highly uncertain. As well as potential changes associated with offshore renewables, imminent changes in fisheries practice as part of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and the end to pelagic and demersal discards, will remove a major source of prey for scavenging seabirds, including Gannets (CEU 2012). It seems likely that this will result in changes in behaviour, distribution and abundance of affected species (Bicknell *et al.* 2013). Thus, although Gannets currently seem to be one of the few seabird species that are increasing in Scotland, conditions may well change over the coming years making it particularly important to continue collecting data on abundance.

Although it is possible to count the numbers of nests in small Gannet colonies from the land or the sea with reasonable accuracy, as numbers increase this becomes progressively more difficult. In most colonies it soon becomes impossible to view the entire colony from the land and counts have to be made from both the land and sea, which increases the risk that some areas are overlooked while others are counted twice. Most of the main Scottish colonies are now surveyed by aerial photography, which has several important advantages. Crucially it is usually possible to delimit discrete counting areas using natural features of the cliffs. If these areas are standardized (e.g. Troup Head) the approach enables detailed comparisons to be made between surveys and thus identify if the extent and/or density of the colony has changed. The value of this method is further enhanced by the advent of digital photography and associated software for viewing, manipulating and archiving images which in future will make it much easier to compare results from successive surveys. Given the high conservation importance of the Scottish Gannet population and potential concerns about the adverse effects of offshore wind farms and/or changes in EU discard policy, maintaining the long tradition of colony counts of this species using 21st century technology should be a top priority.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks go to the many people who contributed to making this survey a success. We are well aware of the difficulties involved in just reaching some of the remote colonies, so are especially grateful to Sheila Gear for Foula, Miranda Forrest and John Love for Barra Head and Nick Hancock for his epic on Rockall. Although Gannet counting wasn't the purpose of his stay,

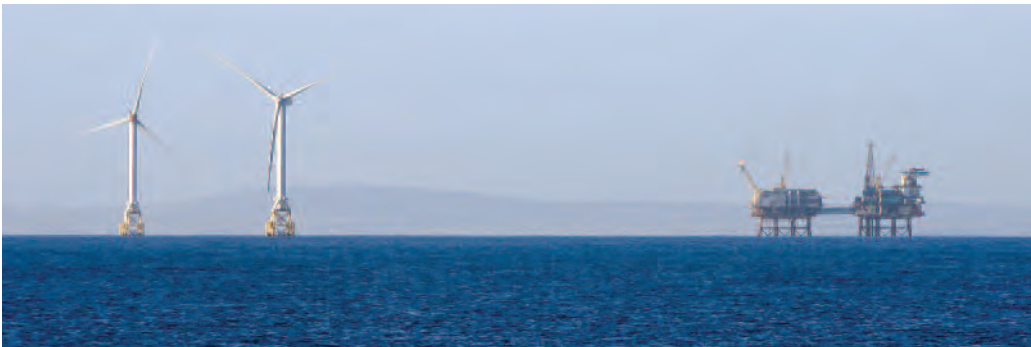


Plate 10. Beatrice Field, inner Moray Firth. Announced in 2014, this will be the core area of a 100 wind-turbine development, 28 February 2011. © S. Murray

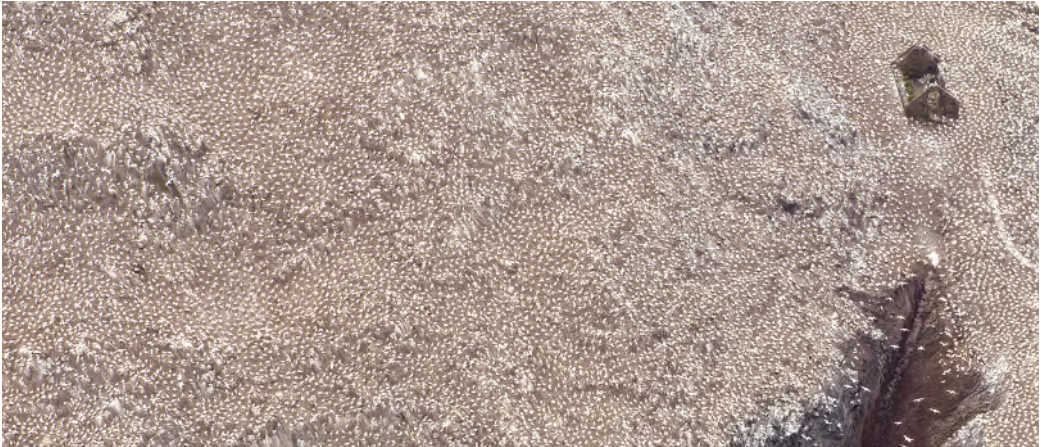


Plate 11. Gannets surround the ruined medieval chapel on Bass Rock and even breed between its walls, 23 June 2014. © S. Murray

he contributed a unique ornithological record to the history of the rock. From SNH we thank Jonathan Swale and Afra Skene for help in Shetland; from the RSPB, Chris Bell and Alan Leitch in Orkney and Crystal Maw at Ailsa Craig. From NTS, Susan Bain and Paul Sharman for their help on St Kilda. Jill Harden, Maggie Sheddan, Angus Smith, Duncan Goulder and Roddy Mavor all assisted in various ways. The aerial survey in 2013 was made under contract to SNH and we thank Andy Douse for facilitating this work. Finally, special thanks are due to our pilots, David Rutter in 2013 and Ronnie Cowan in 2014, whose skill and enthusiasm were vital to the success of the aerial surveys. Dave Cowley of RCAHMS made the flights in 2014 possible and without his support some of the key colonies would not have been surveyed.

References

- Anderson, V. 2013. Gannet: Full colony count, Troup Head, 2013. Unpublished report, RSPB, Strathbeg.
- Beatty, J. 1992. *Sula: The Seabird Hunters of Lewis*. Joseph, London.
- Belaousoff, S. 1993. Northern Gannet and Common Guillemot nesting on Rockall. *British Birds* 86: 16.
- Bell, C. 2014. *Westray and Papa Westray, 2014 annual report*. RSPB, Orkney.
- Bicknell, A.W.J., Oro, D., Camphuysen, C.J. & Votier, S.C. 2013. Potential consequences of discard reform for seabird communities. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 50: 649–658.
- Blackburn, A. & Budworth, D. 2004. A new gannetry for the UK. *Seabird Group Newsletter* 96: 10.
- CEU 2012. *Outcome of the Proceedings of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 12 June 2012, Brussels, Belgium*. Interinstitutional File: 2011/0195 (COD), 14 June 2012, 11322/12, 78 pages.
- Chardine, J.W., Rail, J-F. & Wilhelm, S. 2013. Population dynamics of Northern Gannets in North America, 1984–2009. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 84: 187–192.
- Chapdelaine, G. & Rail, J-F. 2014. *Northern Gannet - a sentinel species for the Gulf*. 3rd edn. http://planstlaurent.qc.ca/en/state_monitoring/monitoring_sheets.html.
- Cook, A.S.C.P., Johnston, A., Wright, L.J. & Burton, N.H.K. 2012. *A Review of Flight Heights and Avoidance Rates of Birds in Relation to Offshore Wind Farms*. Crown Estate Strategic Ornithological Support Services. Project SOSS-02. www.bto.org/science/wetland-and-marine/soSS/projects.
- Davies, R.D., Wanless, S., Lewis, S. & Hamer, K.C. 2013. Density-dependent foraging and colony growth in a pelagic seabird species under varying environmental conditions. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 485: 287–294.
- Denton, A. Nisbet, C. & Snell, K. 2014. *Noss National Nature Reserve annual report 2014*. Unpublished report, Scottish National Heritage, Lerwick.

- Gardarsson, A. in press. Icelandic colonies of the Northern Gannet in 2013–2014. *Bliki*.
- Heubeck, M., Mellor, M., Denton, A., Nisbet, C., Pawley, E., Skene, A., Swale, J., Gear, S., Harper, N. & Okill, D. 2014. Shetland (excluding Fair Isle). *Seabird Group Newsletter* 127: 3–4.
- LPO 2014. <https://sept-iles.lpo.fr/37-les-actualites/234-fou-de-bassan-de-la-reserve-naturelle-nationale-des-sept-iles-etat-de-la-population-en-2014>.
- Mavor, R.A., Parsons, M. Heubeck, M. & Schmitt, S. 2005. Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland, 2004. Joint Nature Conservation Committee (*UK Nature Conservation*, No. 29), Peterborough.
- Meek, E. 2013. Seabirds in Orkney in 2012. *Seabird Group Newsletter* 122: 1–5.
- Miles, W.T.S. 2013. Long-term declines in Scottish seabird populations. *Scottish Birds* 33: 145–152.
- Murray, S. 2009. A count of the Grassholm gannetry in 2009. Countryside Commission for Wales *Commissioned Report*, Bangor.
- Murray, S. & Wanless, S. 1986. The status of the Gannet in Scotland 1984–85. *Scottish Birds* 14: 74–85.
- Murray, S. & Wanless, S. 1997. The status of the Gannet in Scotland in 1994–95. *Scottish Birds* 19: 10–27.
- Murray, S., Wanless, S. & Harris, M. P. 2006. The status of the Northern Gannet in Scotland in 2003–04. *Scottish Birds* 26: 17–29.
- Murray, S., Smith, I. & Smith, A. 2014a. Gannet and Guillemot breeding on Rockall, North Atlantic, *Scottish Birds* 34: 13–15.
- Murray, S., Wanless, S. & Harris, M.P. 2014b. The Bass Rock - now the world's largest Northern Gannet colony. *British Birds* 107: 765–769.
- Murray, S., Harris, M.P. & Wanless, S. 2014c. An aerial survey of Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* on Scar Rocks, southwest Scotland, in 2014. *Seabird* 27: 104–109.
- Nelson, J.B. 1978. *The Gannet*. Poyser, Berkhamsted.
- Newton, S. 2014. *The 2013–2014 census of Gannetries in Ireland*. Interim report to National Parks & Wildlife Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
- Parnaby, D. & Hatsell, C. 2014. Fair Isle seabird summary 2014. *Seabird Group Newsletter* 127: 4–6.
- Pawley, E. 2014. *Hermaness and Keen of Hamer National Nature Reserves annual report 2014*. Unpublished report, Scottish National Heritage, Lerwick.
- RSPB 2012. Shining a light on gannet numbers at RSPB Bempton cliffs. <http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/details.aspx?id=326575>.
- Russell, D.J.F., Wanless, S., Collingham, Y.C., Anderson, B.J., Beale, C., Reid, J.B., Huntley, B. & Hamer, K.C. 2014. Beyond climate envelopes: bio-climate modelling accords with observed 25-year changes in seabird populations of the British Isles. *Diversity and Distributions* doi:10.1111/ddi.12272.
- Skov, H., Upton, A., Reid, J., Webb, A., Taylor, S. & Durinck, J. 2002. *Dispersion and vulnerability of marine birds in Faroese waters*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Aberdeen.
- Wanless, S., Frederiksen, M., Harris, M.P. & Freeman, S.N. 2006. Survival of Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* in Britain and Ireland, 1959–2002. *Bird Study* 53: 79–85.
- Wanless, S., Murray, S. & Harris, M.P. 2015. An aerial survey of Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* colonies off NW Scotland in 2013. *Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report* No. 696.
- Zonfrillo, B. 2001. Ailsa Craig before and after the eradication of rats in 1991. *Ayrshire Bird Report* 2000.

S. Murray, Easter Craigie Dhu, Butterstone, Dunkeld PH8 0EY.

Email: murraysurvey@yahoo.co.uk

M.P. Harris & S. Wanless, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Bush Estate, Penicuik EH26 0QB.

Email: swanl@ceh.ac.uk

Revised ms accepted January 2015

A review of the status of breeding Black-necked Grebes in Scotland

M. Holling

In the early and mid-1970s the entire breeding population of Black-necked Grebes in Britain was in Scotland, with up to 19 pairs nesting in Scotland at that time. Regular breeding in England only began in 1977 and since the 1990s the proportion of Britain's breeding Black-necked Grebes in Scotland declined relative to the number of pairs breeding elsewhere (reports of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel). Forrester et al. (2007) reviewed the status of Black-necked Grebes up to and including 2004 and at that time the species still bred in Scotland. However, 2004 was to be the last year that breeding was confirmed in the country. This paper looks at the decline and subsequent loss of Black-necked Grebe as a breeding species in Scotland.

Sources of data

The UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) monitors and reports the numbers of the rarest breeding birds in the UK and began collecting data on Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* when it was established in 1973. Their reports provide the only UK-wide assessment of the breeding population since that time. Early reports published in *British Birds* listed records as 'county A, county B etc.' so it is not clear from those reports in which county or even country the nesting occurred. Access to the RBBP records was permitted for the compilation of this paper, and the counties (recording areas in Scotland) in which breeding occurred are named here for the benefit of the ornithological record. Thus, in the first report of the RBBP (Sharrock *et al.* 1975) confirmed breeding was noted at three sites, all of them in Scotland: two in Fife ('County A') and one in Perth & Kinross ('County B').

Because of their rarity and susceptibility to disturbance, records of Black-necked Grebes have been subject to some suppression and reports have not always been submitted to county bird recorders nor even to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. This has led to different numbers being published for a year or for a recording area, and even the *Birds of Scotland* project was unable to source all data at the time.

One of the aims of this paper is to provide a definitive account of the changing status of the species in Scotland and to this end the author has sought to seek out all available sources of information. Much of these data came from the archives of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, but additional data was provided by current SOC bird recorders reviewing their archives and by checking other published information, particularly the Scottish Bird Report (1968–2000) and local bird reports, where available, for the period under review. A number of people have been very supportive in this quest and they are acknowledged at the end of this paper.

Inclusion of records in this review

This review is only concerned with breeding Black-necked Grebes, using the standard criteria of confirmed, probable and possible breeding based on national Atlas surveys (such as Balmer *et al.* 2013), modified slightly so as not to include apparent passage birds or single birds present for only a few days even if at potential breeding sites. These are the criteria used in the annual reports of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (e.g. Holling *et al.* 2014) and summarised below.

All records were assessed to use consistent definitions of breeding evidence as follows. Confirmed breeding records are those where there is good evidence that eggs have been laid and/or young have been seen. Probable breeding usually relates to the presence of at least one pair at a site for at least a week. A record of birds displaying (unless birds were only on site for a single day) would also be classed as probable breeding. Pairs present at a site for less than a week and where no other breeding behaviour was observed are classified as possible breeding.

Black-necked Grebes frequently occur on apparently suitable water bodies in the spring, and sometimes display is recorded, but no further proof of breeding is recorded. Depending on the length of time such birds are recorded at a site, these records may be classed as possible or probable breeding, but in many instances reports of grebes seem not to have been followed up, so it is unclear whether pairs remained on site (and may therefore have bred) or whether they in fact moved on. Breeding Black-necked Grebes are specially protected by law, being on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) which means it is an offence to disturb them at or near the nest unless the observer has been granted a licence by the BTO or SNH. Conscientious birdwatchers will therefore take care to observe only from a distance, which could mean that incubating birds, hidden in vegetation, may be missed. In addition, once chicks are hatched, they tend to be led into denser vegetation and may not be visible until they are older and larger, or they may be predated and hence go unrecorded. Thus some pairs granted a status of only probable breeding may actually have laid eggs at the site. Productivity at many sites may also have been under-estimated.

Breeding Black-necked Grebes in Scotland 1973 to 2014

Prior to 1973, confirmed breeding in Scotland had been recorded in six recording areas, documented in Forrester *et al.* (2007): Angus & Dundee, Borders, Clyde, Fife, Lothian and Perth & Kinross. During the 42 year period 1973–2014, Black-necked Grebes bred in five Scottish recording areas: Angus & Dundee, Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, Fife and Perth & Kinross. An overview of the numbers and sites in each of these areas is detailed in Appendix A.

Up until the mid-2000s, nesting in Scotland was still annual and confirmed breeding was recorded at seven main sites in four recording areas. The principal sites, where confirmed or probable breeding occurred on five or more occasions, are shown in Table 1. During the period 1973–2004, confirmed breeding was recorded from a further three sites, two of which were within the same four recording areas. Records of only probable or possible breeding came from an additional 12 sites, within three recording areas: Lothian, North-east Scotland and Perth & Kinross.

Table 1. Principal breeding sites for Black-necked Grebes in Scotland, 1973–2014.

Site name	Recording area	Years when breeding was confirmed or at least probable	Total years
Kilconquhar Loch	Fife	1973–2005	33
Dupplin Loch	Perth & Kinross	1973–93	21
Loch of Kinnordy	Angus & Dundee	1986–2000	15
Folly Loch	Borders	1995–2005, 2009	12
Lindores Loch	Fife	1973–75, 1977–80, 1982, 1985–86	10
Bemersyde Moss	Borders	1992–95, 1997–2000, 2003	9
Cogbrae	Perth & Kinross	1995–2002	8

In the early 1970s, breeding occurred regularly at 1–2 sites in Fife and one site in Perth & Kinross. Confirmed breeding in Fife continued in most years until 2003, while in Perth & Kinross the site was abandoned after 1993 to be replaced by another from 1995 until 2000. In the late 1980s a new breeding site was established in Angus & Dundee and this site was still in use when, in the early 1990s, breeding began in Borders. By the end of that decade breeding was regular at two sites in the Borders and continued at one of these until 2004. Breeding in Angus & Dundee ceased in 2002.

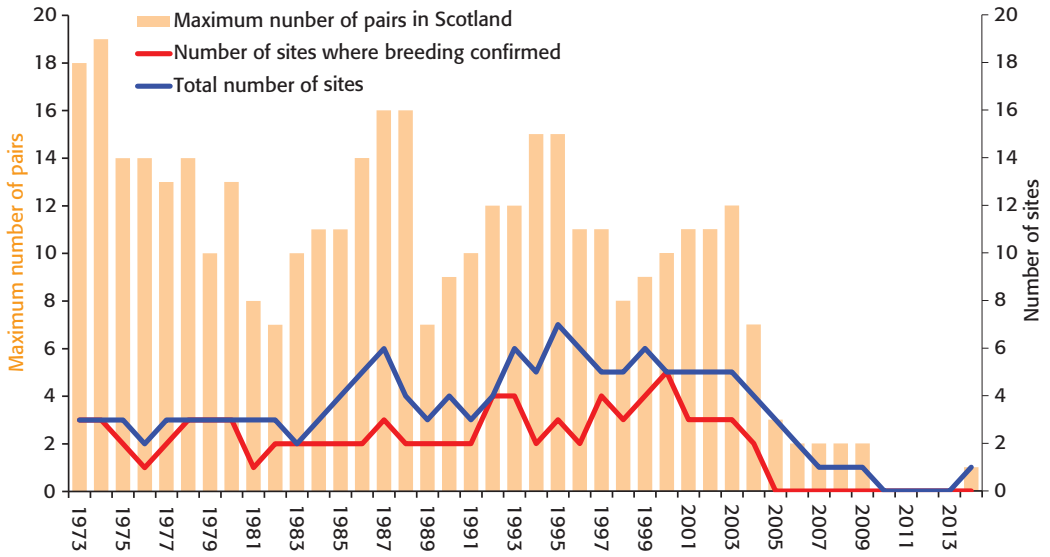


Figure 1. The maximum total number of breeding pairs, number of sites and number of sites where breeding was confirmed for Black-necked Grebe in Scotland, 1973–2014.

However, a new site in Perth & Kinross was colonised in 2003 and breeding also occurred in 2004. The last year of confirmed breeding by Black-necked Grebes recorded in Scotland was thus 2004.

The peak number of sites occupied in the breeding season occurred in 1995 (seven) and subsequently began to decline (Figure 1). The total number of pairs never exceeded that at the start of the review (18–19 in 1973–74). Between 1973 and 2004 the maximum total number of pairs fluctuated between seven and 14. After 2004 pairs and single birds continued to appear in spring at former breeding sites.

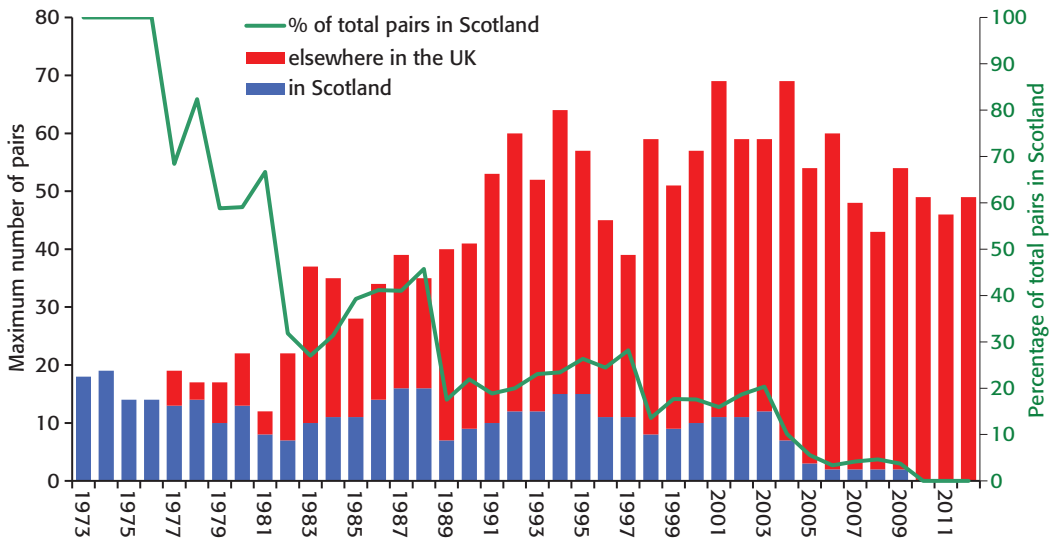


Figure 2. The maximum total number of breeding pairs of Black-necked Grebe in Scotland and the UK, 1973–2012. Blue bars show the number of pairs reported in Scotland; red bars show the additional number of pairs elsewhere; the green line indicates the percentage of the total UK population that occurred in Scotland. Source: RBBP files.

The Scottish population in comparison with the whole UK population

In the mid-1970s, all of the UK's breeding Black-necked Grebes occurred in Scotland (Figure 2), but after breeding re-commenced in England (Northumberland, 1977), the proportion began to decline even though the number remained between seven and 16 breeding pairs until 2005 when there were only three.

Martin & Smith (2007) reviewed the changing status of Black-necked Grebe in the whole of the UK up until 2004, also using RBBP data. The numbers of breeding pairs and sites used in this paper have subsequently been amended in the light of new information from Scotland which was unearthed as part of this review.

At the time of writing not all data for 2013 are available for all counties in the UK, though the RBBP has received records from all the relevant recording areas in Scotland. These show that there were no pairs reported at any sites. Limited data received so far for 2014, however, indicate that there may be a glimmer of hope for the future, as a pair was recorded displaying in Perth & Kinross during the summer, at a site with suitable nesting habitat. Given the sensitivity of the species to disturbance and the scarcity of Black-necked Grebes in Scotland now, the location of this pair is being withheld and, if the pair returns in 2015, the site should remain secret in the interest of the birds.

Why the decline?

A question which has vexed ornithologists is just why the Black-necked Grebe has become an increasingly rare breeder in Scotland and since 2004 has effectively been extinct as a breeding bird here. Examination of the records indicate a number of factors which have had an impact on the breeding success of pairs at the documented sites and each one of these may have played a part in determining the outcomes at each site. Black-necked Grebes show a preference for still, sheltered, eutrophic water bodies with plenty of cover including especially floating or partially submerged vegetation and reeds or sedges at the water's edge. Typically, these are small lochs or larger ponds, although larger water bodies with quiet, well-vegetated corners can be used as well. Many Black-necked Grebe sites across the UK also hold colonies of breeding Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* which may confer some additional protection from predators which could take eggs from the grebes' nests, or small young. It is perhaps no coincidence that nesting by Black-necked Grebes at Loch of Kinnordy and at both Borders sites ceased once there were no nesting gulls at these locations.

Most sites used tend not to suffer from disturbance by people, and frequent disturbance can dissuade pairs from settling or cause loss of eggs or young. With the Black-necked Grebe receiving additional protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), most breeding sites have been kept secret when in use to minimise such disturbance. Despite this, some pairs (though not in Scotland) nest in quite public places having become accustomed to the presence of people!

At many Scottish sites, there seems not to have been an obvious change in the habitat at breeding sites. The fact that before desertion, a number of breeding sites have suffered several years of low or zero productivity suggests that there may be a factor not obviously apparent to us, such as changes affecting food supplies for the chicks. Some observers have noted some aggression by other species such as Coot *Fulica atra* and Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, which have resulted in displacement of the nesting grebes. Predation by a variety of species including large gulls *Larus sp.*, Pike *Esox lucius* and Stoat *Mustela erminea* has been noted. High water levels have been an important factor at some sites, flooding nests out and, when coupled with windy weather, waves have removed floating vegetation. This was certainly the cause of the loss of breeding at one site in the Borders (Folly Loch), although the simultaneous desertion of the site by breeding Black-headed Gulls may also have been a factor. The increase in the numbers of

Otters *Lutra lutra* has been suggested by some as a factor in colony desertion by gulls at some sites including Loch of Kinnordy and Bemersyde, potentially indirectly leading to the desertion of these sites by Black-necked Grebes, although there seems to be no direct evidence for this.

There is no clear reason why all the traditional sites previously occupied have been deserted although at some, changes in the habitats available have certainly occurred. However, historically, Black-necked Grebes have been prone to change breeding sites suddenly, deserting some and colonising others. Thus, the RBBP archives show that between 1973 and 2012, Black-necked Grebes bred at 71 different sites across the UK, though never at more than 17 in any one year.

Martin & Smith (2007) provide an informative summary of the problems at a number of Black-necked Grebe sites across the UK. Scotland is also at the edge of the breeding range of the species (Snow & Perrins 1998), so it may be that other factors are affecting the population in other parts of the range in such a way that fewer birds are reaching Scotland in the spring.

Acknowledgements

This review could not have taken place without the full co-operation of the current local bird recorders, in particular Jon Cook, (Angus & Dundee), Ray Murray (Borders), Scott Paterson (Perth & Kinross) and Malcolm Ware (Fife). In addition, many of their predecessors provided RBBP with confidential records from earlier years. The analysis presented here was only possible because over the years a small group of dedicated birdwatchers have diligently taken notes of and followed up potential breeding records of Black-necked Grebes in Scotland, and then they have had the foresight to share them, confidentially, with local bird recorders, who in turn submitted the information to be held on the data archive held by the UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel. One of the Panel's aim is to maintain a secure database of all rare breeding bird records for posterity and the co-operation of the Panel is acknowledged here. The author would also like to thank Ian Andrews for promoting the idea of this paper and patiently waiting on its delivery.

References

- Balmer, D.E., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B.J., Swann, R.L., Downie, I.S., & Fuller, R.J. 2013. *Bird Atlas 2007–11: the breeding and wintering birds of Britain and Ireland*. BTO Books, Thetford.
- Holling, M., & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2014. Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2012. *British Birds* 107: 504–560.
- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerney, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C., & Grundy, D.S. 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. SOC, Aberlady.
- Leitch, A.J. 2002. The status of Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* in Angus 1985–2001. *Angus & Dundee Bird Report* 2001: 60–63.
- Martin, B. & Smith, J. 2007. A survey of breeding Black-necked Grebes in the UK: 1973–2004. *British Birds* 100: 368–378.
- Murray, R.D., Holling, M., Dott, H.E.M. & Vadome, P. 1998. *The Breeding Birds of South-east Scotland: a tetrad atlas 1988–1994*. SOC, Edinburgh.
- Rare Breeding Birds Panel reports online www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-online-reports
- Sharrock, J.T.R., Ferguson-Lees, I.J. & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 1975. Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 1973. *British Birds* 68: 5–23.
- Snow, D.W. & Perrins, C.M. (eds) 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Concise Edition. Volume 1. Non-Passerines. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

**Mark Holling, The Old Orchard, Grange Road, North Berwick, East Lothian EH39 4QT.
Email: secretary@rbbp.org.uk**

Revised ms accepted January 2015

If anyone has additional information on breeding Black-necked Grebes in Scotland, not summarised in this paper, they are invited to send details to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel at: secretary@rbbp.org.uk.

Appendix A. Review of breeding activity by recording area 1973–2014.

During the 42-year period 1973–2014, Black-necked Grebes bred in five Scottish recording areas, detailed below.

Angus & Dundee

Confirmed breeding at two sites.

Year of last confirmed breeding: 2002.

Year of last successful breeding: 2001.

Maximum total pairs in one year: 11 (1994).

In Angus & Dundee, breeding has only been confirmed at two sites, and never at more than one in any one year. During the 1990s, the principal site, Loch of Kinnordy, was the premier Scottish site for breeding Black-necked Grebes, with a maximum of 11 pairs in 1994. Breeding was first confirmed in 1986 and then in all years until the last in 2000, but the last year when young fledged from this site was 1997. The population at Loch of Kinnordy was well monitored by RSPB staff at the reserve, and a total of 30 young fledged during the period 1988–97 (Leitch 2002). In 2001, a pair returned to Kinnordy, but although they appeared settled, in May they moved to a nearby site from which two young fledged in July. A single pair bred at this second site in 2001 and returned in 2002 where they laid two clutches of eggs, but both were unsuccessful. A pair returned briefly in 2003, but since then there has been only the occasional record of the species in the area and nothing to qualify as potential breeding. (Note that the third site mentioned in Martin & Smith (2007) was an error, Black-necked Grebes have only bred at two sites in Angus & Dundee). It is not clear why breeding ceased at Loch of Kinnordy, but there was a long run of years when no young were raised before the site was deserted. However, the shift to the second site coincided with the collapse of the large nesting colony of Black-headed Gulls at Kinnordy in 2001. Many of those nesting gulls actually relocated that year to the same site that held the breeding pair of Black-necked Grebes.

Borders

Confirmed breeding at two sites.

Year of last confirmed breeding: 2004.

Year of last successful breeding: 2002.

Maximum total pairs in one year: seven (2003).

Black-necked Grebes returned as a breeding species in Borders in the 1990s, when a pair bred at Bemersyde Moss in 1992 and one young was seen in July that year. A pair returned in 1993 and 1994, and may have bred, but proof was not obtained; however, in 1995 a pair bred again here and also at a second site close by, Folly Loch. Both sites were then occupied and breeding occurred at one or both sites until 2004 when three pairs at Folly Loch fledged at least one young. In subsequent years though, both sites became increasingly unsuitable for breeding. At Folly Loch, the basis of many nests were rush *Juncus* clumps that grew in what was formerly a dense rush and sedge marsh with little standing water. After flooding created the loch in the late 1980s the muddy substrate where these grew was gradually eroded by wave action, the half-submerged 'islands' for the grebe and Black-headed Gull nests slowly disappearing. At Bemersyde Moss, although the vegetation remained much as before, the formerly large colony of Black-headed Gulls (the largest in Scotland, which numbered 14,320 pairs in 1991 (Murray *et al.* 1998)) suddenly became extinct; it was thought this colony offered a degree of protection to the grebes. In 2005–09, 1–2 pairs returned to Folly Loch, but no nesting occurred, and there were no records from Borders in 2010.

Dumfries & Galloway

Confirmed breeding at one site.

Year of last confirmed breeding: 1993.

Year of last successful breeding: none.

Maximum total pairs in one year: one (1993).

During the period of buoyant numbers of breeding Black-necked Grebes in Scotland during the 1990s, a pair attempted to breed at Carlingwark Loch in Dumfries & Galloway, but the nest was flooded out and no young were raised. Only a single bird returned in the following two years.

Fife

Confirmed breeding at two sites; probable/possible at a further three sites.

Year of last confirmed breeding: 2003.

Year of last successful breeding: 2001.

Maximum total pairs in one year: 10 (1977 & 1978).

Breeding has only ever been recorded at two sites (Kilconquhar Loch and Lindores Loch), but was first noted in Fife in 1931. By 1973, breeding was confirmed at both sites and continued at both until 1975 and again from 1977 until 1980. After that, Kilconquhar Loch was the only breeding site, with up to four pairs recorded. Breeding was confirmed in eight of the years between 1991 and 2003, the last year confirmed breeding was noted in Fife. The last year when young probably fledged was 2001. Disturbance by fishermen in boats is believed to have led to the desertion of the second site and in recent years water levels have remained very high, preventing the establishment of suitable vegetation for nesting. One or two pairs continued to be recorded until 2006, but there has been nothing to suggest potential breeding since then. As with the Loch of Kinnordy, there seems not to have been an obvious change in the habitat available at Kilconquhar Loch, but there was a run of unproductive years before breeding ceased.

Perth & Kinross

Confirmed breeding at three sites; probable/possible at a further six sites.

Year of last confirmed breeding: 2004.

Year of last successful breeding: 2003.

Maximum total pairs in one year: 14 (1973).

At the start of the period under review, Perth & Kinross held the largest number of breeding pairs of Black-necked Grebes, all of which bred at Dupplin Loch, which remained an important site until 1993. Numbers recorded there fluctuated from three to 14 over this 21-year period, with 10–12 pairs during a second good spell in 1986–88. Although pairs were recorded at times at four other sites in 1984–87, at none of them was breeding ever confirmed. In 1995, probable breeding was noted at Cogbrae with breeding confirmed there in 1997–2000, though the maximum number of pairs at Cogbrae never exceeded five (1999) and that was the only year when it was known that young fledged. This site became quite well known and it is thought that disturbance there may have displaced the breeding pairs to another site west of Perth where 1–2 pairs bred in 2003–04. At least one young fledged in 2003. There then followed a number of lean years until 2014 when a pair summered and display was recorded at a new site, perhaps indicating the first signs of recolonisation of the area.

Changes in numbers of wintering Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes in south-west Scotland

Loch Ryan in Dumfries & Galloway was formerly recognised as the only regular wintering site for Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). From the 1960s to the 1980s the average winter counts were between nine and 12 (Dickson 1992), with a peak count of 23 in February 1969. Slavonian Grebes *Podiceps auritus* were much scarcer with average counts for both Loch Ryan and Luce Bay combined of between four and eight from 1969 to 1989 (Dickson 1992). Neither grebe featured in the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts for Loch Ryan until 1992/93. Black-necked Grebes occurred nearly always on the western side of Loch Ryan, whereas Slavonians are widespread and often found with groups of Scaup *Aythya marila* and other sea ducks; they rarely gather into a single species pack.

Black-necked Grebes declined to three to five in the 1993/94 winter, singles by 2000 and then became less than regular. They have not been recorded on WeBS counts since 2004,

were absent in 2005, with only two reports in 2007; in 2008 four appeared in March and none since (*Dumfries & Galloway Bird Reports*). This decline mirrors the collapse in the Scottish breeding population (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Holling 2015). During the same period, Slavonian Grebes have become regular winter visitors in increasing numbers. Prior to 1990, numbers rarely reached into double figures, but during the 1990s there was an increase with 23 recorded in 1995, 26 in 1997, 36 in 2001, 50 in 2004, 61 in 2006, 58 in 2008, 67 in 2012 and a record count of 109 in December 2014 (*Dumfries & Galloway Bird Reports*). A similar increase has been reported from the Firth of Clyde which recorded a peak of 84 on a WeBS count in November 2010, and on the Northern Ireland coast, with a peak count in Loch Foyle of 103 in December 1995 (Charles & Andrew 2012, D. Allen pers. comm.). These increases have been attributed to an increased number of birds coming from Iceland (Holt *et al.* 2012). High counts on Loch Ryan are dependent on ideal count conditions with good visibility and a calm sea state. This

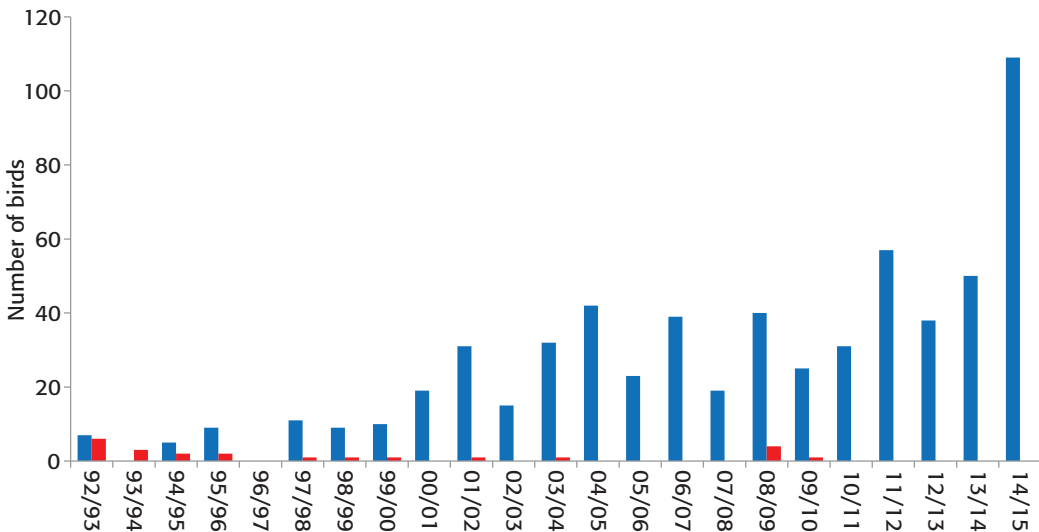


Figure 1. Numbers of Slavonian Grebes (blue) and Black-necked Grebes (red) from WeBS counts at Loch Ryan, 1992/93–2014/15.

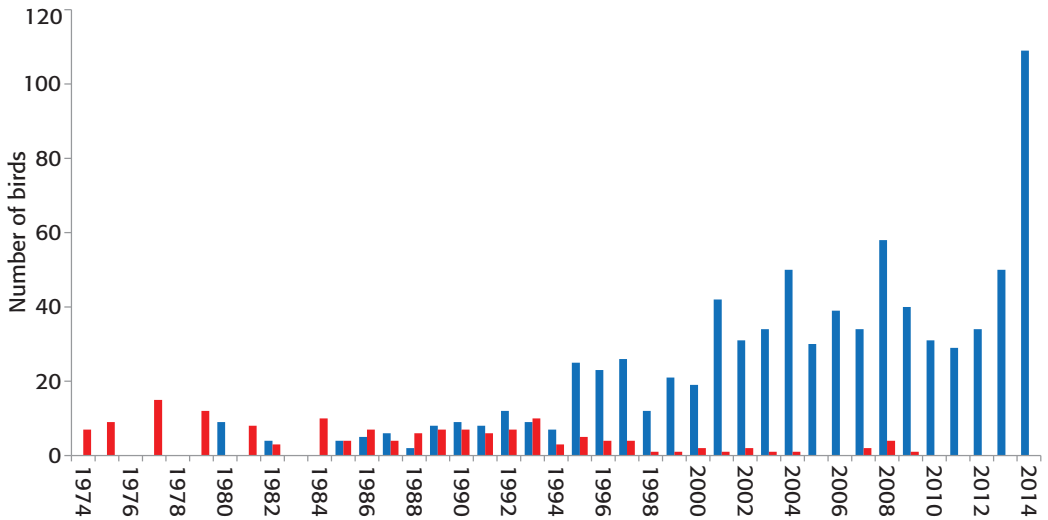


Figure 2. Numbers of Slavonian Grebes (blue) and Black-necked Grebes (red) at Loch Ryan 1974–2014 from all local records.

can mean that WeBS count days may not be particularly suitable for counting these birds; note the difference between the WeBS count peaks and all records in Figures 1 & 2.

Luce Bay, only 11 km to the south, also supports Slavonian Grebes in winter and, previously, there were occasional records of Black-necked Grebes. This site is far more difficult to cover being much larger, more exposed and with fewer good vantage points. During the period 1965–90 as many Slavonian Grebes were recorded in Luce Bay as in Loch Ryan (Dickson 1992). There is likely to be some interchange between the two sites. Luce Bay is less frequently counted, but 41 Slavonian Grebes recorded at the Waters of Luce (the north-east section of Luce Bay) on 11 January 2013 indicates that high numbers can occur at this site. Slavonian Grebes are recorded only occasionally at other sites along the Solway Firth, usually in single figures.

References

- Charles, D. & Crory, A. 2012. *Northern Ireland Birding Report*.
- Dickson, R.C. 1992. *The Birds in Wigtownshire*. G.C. Publishers, Wigtown.
- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerny, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy D.S. (eds.) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.
- Holling, M. 2015. A review of the status of breeding Black-necked Grebes in Scotland. *Scottish Birds* 35:19–25.
- Holt, C., Austin, G., Calbrade, N., Mellan, H., Hearn, R., Stroud, D., Wotton, S. & Musgrove, A. 2012. *Waterbirds in the UK 2010/11*. The Wetland Bird Survey. BTO, RSPB, JNCC, WWT.
- Paul N. Collin, Gairland, Old Edinburgh Road, Newton Stewart DG8 6PL.**
Email: pncollin@live.co.uk

Revised ms accepted January 2015



Plate 12. The double-shelled Osprey egg found in the Borders on 1 July 2014. © D. Bennett

A dead Osprey chick in a double-shelled egg

Tweed Valley Osprey Project (TVOP) volunteers have been monitoring the breeding activity of a single pair of Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* at a nest near Peebles, Borders, since CCTV coverage was installed there in 2004, as described by Savory *et al.* (2014). On 5 June 2014, the female of this pair was seen leaving the nest, when the male and three young chicks (4–8 days old) were present, and it was not seen again. There had been prolonged heavy rain the day before, on 4 June, when the female was seen being fed by the male while it was sheltering the chicks. It had sodden plumage, did not look happy and may have been badly chilled. On 6 June the chicks were all dead, the male was present and there was still no female. On 7 June TVOP Project Officer Diane Bennett and Forest Enterprise Scotland Environment Officer Tony Lightley inspected the nest and its vicinity and could find no sign of the female. They presumed it was dead. CCTV coverage of this nest continued until 21 July when the camera ceased to function due to a fault. During this time the resident male (darvic leg ring SS) was at the nest regularly and from 7 June it was seen being pestered by up to three new Ospreys which lacked the distinctive head marking of

the original female. The male eventually seemed to accept the advances of the most persistent newcomer, presumably a female, so perhaps they will return as a pair in 2015.

In view of public interest, it was decided to install a CCTV link to another Osprey nest in the upper Tweed valley. This was done on 1 July when there were two chicks aged about five weeks and an unhatched egg in the nest. One of the chicks (a female with darvic ring FK8) subsequently had a radiotransmitter fitted by Roy Dennis and David Anderson on 16 July and its movements have been tracked by satellite since it fledged a few days later. One of its first flights was across the Firth of Forth to Leven (Fife) and back! The unhatched egg was found to have a double shell and to contain a well-formed dead chick with an egg tooth (Plates 12–14). The chick seems to have died some time before it was ready to hatch, possibly because its vital gas exchange was inhibited by the double eggshell. Tony Lightley, who checks all the TVOP Osprey nests annually, says he finds one unhatched egg a year on average, but this was the first one with a double shell.

If you enter 'double-shelled egg' into Google, you will see examples of eggs with double shells laid by domestic hens, and just one laid by a wild bird, a bluebird *Sialia* sp. in a nestbox in North America (www.sialis.org/weirdeggs.htm). Professor Sally Solomon, previously at Glasgow University and an expert on eggshell structure, has told me she found a fossilised dinosaur egg with a double shell amongst some she examined in the 1990s (see www.independent.co.uk/news/did-stress-destroy-the-dinosaur-1073680.html). In the commercial egg industry, eggs with imperfect shells (with excess calcium 'dusting', 'white banding', 'slab-sided' or soft shells) are common and cause financial loss. They are downgraded and used for production of processed foods. They are usually a consequence of some form of environmental stress. In the 1990s Martin Reynard and I at Roslin Institute investigated their causation. In a series of experiments we identified a roughly three-hour (hormonally controlled) window during which an egg can be laid (Reynard &

Savory 1999). If the egg is not laid then, because the bird is stressed (proximity to unfamiliar hens was used as a standard stressor), it remains in the shell gland/uterus and is not laid until after the next egg is formed which then lies next to it. The length of the delay thus determines the type of eggshell abnormality observed.

In none of our work in the 1990s, when we recorded many abnormal eggs, did we find a double-shelled one, so their occurrence may be very rare (although they would not be evident if the outer shell is perfect). The precise mechanism which causes a complete egg to be encased in a second shell is unknown. Presumably for it to happen the 'normal' egg must be withheld in the oviduct long after the time it should have been laid. Sally Solomon has suggested that severe stress might occasionally cause antiperistaltic (anterior) movement of an egg out of the shell gland, and when the stress subsides it returns to the gland and is covered in a second shell. This raises the



Plate 13. The outer shell partially removed to reveal the inner egg. © D. Bennett



Plate 14. The dead Osprey chick found inside the double-shelled egg. © D. Bennett

question of whether the double-shelled Osprey egg in the Tweed valley nest was a consequence of environmental stress. One possible explanation might be the frequency with which Osprey pairs are harassed by other intruding Ospreys looking for a mate and nest site. TVOP volunteers have recorded many such encounters over the years, and with a growing population of younger birds across Scotland which do not breed because nest site availability appears to be limiting, such harassment of resident pairs may increase.

References

Reynard, M. & Savory, C.J. 1999. Stress-induced oviposition delays in laying hens: duration and consequences for eggshell quality. *British Poultry Science* 40: 585–591.

Savory, J., Bennett, D. & Lightley, T. 2014. Visits to an Osprey nest by Jays and 12 other species over ten years. *Scottish Birds* 34: 161–163.

John Savory, Netherham, Station Road, West Linton, EH46 7EL.

Email: jandesavory@hotmail.com

Diane Bennett, Tweed Valley Ospreys, Kailzie Gardens, Peebles, EH45 9HT.

Email: tweedvalleyospreys@gmail.com

Tony Lightley, Dumfries and Borders Forest District, Ae Village, Dumfries, DG1 1QB.

Email: Tony.Lightley@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Revised ms accepted January 2015

Red-backed Shrikes breeding in Moray in 2013

On 10 July 2013, Jim Craib was returning from a day in the hills along a footpath through moorland in central Moray. Shortly after passing some ruined buildings, he encountered a male Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* which he watched for a while and, assuming it to be a late migrant, moved on.

On my return from holiday ten days later, I was intrigued by Jim's e-mail. It did seem a very late (or early) date, and unusual locality, for a migrant Red-backed Shrike. On 21 July, I visited the area and immediately heard an unfamiliar alarm call coming from a small

patch of willow scrub where I then saw a fine adult male Red-backed Shrike perched prominently above the foliage. It was not long before an adult female flew into view and I then located two juveniles perched quietly in some gorse. When these did fly for short distances, they did so strongly and appeared to have fledged several days previously. Frustratingly, the female bore a ring, but it would have been inappropriate to attempt to re-capture her. The pair and their two young were still present when Ian Francis visited the site on 26 July.



Plate 15. Red-backed Shrike breeding habitat, Moray, July 2013. © Martin Cook



Plate 16. Red-backed Shrike, female, Moray, 21 July 2013. © Martin Cook

The breeding area was located on the edge of open moorland in central Moray at an altitude of 220 m. The exact nest site is unknown, but the family group showed a close affinity for a steep grassy bank with scattered Broom *Cytisus scoparius* and Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, and large stands of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. The bank was curved in such a way as to provide a sheltered south-facing bowl. Near the top of the bank was a small Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* surrounded by a dense thicket of Gorse and Broom. This was the focus of the male's activity and seems likely to have been where the nest was located. Below the bank was wet acidic grassland leading down to a burn.

The weather in the area in June and July 2013 was largely settled, dry and warm with only brief periods of cool, wet conditions. This is likely to have increased the availability of the large insects on which the adults feed their brood.

This is the first confirmed breeding by Red-backed Shrikes in Moray & Nairn. They have been proved to breed elsewhere in Scotland on 17 occasions (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Holling *et al.* 2008, 2010, 2012):

Table 1. Breeding Red-backed Shrikes in Scotland.

Caithness	1977, 1997
Highland (Badenoch & Strathspey)	1977, 2005
Highland (Inverness)	1978
Highland (Ross & Cromarty)	2010
Highland (Sutherland)	1985, 1988, 1999, 2007
North-east Scotland	1977, 1979, 1981
Perth & Kinross	1978, 1994
Shetland	1990, 2004

I revisited the site on three dates during the early summer of 2014, but unfortunately no Red-backed Shrikes were found.

References

- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerney, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. (eds) 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.
- Holling, M., & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2008. Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2005. *British Birds* 101: 276–316.
- Holling, M., & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2010. Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2007. *British Birds* 103: 2–52.
- Holling, M., & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2012. Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2010. *British Birds* 105: 352–416.

Martin Cook, Rowanbrae, Clochan, Buckie, Banffshire AB56 5EQ.

Email: martin.cook99@btinternet.com

ms accepted January 2015

Mark Holling, Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, has commented: "With great swathes of the Scottish countryside never visited annually by birders it is inevitable that we must be missing many comparable breeding attempts. Many Scottish breeding attempts by rare species such as Red-backed Shrikes have only come to light by chance discoveries of birds found in suitable breeding habitats and then followed up. This may involve patient watching of the bird's behaviour, or re-visiting the site at a later date to see if the bird(s) are still present and perhaps to obtain further evidence of breeding by seeing young or adults carrying food for young. A similar instance was the discovery of breeding Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina* in Highland in 2009 (*Scottish Birds* 30: 126–127). Most rare breeding birds receive special protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), so finders should watch from a distance so as not to disturb the birds in any way, and report any discoveries to the local recorder, as Jim Craib did in this instance. It is therefore important to be vigilant and to follow up late spring records of apparent migrants in potential breeding habitat."

Obituaries

James Stewart (1926–2014)



Plate 17. Jim Stewart (left) with Keith Macgregor on the Mull–Oban ferry, March 2005. © Tom Delaney

Jim was born in Howgate, Midlothian. A clever scholar, he was Dux at Penicuik High School in 1939. He began working life as an apprentice draughtsman at an engineering company in Loanhead and studied electrical engineering at Heriot Watt College. In 1952, he began working for Ferranti at Crewe Toll, Edinburgh, simultaneously continuing his studies at 'the Watt', where in 1955 he was awarded the prestigious Watt Club Bronze Medal. Jim worked at Ferranti until his retirement, 37 years later, in 1989. Latterly he managed the company's Inertial Systems Department manufacturing facilities and led the team who built the gyroscopes used in military aircraft including the Buccaneer and the Harrier. In 1957 he married Elma, and in 1959 they purchased the family home in Greenbank Crescent, Edinburgh, where they were to raise three sons: Alastair, Donald and Colin.

Jim's life-long enthusiasm was for birds and the natural world. In addition to SOC, he was a long-standing member of the Edinburgh Natural History Society, which he served as treasurer and was a popular leader of excursions for many years. He was also a leading member in Scotland of the British Arachnological Society and made an extensive collection of spiders, now donated to the Royal Scottish Museum.

He was a member of KSM's Edinburgh birding group and in the 1960s and 1970s a regular participant at the SOC Wednesday evening sessions at Regent Terrace organized by George and Irene Waterston where Willie Brotherston sent us off on wild goose chases to reservoirs and roosts throughout the Lothians. Jim also made many trips throughout Scotland and the UK to destinations from North Ronaldsay to the Scillies, and, overseas, from Andalucia to Canada. Jim kept good notes of all these excursions; this is his record of one memorable event in East Lothian:

19 June 1964 - at Saltoun Big Wood very cold and blustery evening with showers (had been hail in early evening). Reckoned we heard at least two singing male Nightjars.

24 June 1964 - back to Saltoun to check up on Nightjars. Heard and watched one singing male which covered a wide territory. It was obvious that this single bird had been counted as two on the 19th. No sign of another bird at all.

In the 1960s, Jim, KSM and TD went to the Uists. The day after we arrived, builders turned up to replace the roof, and for the rest of our time there we slept under rafters covered only with a tarpaulin. However, there were Corncrakes in the garden and from the house we could see Golden Eagles hunting over the hill. Further afield we found Red-necked Phalaropes, ground-nesting Grey Herons and the nests of

Twite and Corn Bunting. Then, exceptionally, we found a Black-headed Bunting. In those early days birding luminaries seemed more accessible; on one trip to Norfolk, Jim was delighted to meet R.A. Richardson at Cley, and on another, at Welney, Director of the RSPB, Peter Conder. In 1982, Jim and TD returned to Uist to see the long-staying Steller's Eider. Jim found the skeleton of a whale buried in the dunes... he retrieved one of the massive vertebrae and for years used it at home as a stool.

In 1986, Jim, TD and Eric and Andrew Pickard visited the uninhabited island of Eilean nan Roan, off Sutherland, where we were dive bombed by Bonxies and Arctic Skuas. We camped in a ruined shieling and grilled our supper on a rusty shovel over a fire. After dark, sitting on a cliff top in the rain, we watched by torchlight as Storm Petrels fluttered into their nest sites. On our way home through Sutherland, we couldn't resist the appeal of Ben Loyal. As we scrambled up the last bit to the summit, a Golden Eagle swooped low overhead, nearly causing us to lose our footing, but giving us our best view ever.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Jim regularly visited the Isle of May, usually with KSM, the late Charlie Cowper and TD. Once, when the sea was rough and the wind from the wrong quarter, the boatman, Willie Hughes, was unwilling to make the crossing; in his famously hoarse voice proclaimed: 'It's no' a day'. For years afterwards, that was Jim's theme whenever the weather was against us. On another trip to the May, marooned by storms, we ran out of food. Eventually, we stewed up a snared Rabbit along with an Octopus we found in a rock pool. Fortunately Willie's boat appeared before we had to eat the concoction.

From 1966 to 1990, Jim, usually in company with KSM and TD and in the 1960s with the late Arthur Smith made an annual trip in February or March to the Solway, to Kintyre or to Islay.

After 1990, we added Northumbria and north-east Scotland to our destinations. Jim kept meticulous notes of all these trips, according to which the north-east yielded the highest

species count. On our 1994 trip we were lucky enough to see the very accommodating Ross's Gull at Kinnaird Head, although we hadn't gone specifically for it. Some gulls we did go for were less obliging. In 2002, the Ivory Gull at Montrose afforded close views, but refused to wake up during the whole time we watched it. Elsewhere, despite hours of searching in pouring rain, led by an increasingly irate Frank Hamilton, a reported Bonaparte's Gull failed to show up at all. In the 1980s and 1990s Jim particularly enjoyed an annual autumn trip from Leith Docks to the Bell Rock on the famous MV *Gardylloo* and the views it often provided of skuas, shearwaters and terns.

The last of our long series of winter trips was in March 2005 to Mull, where we had close views of White-tailed Eagle and many of Golden Eagle. Sadly, after that, Jimmy's health made such excursions impossible. Jim was always a good birding companion, easy going and cheerful. He had a good wit and disliked pretention. If anyone was prone to repetitive use of a cliché, Jimmy would use it as the person's nickname... we wonder if 'déjà vu' will recognize himself here?

Jim was skillful in many fields beyond birding: he built a large extension onto the house in Greenbank, hand carved a traditional wooden rocking horse for a grandchild, learned the art of silversmithing in order to craft a ring for Elma and also took up book binding. After Elma's tragically early death, Jim didn't let the burden of keeping up the family home stand in the way of maintaining his friendships and interests. He was stoical in the face of diabetes, diagnosed in his sixties, and then Parkinson's disease ten years later. Eventually, he moved to live with son Colin and family in Northumberland, and finally to a care home in Hexham, where he passed away peacefully in his sleep.

Somehow, and almost without our realizing it, Jim played a really important part in the lives of his many friends. He will be greatly missed.

Tom Delaney and Keith S. Macgregor

A year in the life of Mousa: island nature reserve jewel

W. MILES

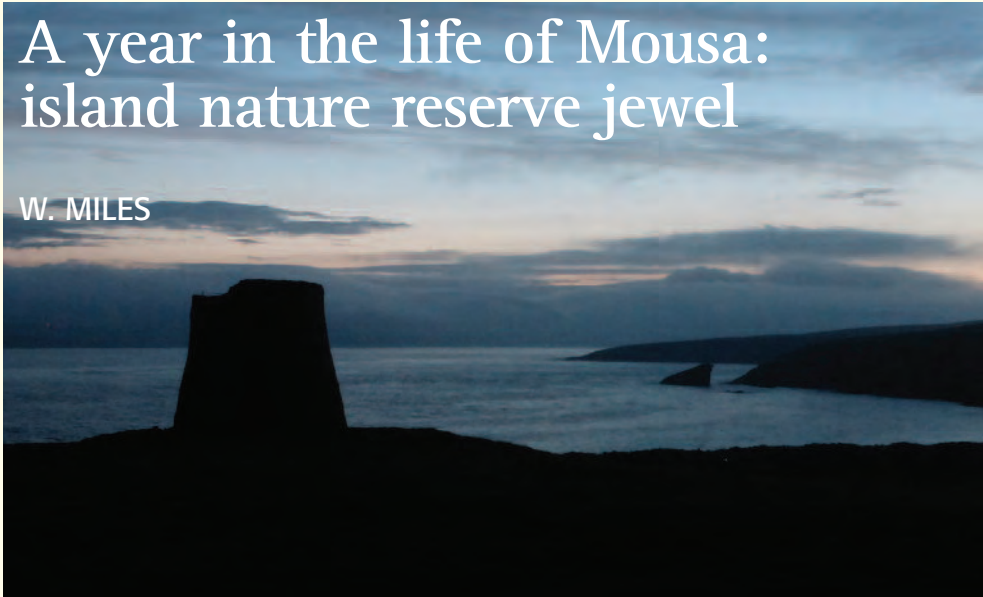


Plate 18. The Broch of Mousa on a warm, calm night in early summer, Shetland, June 2014. © Will Miles

Mousa is an uninhabited small island of just 180 hectares, located approximately 1 km east of south mainland Shetland at exactly 60° north. It is uncommonly rich in marine wildlife, especially birds, and holds much of great natural and historical interest to a very broad variety of people: birdwatchers, seabird scientists, archaeologists, artists, musicians, families on holiday and school groups, to name but a few. This article aims to describe and celebrate some of the natural diversity to be found on the island, through the turning of a year. It is based on visits made in 2014 during daytime and at night.

Winter

Looking down at Mousa from a low flying, ten-seater plane in February I am struck by two things. Firstly, that winter is perhaps not the best season for inter-island flying in Shetland (a series of high-speed, freezing squalls has made this particular journey, from Fair Isle to Tingwall, quite lively). Secondly, that the shape of Mousa is of two isles joined together, with the north isle about a third the size of the south, and the outline of both drawing the eye through an intricate figure of eight.

Mousa has been an RSPB island nature reserve since 2000 and is managed via agreements with its agricultural tenants, J. & A. Sinclair, and

the landowner, the Bells of Sandlodge (The Sumburgh Company). It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and a Special Protection Area (SPA) within the European *Natura 2000* nature reserves network.

The landscape of the island is gentle: rolling but never very high, predominantly herb-rich maritime grassland (maintained through low-intensity sheep grazing), here and there criss-crossed by dry stone walls. Two tidal lagoons sweep deep into the southeast corner and there are two freshwater lochans, one each in the north and south. In summer the lagoons are alive with terns and waders, but from the shaking plane a few winter Eiders and Herring Gulls are all that I can see, plus a wallowing lone Grey Seal. The island looks exceptionally cold and windy, its colours are muted by dark clouds and dampness and its surfaces pummelled by hail, and suddenly I fully appreciate why its abundant birdlife is now mostly further south.

Right in the middle of the island, on the south isle, the largest hill rises to just 55 m above sea level, encircled by the visitor path. This leads to an exceptionally rare feature which for most human visitors, if not one or two other species, stands as an instinctive homing point and *the*

focal centre of the island. It is the Broch of Mousa, an Iron Age dry stone roundhouse of spectacular height (13.3 m).

The broch is exceptionally well preserved and one of just a handful of such ancient towers still standing in Scotland. Apart from a small doorway, there are no large openings in its near-vertical outer surface, just small cracks and cavities between the building stones. These little crevices are occupied by a throng of nesting Storm Petrels plus one or two pairs of Black Guillemots through the warmer seasons; however in winter, the birds are elsewhere and the tower is relatively lifeless, standing on the island's western shore like a frozen sentinel gazing across to the Shetland mainland opposite.

Luckily for the birder, a look across Mousa Sound in winter does not always seem so futile. Viewed from the mainland, the sheltered water usually holds a large flock of Eiders, which in several years has contained up to two King Eiders. Also, Long-tailed Ducks, Little Auks, Black Guillemots and Great Northern Divers can be seen here (there are at least eight records of White-billed Diver too), as well as Otters, Harbour Porpoises and, occasionally, the odd pod of Killer Whales.

Mousa can only be accessed by boat and Mousa Sound acts as the island's natural gatekeeper. In winter the Sound is too rough for commercial boat trips to cross safely. However in April, as the Shetland spring gathers momentum and sea conditions ease, The Mousa Boat service starts up again and day and night trips to the island can begin.

Spring

Full springtime in Shetland can take an age to arrive, but once it has, the intensity of life and colour is exhilarating. From the end of March to early June the island is refreshed by growth and change. The birdlife always builds up gradually, but the plants sometimes seem to switch from drab brown to fresh greens, pinks, violets, turquoise, powder blue and yellow in just a few days.

Most numerous among the breeding birds are the seabirds. Late March and the first week or so of April see the return of breeding Black Guillemots, Puffins, Shags, Great and Lesser

Black-backed Gulls, Herring Gulls and Fulmars. Through April, Great and Arctic Skuas, Kittiwakes, Arctic Terns and Red-throated Divers reappear. Then later, mostly in May and early June, the Storm Petrels arrive. Gannet, Razorbill and Guillemot activity picks up through April too, although these species don't breed on the island and many of the individuals seen passing and fishing close by are presumably breeders from elsewhere, perhaps Noss, Sumburgh or Fair Isle. Other breeding birds include Oystercatchers, Curlew, Lapwing, Ringed Plovers, Redshanks, Snipe, Eiders, Greylag Geese, Rock Doves, Ravens, Hooded Crows, Wheatears, Rock Pipits, Meadow Pipits, Twite, Skylarks, Shetland Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris zetlandicus* and Shetland Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes zetlandicus*. On a fine day in May it is possible to see and hear all these species well, except for the Storm Petrels, within an hour of stepping off the boat.

One important reason why seabirds successfully breed on Mousa, notably the petrels, is that the whole island is entirely free of rodents and cats,

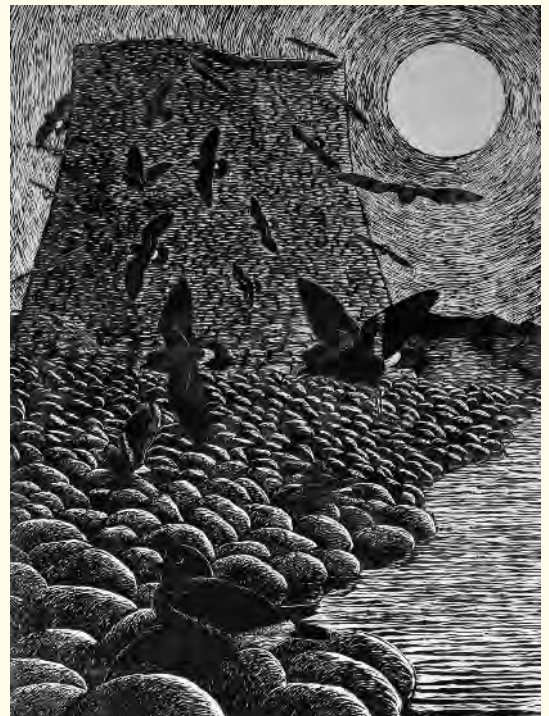


Plate 19. Mousa broch, full moon and the Storm Petrels - appearing and disappearing like wisps of smoke. Woodcut print by Shetland artist Howard Towll. © Howard Towll

also ferrets and Stoats (common on mainland Shetland). This is indeed remarkable, considering the island's extensive history of human habitation and boat landings. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Mousa was relatively well populated by at least 11 families, as evidenced by the remains of the croft walls and buildings, the broch is thought to date from around 100 BC, and earlier occupation even than this is indicated by the remains of Bronze Age burnt mounds and a Neolithic homestead. Certain islands in Shetland seem to have an incredible resilience to colonisation by Rats, for example Fair Isle, with its long history of boat traffic and large shipwrecks, Mousa and Uyea. It is said that the soil of Uyea has a property that deters Rats and that crofters on neighbouring Unst used to cross to the island, collect earth, and return with it to sprinkle around their crops as effective protection from rodent damage. Could the soils of Mousa have such power? Currently, RSPB Scotland guards against rodent colonisation by routine monitoring on the island and a contingency biosecurity plan for rapid eradication in the event of occurrence.

Like anywhere in Shetland, on Mousa, passage birds can be hit or miss but when the migration is good it can bring great surprises. Numbers are usually low, even on a good day, but species can be diverse. One House Martin and two Wheatears were the lot on my 'worst' spring day trip, but the best trip (20 May) produced three Great Northern Divers and a blue Fulmar from the ferry, one Whinchat, two Redstarts, seven Wheatears, one Sanderling, two Chiffchaffs, three Willow Warblers and a Blackcap along the visitor path, then a Honey-buzzard, which flew past at close range whilst I was admiring the view from the top of the broch. It is impossible to predict what might be seen, but in Shetland anything can appear.



Plate 20-21. Within Mousa's herb-rich maritime grassland can be found dwarf shrubs such as this Creeping Willow *Salix repens*. Mousa, Shetland, July 2014. (Inset). Shetland Bumblebee *Bombus muscorum agricola* and Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Mousa, Shetland, 11 September 2014. By this time of year, few pollinating insects or plants in flower are still standing. © Will Miles

Most birdwatchers do not often go looking for birds at night; however, twice a week from mid-May to mid-July, The Mousa Boat runs a special night-time ferry service to facilitate just this. The desired species is of course the Storm Petrel. Their breeding season is unusually protracted, on Shetland lasting through to November, occasionally even December. But May and early June mark the beginning, when the breeding birds begin to settle and lay.

During daylight hours there is little to show that the petrels are present. They nest deep in crevices and are only active on land at night, almost never seen at sea from land, rarely heard singing during daytime, and in spring their distinctive fragrance has not yet permeated the inside of the broch (filled with it later in the year). However, as I leave the night ferry and begin to walk towards the broch at about 11 p.m. (the date is 24 May), familiar purring and hiccupping sounds start up along a tumbledown wall, somehow evocative of a particularly unfrighting 1970s science-fiction film - hidden tiny creatures with magical sonic lanterns, suddenly coming to life.

I reach the broch and stop to look and listen with the other visitors, tonight, the majority here with the two local nature and wildlife tour companies. The night is clear and the last beams of sunlight never completely fade, reminding us how near we are to the Arctic. Close in front of us the imposing curves of the broch can be seen in detail, looming up high into the dark blue sky.

Soon there is a flicker of black and white and a Storm Petrel scoots out from behind the broch, clearly visible but flying fast. The bird circles the tower a few times, then another appears, and another, all three spiralling together. Suddenly there is a fourth bird at the very top, moving quite differently. It is flying very slowly, hanging and slow-flapping in the minimal breeze, on tiptoe delicately pattering along the parapet. The combination of the tiny birds, mighty broch and soft midnight glow is spellbinding, enchanting.

We return to the boat at about 1am, having seen perhaps thirty different petrels at the broch and heard many more calling from the island's



Plate 22. Variation in the appearance of Arctic Terns - a first-summer plumaged bird on a drizzly day in spring, a juvenile on a summer's evening and an adult in early autumn, Mousa, Shetland, 2014. © Will Miles

stone walls and boulder beaches. The atmosphere is tingling but everyone is hushed, as though we all share a secret. As the ferry quietly departs, a snipe begins drumming high above the island and for a short while the sweet, fresh scent of the grassland herbs drifts with us, out across the sound. The calm sea, sprinkled with silver stars, shimmers like the fringes of a dream... And my only wish is to go back.

Summer

Mid-June to mid-August is the busiest time for birdlife on Mousa. Breeding activity peaks, wader passage builds, and non-breeding seabirds visit. The island is at its greenest and days at their longest. In a land of golden perfection, the sun would be warm and always shining and the sea forever calm and clear. But this is Shetland. And the weather is sometimes not so kind, even in summer.

Whatever the weather brings though, once on the island, the buzz of seabird activity is impossible to miss. For some species, such as the terns, skuas and Shags, the breeding cycle of individuals is not always tightly synchronised, and during a typical stroll in July it is possible to see a variety of young birds, ranging from small, newly hatched chicks to fully fledged, fresh-plumaged juveniles. Arctic Terns are a dominant feature in summer, their activity being particularly frenetic and vigorous. The tidal lagoons are a hotspot for this species and a brilliant place (particularly for families and school groups) to encounter varied nesting, preening, feeding, courtship, and chick-rearing activity. Here the full age range of chicks, juveniles, first-summer, and adult birds occur all together and with a telescope can be observed from afar in detail for hours (when watching seabirds in high summer, I often lose track of time).

Since 2000, seabird breeding numbers on Mousa have been monitored by RSPB Scotland staff and volunteers, using standardised, non-invasive techniques (see Walsh *et al.* 1995). During this time, like elsewhere on Shetland, breeding numbers have fluctuated and each year is different from the last. Logistical constraints dictate that not all species can be monitored annually. However, full censuses are carried out each year for Arctic Tern, Great Skua and Arctic Skua and since 2000 maximum counts have totalled 1,127 apparently occupied nests (AON) and 41 and 14 apparently occupied territories (AOT), respectively. Breeding numbers of Storm Petrels have been estimated using call playback surveys and demographic modelling of the colony, the largest in the UK (Ratcliffe *et al.* 1998, Bolton *et al.* 2010). These methods indicated a substantial increase occurred between 1996 and 2008, from 5,410 (95% CI 3,932–7,022) to 11,781 (95% CI 8,100–17,728) apparently occupied nest sites (AOS).



Plate 23. The path to the broch in high summer. Alongside, Storm Petrels nest within the boulder beach. Mousa, Shetland, July 2014. © Will Miles



Plate 24. Storm Petrel nest box and adult. Many such boxes have been placed deep within the island's walls and beaches and are inhabited and successfully used by breeding petrels every year. This box has been temporarily uncovered for research purposes, but usually has a plastic lid and is overlaid with stones. Mousa, Shetland, July 2014. © Will Miles

Owing to the largeness and accessibility of the colony, Mousa's Storm Petrels have been the subject of many research projects. These have examined a variety of aspects of the species' ecology and behaviour, for example the regulation of food-delivery to nestlings (Bolton 1995), physiology and foraging performance of individuals breeding in nest boxes (Bolton 1996), response of individuals to call playback (Ratcliffe *et al.* 1998), age structure of the population (Okill & Bolton 2005), occurrence of hypothermia in nestlings (Watson 2013), effects of disturbance on reproductive success (Watson *et al.* 2014) and, in 2014, the foraging locations of breeding individuals as revealed by miniature GPS data loggers. Much of this work was carried out during the summer months (June to August), the main incubation and hatching period.

Summer can be a slow season for passage migrants. Fortunately though, come July and August, waders are on the move and a few passage individuals can be found most days. In 2014, small parties of migrant Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Redshank and Ringed Plover were seen on the lagoons almost daily, the muddy flashes and edges of the lochans were worth checking too (on 21 July, the flash below the broch held a smart Wood Sandpiper), and after dark,

Golden Plovers, Greenshanks, Whimbrels, Curlews and Black-tailed Godwits were heard calling, high overhead. Migrant Common and Arctic Terns, beginning their long journeys south, also start to show up in July, with increasing numbers gathering on the shores of the lagoons until early August.

Throughout the late spring and summer, Mousa is also visited by non-breeding seabirds: wandering young individuals not yet of breeding age and adults whose breeding attempts have failed early. Non-breeding skuas, gulls, Shags and terns can usually be seen, loafing around the island in small groups. In July and August, non-breeding Storm Petrels visit too, numbers of which can be spectacular. These are mostly young petrels, typically two to four years old - 'teenagers' - which wander the north-east Atlantic in their thousands and at night prospect different islands for mates and nest burrows, prior to settling down to breed in later years. They visit land in greatest abundance during cloudy, particularly dark nights and can make a night-time petrel trip in July an even more extraordinary experience than a trip in May or June. Looking back, my diary notes from 17 July outline a classic midsummer night.

Hot and muggy tonight (hay fever troublesome), the sea is hazy. Low cloud but no rain. Arrive at the broch around midnight and it's buzzing. Scores of petrels calling and in flight, extremely close. The activity is swarm-like, manic. Constant flickings of air on my face as birds stream past. The swift shape of each is blurred by the darkness (very gloomy but not pitch). Birds forever coming and going like wisps of black smoke. White rumps twinkling then gone. Around the broch the wisps weave together into one living dark mass of incredible speed and grace - never scary, just uplifting. Many more birds than in spring; must be hundreds. On the way back to the boat the whole island seems to dance. Sound and movement around every stone.

Autumn

Through August, the noise and throb of seabird activity gradually fades away, as more and more of the breeders and non-breeders depart the island to spend the winter elsewhere. This month marks the onset of autumn passerine migration in Shetland though, and with luck can be productive for scarce and rare species such as Icterine Warbler, Barred Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Wryneck, Common Rosefinch, Greenish Warbler and Citrine Wagtail. By September, usually the only birds still breeding on Mousa are the Storm Petrels; everything else is either a migrant or one of the few residents, such as the Wrens.

On a calm day in early autumn, the island is at its most restful. The piquant spring and summer colours of the grassland have changed to warmer, amber tones and after a season of sharp intensity, the northern sunlight has mellowed and is easy on the eye. It can be an exciting time for the birdwatcher but good weather becomes increasingly intermittent and therefore so too do ferry crossings. The last Mousa boat trip of the year is usually in mid-September.

On one day every year, usually in the second week of September, a standardised sample of Storm Petrel nest boxes and crevices is checked on the island and the status of each nest site recorded. All located chicks of suitably large size are ringed and from the nest data an estimate of annual Storm Petrel productivity is calculated (estimated number of chicks fledged per egg

laid). This study is run by the Shetland Ringing Group and has been carried out by local ringers and volunteers every year since 1995. It is one of very few studies worldwide to ring Storm Petrels of known age and generate precise knowledge of the ages of re-trapped individuals, including established breeders and birds prospecting potential colonies (e.g. see Okill & Bolton 2005). It was a privilege to join the group for the work in 2014, on 11 September.

The trip was timed to weather-perfection and in bright sunshine the ferry set off across Mousa Sound, soon to pass a pod of at least ten Harbour Porpoises gently rolling along through the calm blue surface. On land, a small selection of migrant birds was seen, including Pied Flycatcher, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler and Blackcap, plus two Little Stints on the west lagoon (...secretly though, hopes were high for something rarer).

The group split into two, through the morning carefully checked Storm Petrel nest sites along separate sections of dry stone wall, and encountered young petrels of a variety of sizes. The largest juveniles were fully feathered, with a rather clockwork yet regal manner about them uncannily reminiscent of albatrosses. The smallest chick was tiny, just a fragile gathering of clean grey fluff with a little tubular beak slightly poking out; such birds were not touched and the nest covering immediately replaced. The work was finished by early afternoon and we set foot back on the mainland just as the wind was strengthening and dark clouds began to gather.

There is currently a fashion, it seems, for TV wildlife documentaries in which the presenter touches charismatic wild animals (snakes, Wolves, etc) and imparts that in doing so they, or "we", feel close to nature. There's no denying that if you hold an animal, physically you *are* close to it. However, the concept that by touching wild animals humans feel close to nature strikes me as questionable and is at odds with my experiences as a bird ringer. When briefly holding a bird while it is ringed and measured, including juvenile Storm Petrels on Mousa, invariably I do not feel close to nature or the natural world. One reason for this, among many, is that when holding a wild animal the big

thing that one simply cannot assume is that it really *needs and wants* to be touched - and it is impossible to feel genuinely close to anything (philosophically or otherwise) if there's a chance that actually it might want rid of you.

By contrast, the one circumstance when I do feel close to nature is when I am watching things from a position of reduced physical presence (perhaps hidden on a rock, looking from a distance) and am confronted by an aspect of non-human life that captures my interest so completely that, for a brief time, I lose all consciousness of myself and feel completely anonymous, connected to the natural surroundings because I've left the human world. This sensation, for it is really nothing more, has been described by the artist Lars Jonsson as '*the dissolving*' - an elegant and perfect summary.

It is a credit to those who help manage the island as a nature reserve, that Mousa, as it turns out, is a place where *the dissolving* is particularly easy to chance upon. And it is this, inherently coupled with the diverse gatherings of life which occur there every year, that makes the island a jewel - special, rare and worth experiencing, in daylight and at night.

Travel to Mousa

The Mousa Boat operates day trips from April to mid-September, night trips from mid-May to mid-July and departs from Sandwick, south mainland Shetland. Details can be found at www.mousa.co.uk.

Acknowledgements

For supplying information about Mousa and other Shetland islands I am very grateful to Helen Moncrieff and Newton Harper (RSPB Scotland), Ann Sinclair (Fair Isle Museum), Rory Tallack and Paul Harvey (Shetland Biological Records Centre) and Mike Pennington. Thanks go to Howard Towll (www.howardtowll.com) for allowing use of his brilliant woodcut and to Mark Bolton (RSPB) and Dave Okill (Shetland Ringing Group) for allowing me to join them for Storm Petrel fieldwork.

References

- Armit, I.** 2003. *Towers in the North - The Brochs of Scotland*. The History Press, Gloucestershire.
- Bolton, M.** 1995. Experimental evidence for regulation of food delivery to storm petrel, *Hydrobates pelagicus*, nestlings: the role of chick body condition. *Animal Behaviour* 50: 231–236.
- Bolton, M.** 1995. Food delivery to nestling Storm Petrels: limitation or regulation? *Functional Ornithology* 9: 161–170.
- Bolton, M.** 1996. Energy expenditure, body-weight and foraging performance of Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* breeding in artificial nest chambers. *Ibis* 138: 405–409.
- Bolton, M., Brown, J.G., Moncrieff, H., Ratcliffe, N. & Okill, J.D.** 2010. Playback re-survey and demographic modelling indicate a substantial increase in breeding European Storm-petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* at the largest UK colony, Mousa, Shetland. *Seabird* 23: 14–24.
- Okill, J.D. & Bolton, M.** 2005. Age of Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* prospecting potential breeding colonies. *Ringling & Migration* 22: 205–208.
- Ratcliffe, N., Vaughan, D. Whyte, C. & Shepherd, M.** 1998. The status of Storm Petrels on Mousa, Shetland. *Scottish Birds* 19: 154–159.
- Ratcliffe, N., Vaughan, D. Whyte, C. & Shepherd, M.** 1998. Development of playback census methods for Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus*. *Bird Study* 45: 302–312.
- Walsh, P.M., Halley, D.J., Harris, M.P., del Nevo, A., Sim, M.W., Tasker, M.L.** 1995. Seabird monitoring handbook for Britain and Ireland. Published by JNCC / RSPB / ITE / Seabird Group, Peterborough.
- Watson, H.** 2013. The occurrence of hypothermia in nestlings of the European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. *Seabird* 26: 96–97.
- Watson, H., Bolton, M. & Monaghan, P.** 2014. Out of sight but not out of harm's way: Human disturbance reduces reproductive success of a cavity-nesting seabird. *Biological Conservation* 174: 127–133.

Will Miles, Aberdeen.

NEWS AND NOTICES

New SOC members

Ayrshire: Mr & Mrs B. Dodson, Mrs A. Hogg, Mr T. Quinn, Mr D. Smallwood, **Borders:** Mr N. Baylis, Miss J. Gulliver-Goodall, Mrs H. James, Mr & Mrs A.S. McNeilly, Mr J. Waddell, **Central Scotland:** Mr J. Banks, Mr J.M. Duncan, Mr & Mrs R. Harvey, Mrs J. Lynch, Mr B.H. Thompson, Ms M.I. Verrall, Mr T. Wagstaff, **Clyde:** Mr R. Devine, Mrs C. Duffield, Mr A. Ferry, Mr R. Graham, Ms K. Hotopp, Mr & Mrs C. Howe, Mr S. McNeil, Miss D. Rai, Mr A. Savage, Mr R. Smith, Mr C. Smith, Mrs M. Whyte, **Dumfries:** Mr W.A. Brydson, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr W.C. Aspin, Mr R. Bolger, Mr L. Hunter, Mr M. Osborne, Mr L. Raye, Mr I. Ricketts, Sir R. Saxby, **Fife:** Mr J. Bousie, Mr J.B. Cowan, Mr G. Macmillan, Mr R. Morris, **Highland:** Mr R. Aegerter and family, Mr R. Arnold, Dr S.V. Brown, Mr C. Leslie, Mr A. MacIntyre, Mr R. Mackenzie, Mr I. Plumtree, Mrs H. Skuodas, **Lothian:** Mr G. Blaikie, Ms Z. Clelland, Ms M.M.M. Conlon, Dr D.H.K. Davies, The Donaldson family, Mr & Mrs J. Francis, Mr P. Grainger, Miss E. Green, Dr & Dr M. Griffin, Mr A. Griseewood, Mr G. Hall, Mr G. Jackson, Ms S. King, Ms M. Knox, Mr A. Marks, Miss T. Metzger, Ms I. Paterson, Ms J. Reay, Ms H. Russell, Mrs S. Smith-Main & Ms M. Smith, Ms M. Speirs, Mr & Mrs A. Stobart, Mr S. Whitaker, **Moray:** Mrs M. Rennie, Dr J. Turkington & Mr A. Whyte, Mr D. Watson, **North-East Scotland:** Mr & Mrs K. Coutts, Mr R. Cutting, Mr A. Ewing, Mr S. Gow, Mrs J.D. McDowall, Mr K. Paterson, **Orkney:** Miss L.J. Dow, Ms S. Whiteman, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr R. Hopper, Ms H. Riley, **Tayside:** Mr J.W. Smith.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are **November: 1st** £150 Miss McCulloch, **2nd** £75 Mrs Draper, **3rd** £50 M. Nicoll, **4th** £30 N. Elkins, **5th** £20 I.T. Craig, **6th** £10 Mrs M. Gregory. **December: 1st** £50 Mrs Little, **2nd** £30 Paul Speak, **3rd** £20 D. Wiggins, **4th** £10 Alison Duncan. **January: 1st** £30 Miss P. Moncur, **2nd** £20 T. Johnson Ferguson **3rd** £10 A.D.K. Ramsay.

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

The 200 Club was set up in 1989 by Mrs Daphne Peirse-Duncombe with the aim of raising money for the decoration and refurbishment of the Club's premises. The 200 Club is a Private Lottery and is open for members aged over 18 to join, with payment of £12 payable each June. Members of the scheme are entered into the 200 Club draws throughout the year for 40 cash prizes. Subscription income is split 50/50 between the prize money and SOC funds. Since it was started, the scheme has raised almost £30,000 for the Club. In 2014, it funded the purchase of replacement printers for the office, computer equipment and improved HQ road signage. A joining form is enclosed with this issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Branch updates

Outer Hebrides recorder: we are delighted to welcome Ian Ricketts on board as the new recorder, as of January 2015. Email: recorder@outerhebridesbirds.org.uk Tel: 07534 085505. Ian replaces Yvonne Benting and Ian Thompson who Council wishes to thank for their commitment to the role over the past year.

Fife committee: we were sorry to see Alison Creamer leave Fife to be nearer her place of work in West Lothian. Alison has been an enthusiastic member of the Fife branch and, for the past two years, a committed branch secretary. We wish her well. David Heeley has stepped down from the Fife Committee and as Vice-chairman to take up the position of Hon. Secretary of the SOC. We are sure that he will do a great job, being very well-organised and efficient.

Events

■ SOC Annual Conference

30 October to 1 November 2015, Atholl Palace, Pitlochry. Programme information and booking form will be sent with the June issue of *Scottish Birds*.

■ Isle of Coll Bird Festival

24–26 April 2015. Discover the rich birdlife of this beautiful island - guided walks, boat trips and family activities on offer throughout the weekend. Visit www.collbunkhouse.com

for more information and prices. Or email: info@collbunkhouse.com or tel: 01879 230217.

Waterston House

■ Optics Demo Day

Sunday 17 May 2015, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. A wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try before you buy! Or just come along for some friendly expert advice.

■ Art Exhibitions

John Busby & Howard Towll, show until 1 April
Paul Bartlett, 3 April to 20 May
Lucy Newton, 23 May to 15 July

Paul Bartlett's unique award-winning work is inspired from his encounters with nature on his travels around Scotland and abroad. He continually experiments with new media, combining collage and papier maché with acrylics, pastels, charcoal, sand or even tea. Much of his work highlights the ecology and conservation of his subjects by incorporating pertinent text from recycled nature magazines.

Paul feels very privileged to be making a living from his passion for the natural world. For this reason he feels compelled to give something back and will be donating all profits from the sale of originals at his forthcoming SOC exhibition to conservation charities.

■ The Scottish Birdfair

23–24 May 2015, Levenhall Links, Musselburgh. There is something for everyone at Scotland's annual event for nature lovers. Guided walks, talks, workshops, special events plus a wide range of stalls to browse. Come and visit us at the SOC stand! www.scottishbirdfair.org.uk



Plate 26. Kingfisher by Paul Bartlett.



Plate 25. Paul Bartlett sea kayaking around Mingulay and Barra, Outer Hebrides, July 2013. © Paul Bartlett

Bird Photography Code of Practice

D. TIPLING



Plate 27. Capercaillie, North-east Scotland, 2014. © *Harry Scott*. It should be noted that photographing a Capercaillie at the nest or while it is lekking requires an appropriate licence from SNH. In addition to its Schedule 1 protection, from 2001, it also became illegal, without a licence, to disturb a Capercaillie (or indeed any lekking species) whilst it was lekking. Note that this includes 'rogue males', and also bear in mind that, strictly speaking, Capercaillie lek throughout the year. Further guidance is given by the Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, stating that "forestry operations and known recreational activities [including birding and photography] etc should be avoided within 1 km of lek sites between 1 March and 15 May" (Kortland 2006).

The following article was originally published in April 2011 in the journal British Birds and has been widely quoted as a guide to best practice in the increasingly popular field of bird photography. We thank the author and the editor of British Birds for permission to reproduce the article here, with very minor changes and additional plates and captions. SOC Council and the editors of Scottish Birds endorse this Code of Practice and reiterate that the welfare of the bird(s) should always come first.

The interest in bird photography has boomed over the past decade. Many birdwatchers have become keen photographers, regularly carrying a camera when out birding, whether it be a conventional camera and lens or a compact camera for digiscoping. So it is probably safe to say that most people who go birding are photographers to some degree or other.

With so many more people wanting to photograph birds, particularly rarities, there are

added pressures and responsibilities on photographers. It is usually necessary to get close or sit it out in hides on reserves but all this can bring us into conflict with others. Based on an admittedly non-scientific sample, it seems that many of the complaints about birders' behaviour these days, especially where rare or scarce migrants are concerned, are directed at people trying to photograph the bird. For many years, wildlife photographers affiliated to photographic societies, clubs and organisations have worked with a code of practice. The following list is as much advice to new and aspiring photographers as it is a guide to good ethics and ensuring that the photographer stays within the law. It is time that birders had a Bird Photography Code of Practice and I hope that these recommendations will act as a useful reference for bird photographers at large in Britain and elsewhere.

A well-used mantra, but one that is paramount, is that the welfare of the bird is more important than the photograph.

Birds should not be harassed by continual pushing and flushing. Most rarities soon settle into a pattern and successful photography can often be achieved by waiting patiently and allowing the bird to come to you.

The use of playback vocalisations should be employed sparingly, if at all; if a reaction is not forthcoming immediately, then playback is unlikely to work and should not be repeated in a given territory. It should be noted that the use of playback for species protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act may be considered illegal.

Photographing breeding species listed under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act requires a licence. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a Schedule 1 species when that species is nest-building, at, near or in a nest containing eggs or young. This includes the photography of dependent young, too. To apply for a licence to photograph Schedule 1 species you need to contact the respective licensing



Plate 28. Osprey from Loch of the Lowes hide, Perth & Kinross, May 2014. © *Raymond Leinster*. Photographing birds from footpaths and roads, from cars and hides is often the best way to minimise disturbance, but Schedule 1 species remain special cases. The question always has to be - is photographing this bird from this place likely to cause any risk of disturbance whatsoever? The provision of viewing facilities at reserves to observe specific rare birds' nests (as in the case of this Osprey nest) will often also be the best means of safely (and legally) photographing them. The use of converters on telephoto lenses and digiscoping (with a camera/telescope combination) can often lead to excellent results.

bodies. In the UK these are Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH 2015), the Countryside Council for Wales and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Photography at or near a nest should be undertaken only by those with a good understanding of the species involved and who are, therefore, able to keep disturbance to a minimum. If photography is likely to inhibit normal behaviour, a hide should be used and moved slowly into position; normal practice is for a hide to be moved a short distance each day. A competent bird photographer will be able to identify whether the birds have accepted the hide and this should be checked after every move. If the birds show signs of rejecting the hide, it should be moved back to its previous

position. If signs of rejection persist, photography should be abandoned. Good hide etiquette requires the photographer to be seen into the hide by another person and duly collected. Hides used for nest photography should not be left erected at sites that might attract public attention.

Vegetation, whether around a nest or in other circumstances, for example concealing a shrike's larder, should not be chopped away; judicious gardening, including the tying back of branches, is acceptable, as long as the habitat can be returned to the state in which it was found.

Live mammals such as mice should never be used to bait predatory birds such as raptors and owls.



Plate 29. White-tailed Eagle fishing, Skye, June 2006. © *Iain Leach*. Nest photography is far less fashionable now than in the past and the ability of modern digital cameras to capture action shots in almost any circumstance has opened up a whole new set of opportunities and challenges for bird photographers - and the tourist industry. For example, Red Kites at feeding stations, White-tailed Eagle on boat trips and winter gulls at fish harbours.



Plate 30. Migrant Savannah Sparrow, Fair Isle, October 2003. © Harry Scott. The end product of seeing or finding a rare migrant used to be describing it in a note book and submitting a description, maybe with a sketch; now the aim is often to obtain the 'best' photograph, and publish it online within hours or even minutes. And, it may not be just one person doing this, sometimes there can be dozens at a time. The temptation to get just that bit closer can be resisted, only to have an uncontrolled dog flush everything you have used all your field craft to approach.

Always ensure you have the landowner's permission if you are venturing into an area away from public rights of way or common land.

Nesting colonies, roosts and important feeding areas should not be disturbed in pursuit of photographs. The thoughtless actions of one photographer can jeopardise the reputation of others.

Respect the rights of fellow photographers and birdwatchers. If a photographer is in a position close to a bird, resist the urge to immediately join him or her without first gaining their acceptance. A photographer may have taken a considerable amount of time to carefully approach a bird and by assuming it is fine to approach you run the risk of both flushing the bird and making yourself unpopular with your fellow photographer.

Be honest in declaring the circumstances in which a picture has been taken; if it is of a captive bird, then that should be stated in your caption, particularly if publication or public display is intended.

If digital manipulation is used, in other words a material change to the subject matter, such as an extra bird added to (or removed from) the picture, a background change or other major cosmetic alteration, then this should be stated to avoid misleading the viewer and misrepresenting the subject.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Robin Chittenden, David Hosking and Dave Kjaer for their useful comments and advice while compiling these notes.

References

- Kortland, K. on behalf of the Capercaillie BAP Group.** 2006. *Forest Management for Capercaillie: an illustrated guide for forest managers*. Capercaillie BAP Group. www.capercaillie-life.info/downloads/50119%20low%20res%20text.pdf
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)** 2015. Bird licences - photography. www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/species-licensing/bird-licensing/photography/

David Tipling, Holt, Norfolk

Artist's Profile: Lucy Newton



Plate 31. Red Grouse. © Lucy Newton

Born and raised on a farm just outside West Calder, West Lothian, I was always fascinated by the flora and fauna of the surrounding countryside and farmland. I would spend hours exploring and observing everything from frog spawn to frost patterns and developed a deep interest in nature. This love of wildlife has always stayed with me and now forms the basis of almost all my artwork. The majority of my work depicts native British wildlife or farm animals, species that we are surrounded by everyday, but no matter how often I see them I still always see something new, some fresh inspiration, in them. The possibilities for depicting our rich native wildlife seem sometimes endless to me. However despite this fact my interest also stretches beyond our shores to include occasionally wildlife from other parts of the world.

My first formal art education was at Manchester Metropolitan University where I did a foundation course in Art and Design. I then went on to specialize in illustration and completed my degree at Edinburgh College of Art. Initially after graduating, I did some freelance illustration work. This included work for the *Sunday Herald*

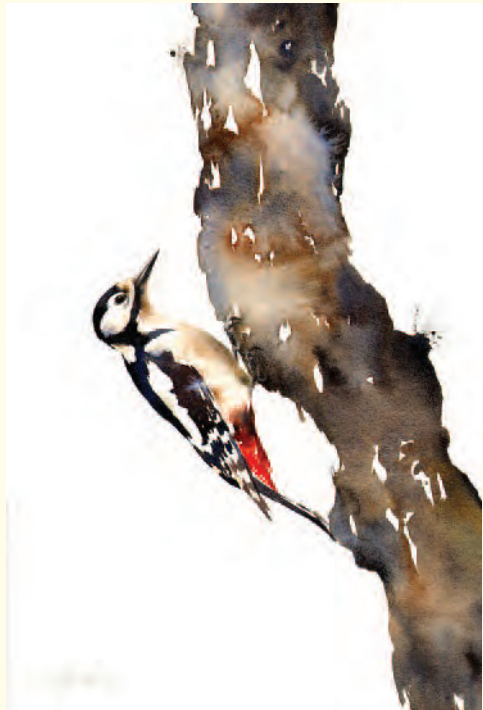


Plate 32. Great Spotted Woodpecker. © Lucy Newton



Plate 33. Goldfinch. © Lucy Newton

after winning their Political Portraits competition with a portrait of the then First Minister Alex Salmond. I have also worked with Wynstones Press producing a series of 42 wildlife-themed folded cards. I continue to do illustration work, however, what I really love is the freedom that comes with doing my own fine artwork. To be able to combine my love of wildlife and my love of art makes me really happy.

I like to show variety in my work in terms of subject, style and medium. I collect reference material and inspiration from a wide range of sources including taking photographs and sketching at farms and fish markets, zoos, wildlife parks, butterfly farms, aquariums and many other places, as well as of course in the wild. All of this and more helps to inform the resulting artworks. Variation in style is also something that comes naturally in my work. In some cases this is a deliberate attempt to capture some of the qualities of my subject by varying the brush and pencil marks to suit the subjects physical appearance or behaviour. In other cases it seems to happen almost by accident, perhaps influenced by my own mood or the weather or



Plate 34. Red Deer. © Lucy Newton

just a reaction to the medium I am using that day. I like to work with a range of media including watercolour, pencil, pen and ink, monoprint, wax crayon, oil bar and collage. I enjoy combining and playing with these various media to try and capture just a fraction of the beauty of my subjects. Unlike many artists whose subject is wildlife, I do not attempt to document the birds and animals in exact realism, but more to just express some of the qualities and energy of the amazing natural world around us.



Plate 35. Lucy at work. © Lucy Newton

I thought you knew!

A. HOGG



Plate 36. Yellowhammer. © John Watson

"The Great Crested Grebes with two young at Martnaham Loch? I thought you knew all about them!" This is just one comment from a birder many years ago which highlights a problem facing all county recorders. Then, there's *"Oh, that bird was here for weeks, from about mid May. Really distinctive. It kept catching bees and knocking seven bells out of them on the fenceline."* All a bit frustrating! However strange it may seem, this kind of comment can turn a local recorder into a mumbling wreck.

The "bee-eating" bird may well have been what you've all deduced by now, but it's gone and, with no back-up notes to support the claim, the record enters the Room 101 of birding history. Let's go back to the earlier comment though. Great Crested Grebes have always struggled in Ayrshire, and only started breeding in the early

part of the 20th century. They no longer face problems from ladies with funny hats so, what's the problem? Before you can even get around to figuring that out, you need to have some idea of current numbers, breeding success and distribution. And, this can't be achieved until observers send in their field notes. Now, doesn't that sound just a tad obvious! In truth, there are loads of common birds that no-one records, let alone send in a comment. I own up right now to being one of the great "ignorers" of Blue Tits, Dunnocks, Wrens etc, unless one of them does something odd like head-butting a cat! Then, it's a note to *Scottish Birds*, and a mention of *"Potentially Fatal Behaviour by a Blue Tit."* But, what about a bird in your garden: one that you've not seen before? It needn't be anything rare. Maybe a Blue Tit at a peanut feeder somewhere on Benbecula? Birds in unusual

areas, or species moving into new habitats are always worth noting. While you're walking through the vastnesses of a Forestry Commission plantation, why not make a note of all the Dunnocks you see or hear? They wouldn't be there before the coming of the trees.

While some birds move into new habitats, others move out of formerly occupied ones. Own up now - how many of you would have known that House Sparrows were in trouble if national surveys hadn't told you? I had no idea, but had begun to notice the number of sparrows in my garden going down for some time. Similarly, over here in Ayrshire, Yellowhammer is a bird which we largely take for granted. The song is so well known, to the point where you really wish that no-one else is going to tell you the easy way to remember it! However, some parts of Scotland have experienced drops in their Yellowhammer populations due to problems such as seed dressings, winter food availability and habitat change. These changes can often go undetected until it's too late - unless somebody's taking notes on the birds in their area.

A couple of questions for you. How many Lapwings do you have in your county? And, what's the population trend? In Scotland, its range has contracted from many lowland farming areas as they've gradually become more specialised. Since the 1980s, many people in Ayrshire have commented on the bird's scarcity in areas where they used to see it commonly. But do we really know what the current distribution is, and how well the bird is faring? I recall frequent comments from local farmers during the 1970s about how Lapwings used to "*carpet their fields*" in the summer - well, not quite, but you get the idea. Asked for some kind of estimate on actual numbers, their facial expression would rapidly change to that of serious puzzlement (why would *that* be important?). It's not hard to give examples of species which have vanished from the Ayrshire scene in recent years, and have done so before anyone really got to grips with the situation. Corn Bunting disappeared quite rapidly - there were at least six territories around Crosshill when I moved there in 1969. By the mid-1970s, they had gone, and the disappointing thing was that I hadn't noticed how quickly it was declining elsewhere in the county. Suddenly, local observers were struggling to "*get it on their year list*."



Plate 37. Lapwing. © Angus Hogg

I don't suggest that Yellowhammer or Lapwing will go the same way, but how sure can we be? And, if the bird is actually in decline, what can be done? At this point, to the accompaniment of lots of anxious hand-wringing and hair-tearing, birders often seem to display a great degree of concern for the future of the whole animal kingdom, the problems facing the world's human population and even the fate of the universe - something that bird behaviour students might call displacement activity. Most of this display of anxiety is well-intentioned, but the question we should really be tackling is "What can we do about it *before* it gets to the serious problem stage?"

Well, how about some of the following:

- Adopt a species which you know well and you think may be in a bit of trouble (the RSPB's Amber List might be handy in identifying some of them)
- Choose an area near your home where suitable habitat exists for that species
- Draw up (or drop from your computer) a map of your local area and make some duplicates for use in the field.
- Visit the area several times during the breeding season (and try to do this for a number of years) and mark on your map the position of every singing male you see or hear regularly in your area. Over several years, you'll get a reasonable idea of just how well your chosen species is doing in that area.
- If you're not too hot on bird song, or find that you're busy doing something else during the breeding season, then you could use your maps to record numbers or flock sizes for your chosen species during the winter.

The important thing is that, by carrying out relatively straightforward fieldwork with one or more species, you're laying down a marker for them over a given period. The results can then be used locally or nationally, perhaps offering valuable comparisons. But, the only way you can do that is by providing the evidence via your very own fieldwork.

I know it's an extreme case, but it can be a wee bit perplexing (to a Scot at least) when a national organisation attempts to enlist our support for a "national" Nightingale survey. That was some time ago, which suggests that those organisers are following a gentle learning curve on species' distribution. However, there are loads of birds which might throw up some surprises in terms of distribution and numbers. Song Thrushes may be relatively widespread and common breeders in much of lowland Scotland, in contrast to the much-lamented range contraction in the south-east of England, but are there still changes in distribution happening. It would be unusual if there weren't, given the pace of land use change. So, there's another nice project for someone to take up, either locally, or maybe even as part of a bigger survey such as the Breeding Birds Atlas.

If "big" doesn't appeal to you, then, here's a way out - and you can still keep your tormented conscience happy too! There can be little doubt that the pace of change in Scotland's countryside is growing and not all of that change is helpful to our birds. Examples of complete, political farces will still occur in planning for long-term land use, but the defense of those areas demands hard, factual information. Those basic facts can be gleaned from *your* home area by carrying out regular surveys and basic note-taking. All of which brings me back to that other endangered species: the local recorder. You're all able to provide good, basic information, and it can be relatively uncomplicated to obtain. Your local recorder can put this information to good use on your behalf if you don't want to take up an issue yourself. So, how about keeping your local recorder happy this year? Send in your notes, either on a monthly, six-monthly or yearly basis. It's easy. Oh, and I forgot to mention - it's quite good fun too!

Angus Hogg, Maybole, Ayrshire.

YOUNG BIRDERS' TRAINING COURSE

Applications are invited from individuals (aged 16-25) to participate in a week-long course run by SOC and Isle of May Bird Observatory on the Isle of May.



- Course will be held on 4-11th July 2015
- Limited to six participants
- Basic, hostel-style accommodation
- Course substantially sponsored by SOC
- Course content will include species recording and data handling, seabird research, bird ringing, Isle of May NNR & aspects of bird observatory life
- Deadline for applications – Monday 27th April at 5pm



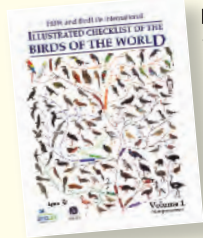
To apply, and for further information, follow links from SOC website: www.the-soc.org.uk



BOOK REVIEWS

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

HBW and Birdlife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World. Volume 1: Non-passerines. Josep del Hoyo, Nigel J. Collar, David A. Christie, Andrew Elliott & Lincoln D. C. Fishpool, 2014. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, ISBN 978-84-96553-94-1, hardback, 903 pages, £145 (€185).



Based on the 17-volume *Handbook of Birds of the World*, this book represents the first of two volumes of a new World checklist. This volume covers the non-passerines. Several other World

checklists are available and they are all very much cheaper; what this one has that the others do not is that colour plates and range maps are included for every species. The book is in familiar HBW style. The species accounts fill the bulk of the book. For each species, the scientific and English vernacular names are given, together with French, German and Spanish names, alternative English names where these are in common usage, a cross-reference to the species entry in HBW, and the IUCN Red List status. The brief species accounts are largely taken up with taxonomic notes and a list of subspecies, together with authorities, dates of description and brief distributional data. A set of maps is included at the back of the book. The lengthy introduction is largely devoted to a discussion of species-level taxonomy and an explanation of the 'Tobias criteria' which have been used, as far as possible for decisions on splits or lumps adopted in the Checklist. The revision of species limits on the basis of these criteria, although scientifically questionable, makes the Checklist an original taxonomic

work. Whether or not you already own the full set of HBW, this 'HBW-lite' represents a handy, up-to-date and authoritative overview of the World's birds.

Martin Collinson

The Passenger Pigeon. Errol Fuller, 2014. Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0-691-16295-9, hardback, 177 pages, £19.95.

The anniversary of the death of the last Passenger Pigeon, a captive bird in Cincinnati Zoo, on 1 September 1914 has brought us several very different books to mark the occasion. This slender volume by Errol Fuller is probably the most lyrical and artistic. Short enough to hold your attention, detailed enough to convey the essential facts, and elegantly presented.



In a series of concise chapters, Fuller retells the story of the once vast numbers of pigeons in their native eastern American hardwood forests and the industrial-scale harvesting and massive habitat destruction that contributed to their catastrophic downfall, before moving on to the pathetic final years of the tiny, dwindling, captive populations. The book is lavishly illustrated with outstanding photography and artwork drawn from many sources, including a series of evocative images of some of the last birds in their aviaries. One chapter is devoted to the Passenger Pigeon in art and books (with an unconvincing defence of Audubon's beautiful, but unlikely, illustration) and an appendix by Julian Hume looks at specialised adaptations of this fast-flying bird. Even one

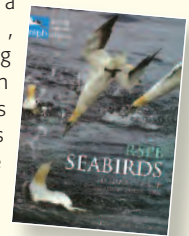
hundred years after its passing, the story of the Passenger Pigeon is far from complete, as recent research (not included in this book) continues to offer new insights into the bird's biology and possible causes of the extinction.

Alan Knox

RSPB Seabirds. Marianne Taylor & David Tipling, 2014. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-0901-5, hardback, 240 pages, £25.

With over 18,000 km of geologically varied coastline providing dry land to nest and rear young and the sea providing food, Britain is home for many seabirds.

Marianne Taylor has put together a wealth of information about the lives of all our numerous and varied breeding seabirds, presented in a large glossy format. With photos by award-winning David Tipling, this book is colourful and informative with a chapter on each species. Identification, distribution, habitat as well as behaviour, diet, breeding are all described in a summarised, readable way, ending with notes on breeding successes or, sadly, the perils that the birds are having to face. Distribution maps are not provided.

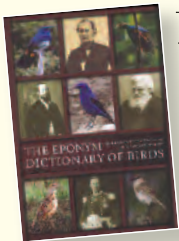


Species which occasionally visit are also described in the relevant sections. However, I would like to have seen more information on the common winter visitors to the shores of Scotland i.e. Velvet Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Great Northern Diver, Red-necked Grebe and the occasional White-billed Diver.

It is a well-designed and informal book for those who would like a biography of the lives of the fabulous seabirds of Britain, written by someone who has a passion for birds and is an extremely knowledgeable and experienced writer, very well complemented with superb photos.

Karen Bidgood

The Eponym Dictionary of Birds. Bo Beolens, Michael Watkins & Michael Grayson, 2014. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-0573-4, hardback, 624 pages, £50.



This book endeavours to itemise all individuals whose names appear in the scientific names of birds down to subspecies level. This includes not only well known zoologists

such as Temminck, Yarrell and Pallas, but women married to describers of type specimens whose first name has been used - e.g. Christine, *Aethopyga christinae*, Mrs Swinhoe's Sunbird. It even includes unlikely individuals who were hardly involved in locating bird species such as Xanthippe, wife of Socrates. It is an enlarged version of *Whose Bird* by the first two authors (review *SBN* 73) with many more entries covering 10,000 different (sub-) species. There has obviously been a lot of research, and the authors include a very short list of names they have been unable to track down. The entries appearing in both books seem to be largely similar, though the earlier book's entry for MacGillivray starts by placing him in Aberdeen whereas this one fails to mention Aberdeen at all.

I am not at all clear where the audience for the book lies. It does not provide useful biographies of the great names in the field, and it

is three times the price of the previous book. The place for it, I suppose, is in libraries - and there is now a copy in the Waterston Library for consultation by anyone curious as to the identity of C.G.F. Hochstetter, who gave his name to the South Island Takahoe.

John Davies

The Homing Instinct. The Story and Science of Migration. Bernd Heinrich, 2014. William Collins, London, ISBN: 978-0-00-759405-4, hardback, 352 pages, £16.99.

The author's previous works include *Winter World*, *Mind of the Raven* and *Why We Run*, with other contributions to various American



journals. This time he has focussed on the "mysteries of animal migration". Written in the style of extended scholarly essays filled with facts and personal anecdotes, it covers current topics of research into migration. The ideas discussed are explored using examples from across the animal and plant kingdoms, with main sources of information named to allow links to the references in the 25 pages listing further reading.

The 352 pages are divided into three main sections: Homing (6 chapters); Home-making and Maintaining (5); Homing Implications (5), plus an Epilogue, Acknowledgements, Further Reading, and the index. There are no photographs, but the text is enhanced by 26 drawings and several chapters start with a literary quote. A very readable book, ideal for those who find they best digest ideas and information in story form.

Stuart L. Rivers

The Teal. Matthieu Guillemain & Johan Elmberg, 2014. T & A D Poyser, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-0850-6, hardback, 320 pages, £49.99.

This new Poyser monograph deals with the Common Teal and its close relative, the Green-winged Teal. The authors, from France and Sweden, respectively, have been studying the Common Teal for many years, the former particularly through his long-term studies in the Camargue.

The chapters, which cover, e.g., distribution and numbers, movements and habitat use, feeding ecology, breeding ecology, mortality, and management, harvest and conservation, present a mass of information in a very digestible form, well illustrated with graphs, maps and photographs (plus a small colour section), together with some charming line drawings.

The two species together have a circumpolar distribution, with populations of around 3–4,000,000 Common Teal in Eurasia and the same, or probably more, Green-winged Teal in North America. The latter seem to be flourishing while, at least in north-west Europe and the Mediterranean, the Common Teal is doing likewise. A quarry species throughout its range, conservation must, the authors emphasise, take into account not only this harvest but also threats to its wetland habitat and the possible future effects of climate change.



There is little about this most delightful of small ducks which you won't find in this fine monograph. Authors and publishers are to be congratulated.

Malcolm Ogilvie

RINGERS' ROUNDUP

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

For lots more exciting facts, figures, numbers and movements log on to: www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports

Recent recoveries

Greylag Goose

A map and information copied from an Orkney Greylag Goose Newsletter for 2013 & 2014 produced by Alan Leitch (see Figure 1 opposite) reveals some unexpected results from the ringing started in 2008 of the breeding population now well established up there.

Storm Petrel

2225662 Ad 08/07/81 Priest Island
Rtpd 15/06/14 Priest Island

Hugh Insley and co-workers seabird monitoring on Priest Island retrapped a 32-years old Storm Petrel on 13 June 2014 which set a new BTO longevity record, only to catch this one two days later to reset the record to just under 33 years old!

Coot

GR25331 Ad 11/12/10 Southport, Merseyside
Seen 10/03/13 Beveridge Park, Kirkcaldy,
Fife 273kmN

Also re-sighted in Kirkcaldy on 9 August and 18 November 2013.

GR25480 Ad 23/12/10 Farnworth, Manchester
Seen 02/02/12 Loanhead, Lothian
264kmN

Also re-sighted in Loanhead 6 May 2012 and 34 km away on the River Tweed in the Borders on 20 February 2013.

The above two birds histories suggest possible cold weather movements from their Scottish breeding areas to England (where they were colour-ringed) during the very cold period in December 2010.

Lapwing

DD02735 Ad 07/12/12 Foulis Point, Cromarty
Firth

Seen 27/01/13 Grindavik, Gullbringu,
Iceland 1197kmNW

6216385 Chick 12/06/13 Karmoy, Rogaland,
Norway

Seen 29/08/13 Ythan Estuary, North-
east Scotland 467kmSW

Last re-sighted in 2013 on the Ythan on 23 November then re-sighted back on 30 November 2014 and 2 December 2014. Some indication of the origins of the thousands of Lapwing which swell our breeding populations on fields and estuaries during the winter months. Note the mid winter re-sighting date of the Icelandic bird.

Black-headed Gull

EG79606 Chick 12/06/09 Forest of Ae, Dumfries
& Galloway

Seen 30/01/13 Stirling 103kmNE

EN95097 Chick 13/06/14 Moorfoot Hills, Borders

Rtpd 15/06/13 Ythan Estuary, North-east
Scotland 184kmN

EY21714 Chick 29/06/13 Moorfoot Hills, Borders
Lunan

Seen 31/10/13 Bay, Angus & Dundee
104kmN

EY47810 Chick 20/06/14 Petterden, Angus &
Dundee

Seen 25/10/14 River Ugie, Peterhead
129kmNE

EX57490 Ad 15/06/13 Ythan Estuary, North-east
Scotland

Seen 22/02/14 Stobswells Pond, Dundee
111kmSW

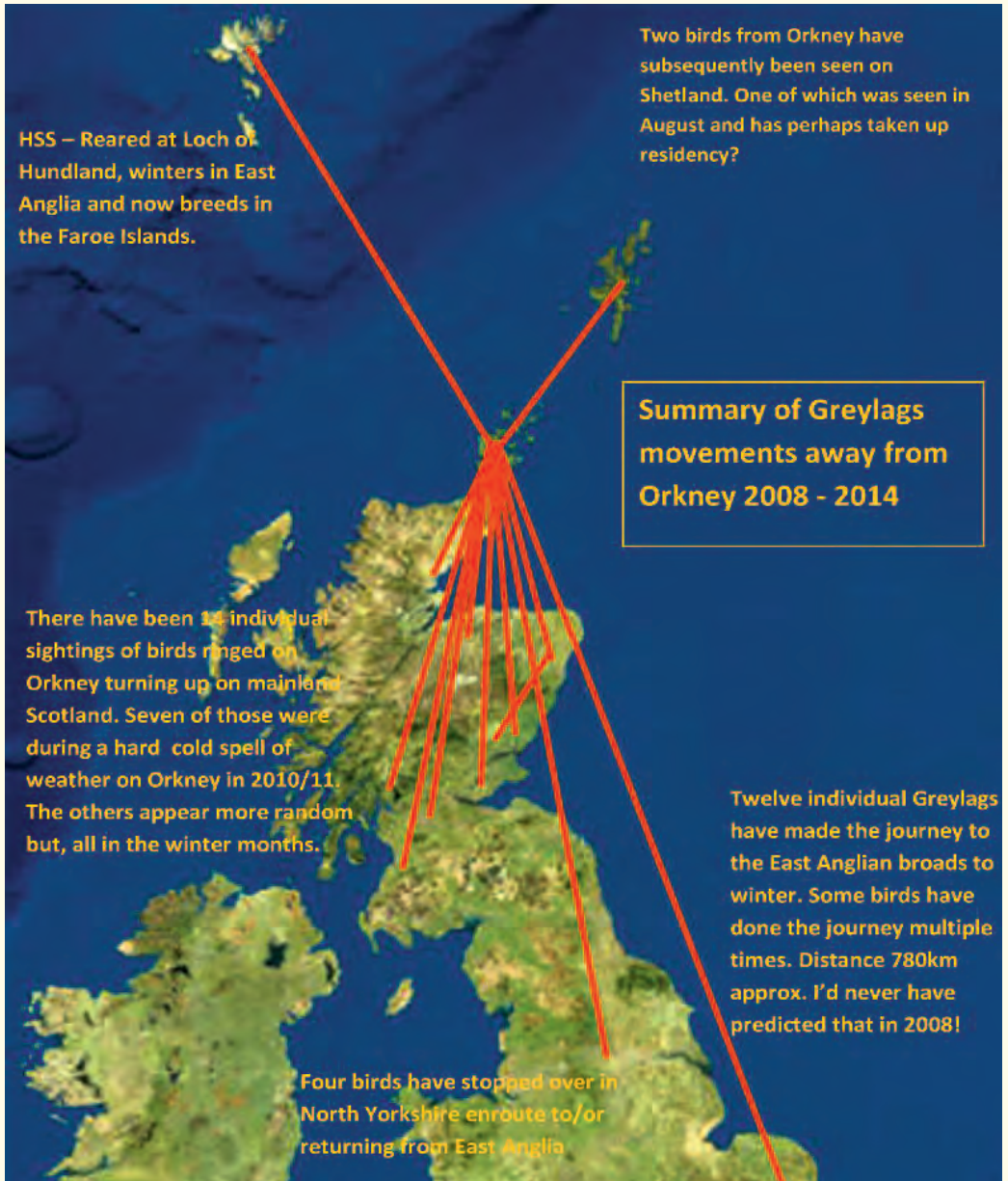


Figure 1. Greylag Goose movements away from Orkney © Alan Leitch

EY34602	Ad	15/06/13	Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland	EY21564	Chick	16/06/13	Moorfoot Hills, Borders
						Seen 02/11/13	Balloch, Loch Lomond, Clyde 100kmW
		Seen 01/11/13	Balloch, Loch Lomond, Strathclyde 190kmW				

Also re-sighted at Balloch on 03/02 and 14/03/2014 then the following winter on 1st and 13 October 2014 and into 2015.

Re-sighted back on the Ythan during summer 2014 where it presumably bred then re-sighted back at Balloch on 5 November 2014.

- EL36757 Chick 29/06/13 Upper Barden Reservoir,
North Yorkshire
Rtpd 18/11/13 Inverleith Park, Edinburgh,
Lothian 213kmNW
- EX44385 Chick 11/05/13 Coquet Island,
Northumberland
Seen 23/10/13 Strathclyde Country Park
163kmNW
- EY02013 Chick 08/06/11 Killington Reservoir,
Cumbria
Seen 23/10/13 Strathclyde Country Park
186kmNW
- EG09363 Chick 05/06/03 Harray Loch, Orkney
Seen 19/01/13 Hogganfield Loch,
Glasgow, Clyde 353km S
- ES65656 Chick 07/06/04 Walls, Shetland
Seen 28/12/13 Duthie Park, Aberdeen,
North-east Scotland
348kmS
- EY55643 Chick 06/06/14 Sands of Forvie, North-
east Scotland
Seen 04/01/15 Center Parcs, Penrith,
Cumbria 250km SW
- EW85348 Chick 31/05/11 Glen Esk, Angus &
Dundee
Seen 15/01/13 Castlewellam, Down,
Ireland 354km SW
- EY55787 Chick 15/06/14 Corgarff, North-east
Scotland
Seen 07/12/14 Waterside, Galway City,
Ireland 350km SW



Plate 39. Colour-ringed (darviced) juvenile Black-headed Gull, River Dee, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, March 2013. © John Chapman

There's lots of gull ring reading going on around the parks of Scotland and beyond providing lots of fascinating sightings and movements. Ringed Black-headed Gulls from Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Denmark and Lithuania have all been reported in recent winters, many returning to the same sites in subsequent winters. Recent colour ringing of chicks in Scottish and north England colonies is also now beginning to reveal interesting movements of our home grown birds which is very valuable given the decline of many breeding colonies. Almost all regions in Scotland are involved in interchanges of birds during the winter, chicks from different regions mix together at the same wintering spots (see the two at Balloch on Loch Lomond) and note the two in Ireland both from upland colonies. Keep up the good work everybody. Summer visits to colonies for a bit of ring-reading could prove very interesting to see how faithful or not these chicks are to their natal colonies.

Song Thrush

- RT83801 Juv 12/02/13 South Walney, Barrow-
in-Furness, Cumbria
Cat 31/05/13 Dundee, Tayside 273kmN

An interesting recovery indicating where some of our breeding birds head for the winter. They are almost completely absent from north and eastern Scotland from October to February.



Plate 38. Colour-ringed (darviced) Black-headed Gulls, Ellon, North-east Scotland, July 2014. © Judy Duncan

Linnnet

D764464 Juv 23/11/13 Glenmore Farm, Wick,
Worcestershire
Rtpd 17/04/14 Gifford, East Lothian
423kmN

Despite most of our breeding Linnets remaining in Scotland throughout the year one or two movements like this one suggest a small proportion do otherwise.

Bearded Tits on the move

While most of us ringers have to make do with reedbeds half the size of a football pitch if we're lucky, Tay Ringing Group members have them as large as an African Safari Park. Size isn't everything, but it does seem to help when attracting typical reedbed species. As well as the usual commoner species such as Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler, the River Tay reedbeds also host populations of Scottish breeding rarities such as Reed Warbler, Bearded Tit and Marsh Harrier.

Indeed, in the case of the Bearded Tit, the Tay reedbeds now has the largest single population in the UK. First recorded there by Mike Nicol in 1992, numbers have gradually increased and in 2014, Tay Ringing Group ringed an incredible total of 998 new "beardies", the majority of which were juveniles, the highest numbers ever recorded on the Tay.



Plate 40. Colour-ringed Bearded Tit from the Tay reedbeds retrapped on the Ythan, November 2014.
© Moray Souter

Prior to 2014 there had been no ringing movements recorded out with Tayside from over 2,000 ringed so it was jolly decent of the birds and Tay Ringing Group to finally share some around with an 'eruption' in autumn 2014 which resulted in birds leaving the Tay reedbeds and turning up (so far) as far north as the Moray Firth and south to Loch Leven in Kinross.

Fortunately, with the birds coming from and arriving at some sites where regular ringing is carried out, we were able to identify the origins of these immigrants.

Ythan reedbeds (North-east Scotland)

Ringing has been carried out here on-and-off since the 1970s and regular summer/autumn monitoring since 2004. Prior to 2014 the only previous records were of a pair present in June/July 2006 with a male ringed there at the end of July.

In 2014 the first sign of anything unusual happening with Bearded Tits was in October when Hywel Maggs heard (but couldn't see) a party of birds 'pinging' overhead for several minutes down at the beach at Newburgh at the mouth of the Ythan before they headed inland. Sure enough that weekend, on 12 October, after two hours of mist netting in the Meikle Tarty reedbed in silence with only the usual Reed Bunts and Sedge Warblers being ringed, suddenly a group of five Bearded Tits burst from the reeds further down river and circled around "pinging" while gaining height before disappearing up river towards the Logie Buchan reedbed. Fortunately Phil Bloor was up there and eventually after we joined him and another hour passed with birds appearing fleetingly now and again, one turned up in the mist net ...already ringed! This was great as we would be able to tell a little bit about the bird and its origins almost immediately, but maybes a ringing tick for somebody wouldn't have gone amiss either. Emails revealed it to be a 2014 juvenile from the Tay reedbed.

We returned the following weekend as usual. The best way to monitor birds in reedbeds is with mist nets so we are just happy plowtering about in the reeds and dubby net rides ringing and monitoring the Sedge Warbler passage, Reed Bunting useage and the autumn roosts of

hirundines and Pied Wagtails, but we were certainly buoyed by the possibility of seeing and ringing some more Bearded Tits for a change. We weren't disappointed. Another 'beardie' was caught ...another ringed one ...another 2014 juvenile from the Tay reedbed!

Following weekend usual nets ...another 'beardie' caught ...another ringed one and definitely ANOTHER Tay bird as this one was a female also wearing colour rings!

All good and well with three now caught on different weekends and all from the Tay reedbed - great information, but were starting to think well just one for the Grampian Ringing Group ringing totals (and second ever) wasn't asking too much was it? So, a slightly tongue-in-cheek email complaint was already being prepared to our Tayside neighbours as we rounded the nets again, only to find three more together, this time all unringed, and a further three unringed birds were caught on 9 November. So, a total of nine different birds were recorded, three ringed from the Tay reedbeds and six unringed.

Two of the six unringed birds were retrapped a few weeks later on 30 November but at the time of writing in January after quite a cold and stormy spell of weather the Ythan reedbeds look and sound very quiet bird-wise with only the odd Reed Bunting and Water Rail to be heard and no signs of any Bearded Tits.

Further north

Some made it even further north. Three were seen and one caught by a happy Ally Young at Spey Bay (Moray & Nairn) on the south shore of the Moray Firth on 25 October 2014 whilst doing his Pied Wagtail roost. Birds reappeared at Loch Spynie where they have bred before, but seemed to have declined in the past few years and more than usual were recorded at Loch of Strathbeg (North-east Scotland), where they have recently started to breed. Other records included 12 in a small strip of reeds at Water of Philorth, just east of Fraserburgh by Chris Gibbins and two were reported in the dunes at Inverallochy by Alan Perkins and three were still there a few weeks later, suggesting an interesting switch to Marram Grass seed in times of need.

And southwards

Mark Newell and others were rather surprised to see a flock of 13+ Bearded Tits flying over the Isle of May on 10 October 2014 (only the second record for the island), but with a Peregrine in hot pursuit they left depleted by one.

This was a new bird for Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) when three were seen on 13 October 2014. Rob Campbell, Neil Mitchell and others then had the added bonus of trapping six in the reedbeds over the next four weeks - three unringed and three ringed, again like on the Ythan, birds previously ringed during 2014 in the Tay reedbeds.

A flock also appeared for a while at Loch of Kinnordy (Angus & Dundee) and a colour-ringed individual identified there also confirmed further eruptees from the Tay reedbeds.

PhD student Iain Malzer has been complementing Tay RG's long-term Bearded Tit RAS (Retrapping Adults for Survival analysis) monitoring with more recent in-depth colour-ringing and tracking. He comments:

"These movements suggest that, when reaching the large numbers such as those seen on the Tay in 2014, these birds can undergo 'eruptive' movements in all directions. The functions or drivers of these movements are not yet fully clear. The birds could reach densities that cause them to disperse and colonise new reedbeds, or they could be undergoing more seasonal movements driven by changes in food abundance. A key way to discern between these drivers will be to see if any of the birds that undertook these wider-scale movements return to the Tay for the 2015 breeding season."

The information provided by ringers and colour ringing sightings throughout 2014, has provided essential insight into the complex movement systems of this species which will undoubtedly assist conservation efforts. However, more information is needed to complete the story and so to report any sightings of Bearded Tits, either colour ringed or not, please send an email to i.malzer.1@research.gla.ac.uk

2014: a record breaking year on Fair Isle

D. Parnaby



Plate 41. Fair Isle Wren, Fair Isle, September 2014. © *James Lowen*

Cast your mind back to 1992 and what do you think of? John Major and Bill Clinton were elected, Jimmy Nail spent three weeks at the top of the singles chart and, in my home city of Sunderland, there were triple celebrations over the awarding of city status, the polytechnic becoming a university and the football team getting to the FA Cup final. An impressive spring for birding brought three additions to the British List: Lesser Short-toed Lark, Spectacled Warbler and Brown Flycatcher. The latter was the highlight of a memorable spring for Fair Isle that brought influxes of Red-footed Falcons, Red-throated Pipits, Subalpine Warblers and Black-headed Buntings as well as the island's first Semipalmated Sandpiper and Pacific Golden Plover and some stunning migration, including a peak count of 350 Spotted Flycatchers. Although Fair Isle's autumn was somewhat overshadowed by birds elsewhere in the Northern Isles, the year ended with 217 species having been logged (taking into account 'splits' since then that have added Siberian Stonechat, Lesser Redpoll and Carrion Crow to the list), a new year list record for the island and comfortably beating the previous record of 208 set in 1982 and 1987.

Fast forward 22 years and, in March, Sunderland appeared in a Cup Final for the first time since 1992 (and lost again), whilst on Fair Isle

thoughts were already turning to the year list and whether that long-standing record could be a realistic target. Like 1992 south-easterly winds were dominant and they had already brought some unexpected winter visitors (Velvet Scoter, Tundra Bean Goose and Little Gull were all birds that turned up in January that hadn't appeared at all in 2013), whilst a Red-flanked Bluetail at the end of March could have been a contender for bird of the spring but in the end would not even make the top-five.



Plate 42. Red-flanked Bluetail, Fair Isle, March 2014. © *Ciaran Hatsell*



Plate 43. Red-backed Shrike, Fair Isle, June 2014. © Steve Arlow



Plate 44. Glossy Ibis, Fair Isle, May 2014. © David Parnaby

A high pressure system in late April saw winds stretch from the very south-east of Europe all the way to Fair Isle and gave impetus to what was widely considered the best ever spring for major rarities on the island. A gorgeous Cretzschmar's Bunting and Caspian Stonechat on the same day were amazing enough, but the spring also went on to produce Hermit Thrush, Calandra Lark, Collared Flycatcher and Bridled Tern and Shetland birders saw themselves making regular trips to the island. Unlike 1992 there were no huge falls during the spring (nor any firsts for Britain, except the 'Eastern' Subalpine Warbler found to be from the central and southern Italian race not previously recorded in the UK), but a Glossy Ibis was a first for the island (as was the tern). Other rarities and good 'local' birds included Laughing Gull, three Blyth's Reed Warblers, four Subalpine Warblers, Greenish Warbler, Green-winged Teal, four Short-toed Larks, Garganey, Mandarin, two Roseate Terns, Temminck's Stint, Hobby, two Honey-buzzard, Crane, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Gadwall, Pochard and Goosander with a decent spring of scarcities including 20 Red-backed Shrike, 15 Wryneck, 10 Marsh Warbler, six Bluethroat, three Icterine Warbler, two Red-breasted Flycatcher, three Hawfinch, two Little Bunting, two Great Grey Shrike, seven Dotterel, Nightjar, five Quail, Waxwing, Corncrake and Richard's Pipit.

By the end of June, the year list was a rather healthy looking 183 and, as we moved into the seabird season, there was a happy feel around the Obs as we reflected on a remarkable year so far. Things got even better as we had the most productive seabird breeding season for many a year. For the first time in my four years at FIBO, the whistling '*winnit winnit*' calls of Guillemots could be heard from the lounge on calm evenings and Kittiwakes fledged their first chicks since 2010. Fair Isle Wrens also enjoyed a good season, with 41 territories the highest recorded since the 1960s. During this time, we also had the return of the Swinhoe's Petrel during some very productive Storm Petrel ringing sessions (one of which included the memorable sight of two Killer Whales surfacing in the North Haven at half past midnight, their breath being clearly audible to the team at the mist nets!).

August saw some good periods of migration, but of the new species that turned up only Red-necked Phalarope could be considered a surprise (although that is partially because we've been spoilt by Arctic Warbler becoming an expected migrant, with 18 in the last seven years). With two more Blyth's Reed Warblers, a Greenish Warbler and a day-count of ten Barred Warblers, there was plenty of birding excitement even before the main autumn period loomed into view. The end of the month also produced the news that a DNA sample taken from a female 'Western-type' Subalpine Warbler trapped on 16 May had identified the bird as a Moltoni's Warbler, the fourth British record of this (at the time) subspecies. Incidentally, 1992 saw the US National Research Council first approve the use of DNA fingerprinting as a reliable identification technique, showing how far technology has advanced to aid birding!

Plate 45. Arctic Warbler, Fair Isle, September 2014. © James Lowen



Fog caused us some quieter days in the main autumn migration period, whilst there were eye-catching rarities to the north and south of us (a remarkably similar situation to autumn 1992), but Fair Isle still produced White's Thrush, Lanceolated Warbler, Red-flanked Bluetail and Paddyfield Warbler, along with a host of scarce species and some of the more expected migrants that had not put in an appearance in the spring. We also recorded our third highest ever island counts of Song Thrush (1,921), Pink-footed Goose (1,105) and Rock Pipit (290). In terms of the year-list (and for anyone keeping a Fair Isle list), the most impressive period was a three-day spell in early October that produced the island's sixth Barn Owl (and the first since 1958), ninth Treecreeper, 13th Blue Tit and first Buzzard since 2012. By mid-October the year list stood at 212, but as westerly winds kicked in and new birds became harder to find, the six species needed for the record seemed a hefty target. A brief reprieve brought Firecrest and

Rough-legged Buzzard (whilst two Humpback Whales gave incredible views and were well appreciated even if they weren't birds!), then more westerlies brought an influx of Redwings from Iceland and the first White-fronted Geese of the year - species 215. As the days ticked by the westerlies came good and delivered a Grey-cheeked Thrush, which performed brilliantly outside the Obs on 24th–25th and left us just one short of equalling the record.

The south-easterly winds that had been such a theme of the year returned towards the end of the month and brought some impressive falls, not least 9,425 Fieldfare (our second highest ever count), whilst Redwing and Woodcock joined Chiffchaff in setting new records for numbers ringed in a year. A potential 'Stejneger's Stonechat' was a very interesting find, although the Caspian Stonechat in the spring had already seen the 'Siberian Stonechat' box ticked for the year list.

Plate 46. Lanceolated Warbler, Fair Isle, September 2014. © James Lowen





Plate 47. Olive-backed Pipit, Fair Isle, September 2014. © Ian Andrews

November began in exciting fashion, with continued arrivals of thrushes and Woodcocks although, with the departure of the seasonal staff, birding became a matter of choosing the most likely spots as dwindling daylight hours meant there was no way of getting round the island in a day. On the 10th, whilst I headed north, Susannah decided enough was enough with the end-of-season accounts and headed off south birding (or as best as she could with our two-year old daughter Freyja in tow). Her reward was the first Shorelark of the year feeding in the Upper Leogh garden - the equaliser!

Another week passed, more birds came in (including another influx of Tundra Bean Geese) and it felt like the autumn was never going to end. I was out at first light again on 17th as Susannah was heading off to Shetland for a meeting later in the day, so I would have to be back to look after our daughters before the afternoon plane came in. The wind was in the SE, the promise virtually crackled in the air alongside the 'seeeps' of Redwings and Blackbirds. Ring Ouzel and Black Redstart were amongst the birds new in and then, there in front of me in the Wirvie Burn, the most beautiful male 'Northern' Bullfinch I have ever seen. It didn't stay long, but that didn't

matter, I was on the phone straight away to Susannah and the Wardening team (Richard Cope, Ciaran Hatsell and Chris Dodd) to let them know that we'd done it: 218 species and the Fair Isle year list record had been broken. Celebratory pints were had around the country that night as we came together in spirit to toast a fitting end to a remarkable year.

Although there were no new species added after that, the BOU split Moltoni's Warbler in early December and so we made it to 219 (although we were all glad not to break the record with an 'armchair tick'). We also reflected on the species we missed: Thrush Nightingale and Citrine Wagtail have become expected in recent years, decent arrivals of Curlew Sandpiper and Rustic Bunting in the Northern Isles failed to hit Fair Isle, whilst Brent Goose managed four straight years without a record and Oortolan continued its decline in occurrences. Perhaps the most shocking 'miss' though was Turtle Dove, it's the first time in FIBO history that one hasn't been recorded, although occurrences have been decreasing markedly in recent years in line with a serious decline in the European breeding population.



Plate 48. Puffin, Fair Isle, June 2014. © Rebecca Nason



Plate 49. Whinchat, Fair Isle, September 2014. © Steve Arlow

Whilst the chase for the year list record was a lot of fun, the bread and butter work of FIBO and other Bird Observatories around the UK and beyond remains an important part of today's conservation movement. Our daily census, ringing activities and the summer seabird monitoring work (carried out under contract from the JNCC) continue to add to our knowledge of migrant and breeding birds, whilst the data analysis project outlined in the previous edition of *Scottish Birds* (and made possible by the SOC grant to digitise the Log data), shows how our daily work can help our understanding of bird movements and populations.

My thanks are due to the FIBO team in 2014 for their hard work (not just in finding new birds for the year list) and for all the visitors who helped make it another special year on this special island.

*David Parnaby, Warden,
Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle.
Email: fibo@btconnect.com*

Marsh Warbler in first-winter plumage - SBRC identification criteria

M.S. Chapman on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

Introduction

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* occurs in Scotland mainly as a scarce spring migrant (up to c.50 per annum) and in smaller numbers in autumn (up to eight per annum), mainly in the Northern Isles. It has bred in Scotland on a handful of occasions, twice each in Shetland and Orkney (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

In spring, identification of adults can be reasonably straightforward, especially when aided by the species distinctive song. Although more care is required with non-singing spring adults, it is in autumn with birds in first-winter plumage that most difficulties arise (adults at this time are uncommon and usually in quite worn plumage). Whilst it is still often subtly distinctive, it has to be separated with caution from Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* of the nominate subspecies *scirpaceus* (hereafter referred to as 'Reed Warbler' or 'Reed') and Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, both of which are basically similar in terms of size, structure and plumage patterns. Furthermore, particular care may be required especially in late autumn with the possibility of confusion with Reed Warblers from more easterly breeding areas, including the subspecies *fuscus* (hereafter referred to as 'fuscus Reed Warbler' or 'fuscus').

The aim of this note is to outline the identification features and criteria used by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) in assessing autumn records of Marsh Warbler. It can be a difficult species to identify in the field, and even more so to assess. Observers should thus try to obtain and present as much detail as possible in their submitted descriptions, including any vocalizations noted, and photographs if possible. Biometrics from in-hand birds can be very helpful, though these are still not conclusive in every case, and it is becoming far more routine now to

do DNA analysis of any small feathers shed during ringing, or other biological samples, which should be obtained if possible (with the caveat that the birds welfare must of course come first).

Basic features

Most observers are reasonably familiar with Reed Warbler, and this note assumes that readers are confident in identifying small *Acrocephalus* warblers to genus. It is important to emphasize that all three species can vary in colour tone depending on the light conditions and the background. An *Acrocephalus* warbler high up in tree foliage can change its appearance considerably if it then drops down to lower or ground level in reeds or weeds or if sunny conditions change to overcast. Thus observers would be best to gauge the colour and tone of any bird over a period of time, and in any varying conditions. All three species are in any case inherently variable in plumage tone in first-winter plumage, i.e. examples of the warmer-toned species, Reed Warbler, can be duller and colder, and both Marsh and Blyth's Reed have a percentage of individuals with warmer plumage. Spring birds tend to show similar differences to first-winters, though these are more clear-cut, with less variability.

Reed Warbler is usually warm, but sometimes neutral-toned, on the upperparts, face and underparts, with usually a notable contrast of the even warmer rufous or cinnamon-tinged rump/uppertail coverts (and often, tail base), with the rest of the upperparts, which are typically warm or mid-brown, with little or no visible olive component. It usually, or often, shows contrastingly darker wings (including the alula) and tail. Fringes to the remiges and retrices are typically warm-toned, contrasting with any exposed darker web bases. Legs are usually dark coloured.



Plate 50. A classic autumn Reed Warbler, Whalsay, Shetland, August 2012. © J.L. Irvine. This bird of the nominate subspecies *scirpaceus* is generally warm-toned, with contrastingly darker wings. Showing the gingery 'rear', both above and below (rear flanks), long fine bill, and dark, greyish legs often contrasting with paler feet. Nominate birds can show a hint of a greyer nape.

Structurally Reed has a long, slim often spiky-looking bill, and generally long-looking wings, with a longish primary projection approximately 2/3rd to 7/8th of the exposed tertial length.

The species is not always vocal, but can be, particularly if several are close together. The typical call is a 'churr' or 'tcharr' characterized by the lack of a hard consonant sound, and sounding quite harsh at times



Plate 51. Marsh Warbler, Quendale, Mainland, Shetland, October 2005. © J. Nicolson. Less warm-toned overall, with strong-looking pale tarsi and claws, contrasting tertial pattern and pale-tipped primaries. Quite clean yellowish-buff tinged underparts, including under-tail coverts.

Marsh Warbler is typically paler and slightly to notably less warm-toned overall, with upperparts variously described as sandy, beige, or dull greyish-olive, with often a tinge of green or olive, lacking in contrast. Usually no contrastingly warmer tones are evident on the rump/uppertail coverts, and it shows paler less warm edgings to the remiges, including the tertials, giving the latter more contrast. The supercilium is typically slightly paler and less warm-toned, and thus more obvious. Warmer-toned birds, similar to a subdued-looking Reed Warbler, do occur however (possibly up to 20% of first-winters, Pearson *et al.* 2002).

It also shows cleaner underparts, with any wash tending towards yellowish-buff; obvious yellow tones on the underparts are a good indicator of Marsh. Leg colour tends to be pale, often strikingly so.

Structurally wing length and primary projection are on average longer than in Reed, whereas bill length is on average slightly shorter. Soft parts, (bill, tarsi and even often the claws), tend to be slightly stouter than on Reed, giving a slightly more robust impression overall. The jizz of Marsh thus while still obviously *Acrocephalus*-like, tends slightly more towards Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin* than the classic slimline Reed.

Marsh Warbler can be quite vocal. The call consists of single hard tongue-clicking notes, sometimes given several times in succession; 'chik', 'chet', 'chud' 'tak', 'thic'. Also chirring calls similar to the usual call of Reed (perhaps usually slightly more 'rattling').

'*Fuscus*' Reed Warbler breeds from Turkey eastwards to Kazakhstan. It is described as occurring in three colour morphs - 'typical', 'warm' and 'grey' (Pearson *et al.* 2002). 'Typical' *fuscus* constitute the clear majority, especially among long-range migrants wintering in East Africa, and thus are presumably the most likely to occur in the UK, and of most interest in terms of confusion with Marsh. These tend towards being paler and less warm-toned on the upperparts, and more uniform than Reed, with cleaner underparts and longer wings, so in many respects they are closer in general appearance to Marsh Warbler, though apparently never showing the green tinge to the upperparts shown by many of the latter, they can however certainly appear warm olive-brown in photographs.

Fuscus show a cleaner, whiter fore-supercilium and eyering on average, and on many, an obvious greyish cast to the rear-crown and nape, not shown by Marsh Warbler. The underparts are typically paler and cleaner with a reduced and less warm buff wash. 'Warm' *fuscus* are very similar in plumage tones to *scirpaceus*, so less likely to be confusable with Marsh, and the 'grey' form is distinctively grey above, lacking olive/brown components in the plumage.

Fuscus usually shows slightly more prominent pale tips to the outer tail feathers, usually on at least the three outer pairs, (usually in contrast only on the outermost pair if present on Marsh/Reed), but this is probably of little use in the field; they also tend to show more



Plate 52. First-winter *fuscus* Reed Warbler, Kenya, December 2012. © P. Kennerley. This bird shows rather olive, Marsh Warbler-like plumage tones and greyish nape. This is a freshly moulted bird, and shows the clean white tips to the primaries, similar to Marsh Warbler.



Plate 53. First-winter Reed Warbler, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2006. © S.L. Rivers. A bright, warm individual.



Plate 54. Juvenile Marsh Warbler, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, September 2003. © M. Maher. This is the same bird as in Plate 59 showing pale and uniform upperparts. There is no obvious warmth in this bird's plumage.

obvious pale tips to the primaries, again more similar to Marsh than Reed.

Soft part proportions and colour are the same as for nominate Reed, and calls are not known to be different.

Blyth's Reed Warbler is now generally considered to be rather distinctive and identifiable, after a history of being thought indistinguishable in the field from Reed. It shows a strong, clean, usually whitish fore-supercilium, running to the eye and often slightly behind, more conspicuous than the eyering, and a prominent feature on many, and which may on some show the well-known 'bulge' over the lores. Typically it has rather dull upperparts, which may be slightly olive or slightly warm-tinged, (and lacking contrast between mantle and rump), contrasting with a bright but very uniform wing - with broader more consistent bright (warm bronze to bright olive) edgings to all remiges, and tertials, and often greater coverts and alula, than Reed/Marsh. This contrasts less with the generally paler web centres to these feathers, forming the 'bronze

wing-panel', though it is in fact not really a discrete panel but more or less the whole rear wing on a perched bird. This combined with generally cleaner-looking, whiter underparts, including the undertail coverts, with a more restricted, somewhat colder greyish-olive or greyish-buff wash on the flanks. Leg colour is variable, but is often notably pale, much as in Marsh, contra many earlier texts.

Structurally it is the shortest-winged of the three species, with often a short and 'bunched' looking primary projection, and more frequently adopts a posture of cocked tail and head, the well-known 'banana posture'.

On a very good view, or side-on photographs, it shows two clearly emarginated primaries, compared to one on Reed and Marsh.

A rather vocal species (all three species dealt with utter a Reed-like 'churr'), with the typical call a single hard note, somewhat like a Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, 'stk' 'tec' or 'tak', often repeated, and thus confusable with Marsh, but not Reed Warbler.

Plate 55. Blyth's Reed Warbler, Fair Isle, October 2010. © R. Nason. This bird shows the bronze-olive wing, quite clean underparts, and pale legs. The fore-supercilium is well marked on this bird, showing the 'bulge' above the lores. Clean whitish undertail coverts are often shown.



Biometrics of Marsh Warbler

Despite biometrics of trapped birds providing much useful information to aid identification, it is important to emphasize that the experience, even of ringers handling many of each species on a regular basis, is that some first-winters cannot be confidently identified in the hand, as there is a degree of overlap in more or less all the useful measurements - see Table 1 which demonstrates the degree of overlap, but also hopefully provides a quick and easy up-to-date reference for any ringers who have a set of measurements from an in-hand bird to evaluate.

The most useful in hand characters are considered to be:

Wing length. Marsh Warbler is on average longer-winged than nominate Reed, by c.2–3 mm. Typical *fuscus* is much closer, often equal and sometimes fractionally longer winged than Marsh.

Wing formulae - notch. The position of the notch on the second primary (P2) is typically closer to the tip than in Reed; by c.2 mm on average, so the notch is shorter in length. This is thought by many ringers to be the single most reliable feature. Alternatively the ratio of notch/wing length is used. Other features such as the emargination on P3 being closer to the wing-tip on Marsh and the relative lengths of P2 and P4 overlap (P2 tends to be longer than or equal to P4 on Marsh), and seem to be supportive tendencies rather than firm identification features.

Soft part measurement. The bill is typically slightly shorter, and slightly broader at the base (and in the field often appears slightly deeper at the base and near the tip) the tarsi slightly broader, and claws slightly shorter and less decurved on Marsh.

Soft part colouration. The tarsi and claws are typically paler in Marsh, with the tarsi often a fleshy-straw colour. This feature is noted consistently in descriptions of both adults and first-winters in the UK. However, up to 50% of Marsh Warblers trapped in Kenya showed darker (or intermediate) leg colour, (Pearson *et al.* and see also Wilson *et al.* 2001). Furthermore, paler legs can be shown by Reed Warbler, though much more rarely, so this is another feature on which

there is overlap. It is possible that only the most obvious Marsh Warblers are generally claimed in a UK context, and some observers may dismiss unnecessarily Marsh Warblers showing darker legs. Blyth's Reed also often show pale tarsi, contra many texts, whereas Reed usually exhibits darker, greyer or bluish-grey legs; this is another variable feature to some degree in all three species, especially in first-winters. The shorter paler claws of Marsh Warbler 'can separate with reasonable confidence c.70% of birds' at a Finnish ringing site (Antero Lindholm *in litt.*)

Wing formulae - ratios. There are also ratios of measurements suggested by Svensson (1992) and Wilson *et al.* (2001) to help separate most birds in the hand. Wilson *et al.* (2001) found that published measurements and in-hand criteria did not necessarily work well for all birds at ringing sites in the eastern Mediterranean, probably due in their opinion to the clinal variation in Reed Warblers. Consequently, they developed new criteria and a new formula, which they are confident will separate the two species well, leaving only a handful as 'indeter-



Plate 56. Claws of three *Acrocephalus* species, Finland, August 2013. © A. Lindholm. Reed Warbler claws (top centre-left) are typically slightly longer, more decurved and with greater contrast between a darker upper and paler under-surface than on Marsh (right-hand bird). Bottom left is a Blyth's Reed, looking similar to a Reed in this case, though is apparently variable.

Table 1. Biometrics for identification of unstreaked *Acrocephalus* warblers. P1 to P10 are the primaries numbered from the outermost to the innermost; SS = secondaries; WP = wing point. The information in this table has been compiled (by W. Miles) from **Kennerley & Pearson (2010)** and **Svensson (1992)**. The exact source of data can be identified by the font colour.

	Reed Warbler (nominate) <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus scirpaceus</i>	Caspian Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus</i>	Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	Blyth's Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
Wing length =	62–73 mm	65–72 mm	64–76 mm	58–66 mm
Tail length =	48–55 mm	49–56 mm	47–55 mm	46–54 mm
Bill length (to skull) =	15.0–18.5 mm	16.6–18.7 mm	14.3–17.2 mm	15.3–18.5 mm
Bill length (to feathering) =	12.1–16.5 mm		11.1–14.0 mm	11.5–15.0 mm
Tarsus length =	21.5–24.5 mm	21.0–24.0 mm	21.0–24.0 mm	20.5–23.5 mm
Tail/wing ratio =	0.75–0.8		0.71–0.79	0.74–0.87
Bill width (at rear of nostrils) =	3.7–4.2 mm	3.8–4.3 mm	3.8–4.6 mm	3.8–4.6 mm
Hind claw length =	5.6–7.2 mm	6.2–8.0 mm	5.2–6.7 mm	5.2–6.5 mm
Tail graduation =	3.0–7.0 mm		2.0–8.0 mm	3.5–0.0 mm
Wing point =	P3	P3	P3 (occasionally P2)	P3 (sometimes P4, occasionally P5)
P2 =	P3–P5/6 (1.0–3.5 mm < wing tip)	P3/4–P5/6	P3–P5	P5–P8
Emarginations to...	P3 (sometimes P4)	P3 (also tip of P4 in some small Middle Eastern birds)	P3	P4 (occasionally P5) (adult); P3 (often P4, occasionally P5) (juvenile)
Notch on P2 =	P7–SS		P6–P9	1.0–8.5 mm < SS (adult); P10–5mm < SS (juvenile)
Length of notch on P2 =	10.0–15.0 mm (adult); 9.0–13.5 mm (juvenile)		7.5–12 mm (adult); 7.5–11 mm (juvenile)	10.5–14.0 mm
Length of notch on P2/ wing length =	0.167–0.231 (adult); 0.144–0.200 (juvenile)		0.125–0.160 (adult); 0.107–0.157 (juvenile)	
Primary projection (1st SS–WP) =	15–19 mm		17.5–22 mm	11.5–16.0 mm
Notch on P3 =	(has slight notch on P3 only rarely)			P8–SS (adult); P6–P10 (if present) (juvenile)

minate'. This note does not go in depth into in-hand identification, but SBRC recommends this detailed paper (Wilson *et al*) to ringers; it may well be the most applicable criteria for ringers to use on any 'problem' trapped migrant *Acrocephalus* warbler in a Scottish context.

Field identification of Marsh Warbler

Clearly some in-hand characters, very useful for identifying Marsh Warbler, such as the notch position on P2, cannot be seen in the field. Others, such as emargination position on P3 and claw length/colour (shorter and paler on Marsh) are likely only to be of value if well photographed. Photographs are now routinely used in the field,

so these features do come into play, but should of course be used with some caution, comparing shots from various angles, and only judging relative positions of primaries and emarginations on images of birds which are truly side-on.

An initial basic set of features for field use in Marsh Warbler identification is suggested; these are (in comparison with nominate Reed):

- 1) Plumage is generally less warm overall.
- 2) Upperparts are paler and more uniform, usually with either no difference in rump colour, or in some a less contrastingly or slightly warmer rump (and uppertail coverts).



Plate 57–58. Putative '*fuscus*' Reed Warbler (left), Kergord, Mainland, Shetland, November 2012. © *R. Riddington*, and Marsh Warbler (right), Fair Isle, September 2012. © *W. Miles*. Whilst not directly comparable on plumage tones due to different lighting conditions, the shorter, slightly thicker bill of the Marsh is evident, as well as slightly yellowish-buff tones to the face. Both show pale-tipped primaries, the Marsh shows a strong pale tip to the outer-most rectrice, the *fuscus* Reed more even pale tips to the outer three pairs. Overall contrasts are similar, but the *fuscus* does appear to show a greyish nape. (Both of these birds' identities were confirmed by DNA analysis; the Kergord *fuscus* awaits ratification by BBRC).

- 3) Paler, with less rufous or buff on underparts, instead tending to a yellowish or yellowish-buff wash. Undertail coverts are usually washed warm buffish on Reed, paler yellowish or yellowish buff on Marsh and often whitish on Blyth's Reed.
- 4) Slightly longer wing, and primary projection. On Marsh, this tends towards 100% (of exposed tertials), on Reed (nominat) c.70–85%, (that of typical *fuscus* being longer on average), and Blyth's Reed c.50–75%. The sample size is probably still small, however, and odd examples of i.e. Blyth's Reed can show a longer projection, such as an otherwise typical bird on Foula in 2013, which was almost Marsh Warbler-like in this respect (P. French, pers. comm.).
- 5) Clear whitish tips to primaries.
- 6) Paler tertial edgings, giving a typically more contrasting pattern.
- 7) Paler leg colour.
- 8) Stouter looking legs.
- 9) Shorter and paler looking claws.
- 10) A slightly shorter, slightly stouter bill on average, which is slightly broader at the base, and less pointed at the tip. Some Reed Warblers can look heavier-billed, and some Marsh less so; it is probably the relative lengths that is the most important feature.
- 11) Call. As described earlier (in 'Basics'), single, hard, tongue-clicking notes, sometime given several times in succession, usually 'thicker' sounding than Blyth's Reed. Also, chirring calls similar to the usual chirring call of Reed (though slightly more 'rattling'). Neither form of Reed is known to give these clear-cut, hard, single notes, although Blyth's Reed does. On, for example, www.xeno-canto.org recordings, good examples of these calls of Marsh and Blyth's Reed can be found; after many samplings of Reed Warbler for this note, it was found that on one or two recordings of Reed Warbler alarm calling (the 'charr' call), mainly at breeding sites, there are occasional single 'chrrk' notes given as well, mixed in, (still not quite the discrete hard calls as given often by Marsh, but if these were to be made by a migrant, they might cloud the issue somewhat). So, in



Plate 59 (left). A classic autumn Marsh Warbler, Norwick, Unst, Shetland, September 2003. © *M. Maher*. Primary projection close to 100% of exposed tertials, rump/upper-tail coverts uniform with mantle, yellowish tinge to underparts. This is the same bird as in Plate 54. **Plate 60 (right).** Reed Warbler, Ronas Voe, Shetland, September 2011. © *J. Nicolson*. A slightly duller example, but still typically warm toned and with long spikey bill.



Plate 61 (left). Marsh Warbler, Northdale, Unst, Shetland, September 2009. © *R. Brookes*. A warmer-toned example, not dissimilar to a dull Reed, and showing the shorter, heavier more blunt-tipped bill. **Plate 62 (right).** Marsh Warbler, Lund, Shetland, September 2014. © *R. Brookes*. A paler, more typical example, with colder plumage tones, and a cleaner face pattern.



Plate 63 (left). A *fuscus* Reed Warbler, Kazakhstan, 29 August 2010. © *P. Palmén*. Rather Marsh Warbler-like, lacking warmth in the plumage. **Plate 64 (right).** Blyth's Reed Warbler, Unst, Shetland, October 2013. © *R. Brookes*. Bronze-olive wing, contrasting with colder olive-tinged mantle, clean whitish fore-supercilium and shortish primary projection.

summary, the hard calls of Marsh and Blyth's Reed are very similar; those of the latter perhaps sounding slightly cleaner and shorter. All three species give a rattling 'chaarr', which in Reed is probably slightly less hard and rattling than the other two species (again from xeno-canto recordings).

A. Lindholm (*in litt.*) has commented: "Both calls of Marsh Warbler and Blyth's Reed Warbler are very similar to each other and I believe that most birdwatchers will not learn to distinguish them with moderate experience (the most difficult is that they are variable). In addition, these calls are not vastly different from the calls of Sedge Warbler. Reed has no 'chk', and its 'tcharr' is different".

Moult

All four forms show, with slight variations (for which see Svensson 1992 and Pearson *et al.* 2002), a basically similar moult pattern, having a complete moult from late September to November or in the case of Marsh Warbler even later on the wintering grounds, so any fresh-looking *Acrocephalus* encountered as an autumn migrant is likely to be a first-winter; Reed Warbler has a body moult prior to starting migration, so migrates as a first-winter; Marsh does not, so starts migration as a juvenile (P. Kennerley pers. comm.), though this may not be apparent. Adults do not moult prior to autumn migration so should appear very worn, at least on the remiges/retrices, but also on the body, especially often on the head, which can make the bill look longer than it really is.

Discussion

It is important to bear in mind that Reed, whilst a warm-toned bird, is not actually rufous all over. Autumn birds can often give a strong impression of warmth, based on strong warm tones to the rump and facial area, with hints on wings and tail base and varying on the underparts, but nonetheless can appear a rather dull brown, tinged warmer on a perched view, and some birds have these warm areas somewhat toned down. *Fuscus* Reed shows several distinguishing characters, and these are in some ways the culmination of a clinal progression in populations from south-west to eastern parts of

the range; hence a typical Reed Warbler breeding in southern Britain is likely to be a warmer bird with slightly shorter wings than one found breeding in northern Sweden. So, autumn migrants to mainland Scotland and the Northern Isles, which may well have come from Scandinavian populations, may appear 'interesting' and slightly more Marsh Warbler-like than might be expected.

Some observers are possibly more sensitive to olive or yellow tones than others, and one person's 'dull brown' can be another's 'brown, tinged olive' Also, birds in the hand not infrequently do not appear to show the brighter tones that may be evident in the field; this should be taken into account when dealing with taxa where slight differences in tone can be quite important.

Nearly all individual features, including the most well-known and reliable, have been shown to be present on a proportion of birds of the alternate species, so using a suite of features is recommended; for example, from a ringer's perspective. A. Lindholm (*in litt.*) has commented:

"I might make a net round, picking up two obvious Reed Warblers, one obvious Marsh Warbler and one that I do not know for certain initially. After putting on the ring, I study the difficult bird more closely, measure the wing, the notch of the inner web of the second outermost primary, bill and the hindclaw length, and then make a decision. So far, I have identified every bird, but I am not convinced that I have never made a mistake. Many ringers have independently come to think that these two species hybridise quite often because there seems to be intermediate birds. But, there are no intermediate adults or songs."

There is at least one recently published record of a bird showing hybrid Reed/Marsh genes in Norway (Otterbeck *et al.* 2013), but as Antero Lindholm suggests, it is probably a very rare occurrence. Marsh/Blyth's Reed hybridisation is not unknown in Finland.

Atypical Reed Warblers can occur in autumn, which can look surprisingly Marsh Warbler-like at first sight. One such was the well-known 'Kelyack



Plate 65. Reed Warbler, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2014. © K. Gillon. This bird showed Marsh-like plumage tones in the field, but was proven to be a Reed Warbler on DNA analysis after being trapped..

Warbler' in Cornwall in October 2003 (Vinicombe 2005). Opinion was divided between Marsh and Reed, when trapped and DNA'd it was shown to be a Reed, not *fuscus*, but considered likely to be from an eastern part of the range.

Another, perhaps similar bird was seen and trapped on Barra, Outer Hebrides, in October 2014 (S.L. Rivers, pers. comm.). Again, quite Marsh-like in the field, DNA tests showed it to be a Reed Warbler. It is hoped that this bird will be written up more fully in a future issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Marsh Warbler, Fair Isle, 12 September 2012

An example of how tricky Marsh Warbler can be even in the hand is illustrated by the following short account of a bird on Fair Isle in autumn 2012 by Will Miles (Plate 58). Had it given more prolonged field views, the basic appearance would probably have been fairly typical and it might have proved an easier bird to identify:

"On the morning of 12 September 2012, Jason Moss found a warbler sp. in the Walli Burn on Fair Isle that was unstreaked, pale, sandy and highly elusive. Field views were fleeting, not sufficient for us to positively identify the bird (which remained silent), but were suggestive of either a Marsh or Sykes's Warbler *Iduna rama*. Late afternoon, the bird was mist-netted for identification purposes. It was not a classically distinctive 'Marsh' on biometrics (all overlapped with other *Acrocephalus* species except for 'length of notch on P2 divided by wing length' - see Table 2); however, the plumage and bare part colouration was wholly typical of Marsh Warbler as viewed in the hand, and following detailed examination and measurement the bird was positively identified (nearly nine hours after it was first seen by JM!). Feathers that dislodged in the bird-bag were sent to Martin Collinson at the University of Aberdeen for DNA analyses, which, as far as possible supported the identification as Marsh Warbler. (The COI DNA sequencing could not completely eliminate the possibility of a hybrid, but it showed that the bird's mother was *palustris*, M. Collinson *in litt.*).

Table 2. Biometrics of a Marsh Warbler trapped on Fair Isle on 12 September 2012.

	Fair Isle bird from 12 September 2012	Species that measurements fit
Wing length =	69 mm	Reed & Marsh
Tail length =	54 mm	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
Bill length (to skull) =	17.1 mm	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
Bill length (to feathering) =	12.4 mm	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
Tarsus length =	22.1 mm	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
Tail/wing ratio =	0.78	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
Bill width (at rear of nostrils) =	4.05 mm	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
Hind claw length =	6.1 mm	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
Tail graduation =	-	-
Wing point =	P3	Reed, Marsh & Blyth's Reed
P2 =	P4	Reed & Marsh
Emarginations to...	P3	Reed & Marsh
Notch on P2 =	P7/8	Reed & Marsh
Length of notch on P2 =	9.2 mm	Reed & Marsh
Length of notch on P2 / wing length =	0.13	Marsh
Primary projection (1st SS-WP) =	17.7 mm	Reed & Marsh
Notch on P3 =	None	Reed & Marsh

Despite much useful earlier work, (e.g. Harvey *et al.* 1984, Harrap & Quinn 1989) and steady subsequent and recent advances, there will doubtless always be odd birds such as these examples which will continue to present identification challenges.

When: the timing of migrants

In Scotland, Reed and Marsh Warbler in first-winter plumage can be encountered as migrants from late July until mid-October at least. Blyth's Reed has turned up mostly from late September to mid-October, with one or two late August and at least one November record in Scotland and several in the UK.

Marsh Warbler is apparently an earlier migrant, in that the vast majority of birds leave the breeding grounds in September. Pearson *et al.* (2002) suggested that they are thus unlikely to be encountered in late autumn in the UK; this is born out to some extent in Scotland, with most seen from mid-August to late September, and by the relatively small number of October and the absence of November records. There was, however, an early November record from Skomer in 2009 (well-photographed, calling, and accepted by the Welsh Records Panel, Boyle (2009), also D. Boyle pers. comm.), and single lost birds clearly can and do break the normal rules of where they should occur, and when. It is also worth considering that *fuscus*, given its range may well be a rather late season visitor; perhaps rather like eastern (*halimodendri*) Lesser Whitethroats. The two 'DNA'd' claims of *fuscus* from Britain, so far, were discovered in November and December.

Acknowledgements

This note draws upon the experience and also editing skills of committee members, thanks especially C.J. McInerney; also discussions with many other observers, and also much else published on the subject over the years. For details of *fuscus* characters, it draws heavily on the work of David Pearson, Peter Kennerley and Brian Small who have studied the form extensively on both breeding and wintering grounds. Thanks also to Antero Lindholm for much helpful comment from a Finnish perspective, P. Kennerley for very helpful correspondence, and to all the photographers who have contributed fantastic pictures. Also,

many thanks to Will Miles for his educational account of a difficult Marsh Warbler on Fair Isle, and for contributing the up-to-date table of biometrics, Table 1. Finally, to the late P.J. Grant who showed everyone way back in 1979 on the Isles of Scilly how to approach *Acrocephalus* field identification, the 'new approach', as it was then (Grant 1980).

References

- Boyle, D. 2009. http://pembsbirds.blogspot.co.uk/2009_11_01_archive.html
- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, R.J., McInerney, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.
- Grant, P.J. 1980. Identification of two first-winter Marsh Warblers. *British Birds* 73: 186–189.
- Harrap, S. & Quinn, D. 1989. The difficulties of Reed, Marsh and Blyth's Reed Warblers identification. *Birding World* 2: 318–32
- Harvey, W.G., Porter, R.F. & Tucker, L. 1984. Field identification of Blyth's Reed Warbler. *British Birds* 77: 393–411.
- Kennerley, P. & Pearson, D. 2010. *Reed and Bush Warblers*. Christopher Helm, London.
- Otterbeck, A., Dale, S., Lindén, A. & Marthinsen, G. 2013. A male Reed Warbler and Marsh Warbler hybrid *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* × *A. palustris* in Norway documented with molecular methods. *Ornis Norvegica* 36: 6–13.
- Pearson, D.J., Small, B.J. & Kennerley, P.R. 2002. Eurasian Reed Warbler: the characters and variation of the Asian form *fuscus*. *British Birds* 95: 42–61.
- Svensson, L. 1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines*. Fourth edition. Stockholm.
- Vinicombe, K. 2005. Marsh Warbler ID. *Birdwatch* 155: 30–32.
- Wilson, J.D., Akriotis, T., Balmer, D.E. & Kyrkos, A. 2001. Identification of Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* and Reed Warblers *A. scirpaceus* on autumn migration through the eastern Mediterranean. *Ringing & Migration* 20: 224–232.

Mark S. Chapman on behalf of the
Scottish Birds Records Committee,
55 Leaside, Firth, Shetland.
Email: msc.1@btinternet.com



Plate 66. Adult Booted Warbler, Torness, October 2014. © Ian Andrews

Booted Warbler, Torness, 11–23 October 2014 - first record for Lothian

I.J. Andrews & M. Eden

Mid-morning on 11 October, Marc Eden found a warbler he suspected was a Booted Warbler. It was close to the Torness Power Station Visitor Centre on the East Lothian coast; indeed when he and his wife, Harriet Woolven, first saw it, it was on the roof. Later, it settled into a routine of feeding on aphids in the nearby Sycamores and Silver Birches and periodically coming down to preen in some conveniently low rose bushes. It was in this low, sunny position that the best photographs were taken (Plates 66–70). Periodically during its stay, it also moved to some lower bushes around the power station car park. A short video can be viewed at <http://youtu.be/ByFeHo2pVQY>

From the outset, this bird was clearly not a classic first-winter Booted Warbler. It was a distinctive bird that showed suspended moult and a distinctly contrasting plumage, which didn't help the small assembled group trying to confirm the

bird's identification. After a discussion on its identification, the group agreed the bird was an adult Booted Warbler showing suspended moult - a conclusion that was confirmed later that day after consulting the books and those with more experience (see Discussion below). The bird was last seen on the 23 October.

The detailed examination of some close-up photographs confirmed the mixture of abraded and bleached older feathers and darker, fresh new feathers, which contributed to a general appearance that at times looked decidedly tatty. The innermost three primaries were new, as were four tail feathers (the centre pair were old, as were the outer three on each side). The tertials were obviously dark centred; the smallest tertial was probably missing on the bird's left wing and the central one on the right. It was these contrasts between new and old feathers that gave the bird its distinctive appearance.

Description

Bill: Dark upper mandible with paler cutting edge; dark sides of lower mandible at tip. **Eye:** Medium to pale brown iris. **Legs:** Pale, almost pinkish, brown with no sign of dark feet or toes. **Head:** Dark sides to the crown contrasted with a paler line(s) down the centre. Pale supercilium in front of eye, above and only extending slightly behind. Pale lores. **Underparts:** Whitish throat and rich buff breast. **Upperparts:** Mid-brown with indistinct pale 'lines'; these were presumably due to the feathers being well worn, something also visible in some close-up photographs. **Wings:** Mid-brown with much darker inner three primaries forming dark panel between pale-fringed old feathers, especially between dark inner primaries and pale-edged secondaries. Fresh feathers also had small pale tips. Emarginations were visible on p3–p5. Wing point formed by p4. Tertiaries dark centred with worn, broad, paler edges, with one apparently missing. **Tail:** The central pair and the outer three on each side were pale brown, but the rest were contrastingly darker brown. The central pair and the outer three were very worn, shorter than the rest (especially the inner pair) and exhibit growth bars. The pale outer web to the outer pair were visible (and this could be seen to extend onto the inner web in photographs taken when it was preening). **Call:** The bird occasionally uttered a quiet 'tac' call, and was heard singing quietly, especially towards the end of its stay.

On 14 October, a Siberian Stonechat landed on top of a tree near where a large group of birders were watching the Booted Warbler - an outstanding duo of Lothian firsts to be seen side-by-side.

Discussion

Paul Harvey, Peter Kennerley and Roger Riddington (pers. comm.) provided some useful comments on the ageing of this bird, which are summarised below together with information from Kennerley & Pearson (2010).

Typically, adult Booted Warblers undertake a complete moult as soon as they arrive on their wintering grounds in India, i.e. sometime between late August and early October. Young birds complete their moult slightly later than adults, but by mid-October the overwhelming majority of individuals on the wintering grounds would be

expected to have completed the autumn moult (with adults and young birds being indistinguishable). This bird, however, has clearly begun its moult (presumably on the breeding grounds, rather than earlier in the migratory journey) and then suspended the process. The suspension of

Plate 67. Adult Booted Warbler, Torness, October 2014. © Peter Macdonald. Note the fresh, darker inner primaries (P8–P10). Note: black numbers = primaries (small dashes mark the emarginations); white numbers = secondaries; t1 = first tertiary; PC = primary coverts; GC = greater coverts; MC = median coverts; LC = lesser coverts; A = alula



moult is not usual in Booted Warblers, but if it occurs there is likely to be much more contrast in the plumage of adults than in first-year birds (because the older feathers in adults are approximately 12 months old, whereas there might only be a few months difference between the old and new feathers in a first-year bird).

The older plumage components of the Lothian bird are well worn and abraded, more so than would be expected of a young bird, even one from an early brood. However, the full extent of this wear is only clear in the close-up photographs. The pale iris also suggests that it is an adult.

The growth/fault bar patterning on the old rectrices was noted and it was suggested that this could possibly be explained by the tail feathers having been lost and regrown simulta-

neously (something that typically occurs with juveniles, although could be explained by other factors - such as the loss of the tail of a full-grown bird in a collision). Despite this, the combination of other factors prompted a consensus was that the Torness individual was an adult in suspended moult.

In scouring the literature, photographs of a similar bird seen on Bryher (Isles of Scilly) on 13–14 October 2006 showed at least some comparable features (Plates 71–72). This was accepted as an adult (*British Birds* 100: 738).

Acknowledgments

Thanks go to Paul Harvey, Peter Kennerley and Roger Riddington for their comments on the ageing of this bird, and to Peter Macdonald for his excellent photographs.

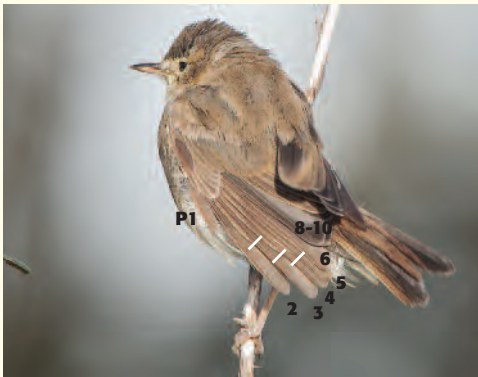


Plate 68. Adult Booted Warbler, Torness, October 2014. © Peter Macdonald. Note the emarginations on primaries P3, P4 and P5 (marked by small dashes).



Plate 69. Adult Booted Warbler, Torness, October 2014. © Peter Macdonald. Note the old, central and outer rectrices compared within the otherwise fresh tail.



Plate 70. Adult Booted Warbler, Torness, October 2014. © Ian Andrews. Note the fresh, darker inner primaries; the dark centred tertials (with one missing on the right) and the old, fault-barred, central rectrices compared within the otherwise fresh tail.

Reference

Kennerley, P. & Pearson, D. 2010. *Reed and Bush Warblers*. Christopher Helm, London.

Ian J. Andrews, Musselburgh, East Lothian.
Email: ijandrews@live.com

Marc Eden, Dunbar, East Lothian.

The status of Booted Warbler in Scotland

This Palearctic species breeds from western Mongolia and north-west China westwards through southern Siberia and northern Kazakhstan into central European Russia, with recent range expansion into the Baltic States and south-east Finland. The entire population is migratory and winters in central to southern parts of eastern India and in Bangladesh.

Recent taxonomic revision has moved Booted Warbler from the *Hippolais* warblers to a new genus - *Iduna* (along with Thick-billed, Sykes's, Eastern and Western Olivaceous Warblers, and Mountain Yellow and African Yellow Warblers) which more accurately reflects their close relationship to the *Acrocephalus* warblers.

There were 36 records of Booted Warbler in Scotland to the end of 2004 (Forrester et al. 2007), and that total has risen markedly to 54 records by the end of 2013 out of an overall total of 145 accepted individuals in Britain [a

further Booted/Sykes's Warbler was present at Tarbat Ness, Highland on 19 August 2006]. As noted previously, the vast majority are from Shetland (30) and Fair Isle (14) with just ten (18.5%) records elsewhere.

The Lothian individual is only the third (or fourth) record from mainland Scotland, following individuals in North-east Scotland in 1992 and 1993, though there are two records from the Isle of May (1975 & 1992). Since 2004 the only other records away from Shetland/Fair Isle have been singles at Balephetrish Bay, Tiree (Argyll) on 31 August to 2 September 2006 (remarkably the second for Tiree), one at Castlebay, Barra on 11 September 2007 (the first for the Outer Hebrides), and a first-winter at Westness, North Ronaldsay on 16 August 2012 (third Orkney record).

Three of the 18 records since 2004 occurred earlier than the previously established 'window' of find dates from 22 August to 19 November: the North Ronaldsay bird of 2012 (16 August); and first-winter birds at Sumburgh Head, Mainland Shetland on 20–21 August 2008 and there again on 18–20 August 2012. This reflects a slight shift of occurrence with nine of the post-2004 birds found in August, eight in September and one on 1 October, compared to six in August, 27 in September, two in October and one in November for the 36 birds to the end of 2004.



Plates 71–72. Adult Booted Warbler, Bryher, Isles of Scilly, October 2006. © Steve Arlow



Plate 73. First-year female Scarlet Tanager, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2014. © Keith Gillon

Scarlet Tanager, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 6–9 October 2014 - the first Scottish record

K. Gillon

It was with some relief that Tony O'Connor and I boarded the ferry to Barra on 4 October to join the rest of the crew who had already been on the island for a week or two. With strong winds forecast, we knew there was a distinct possibility that it would be our last chance of sailing for a number of days, and so it proved. Force 9 gales battered Barra on the 5th/6th, causing ferries to be cancelled, while torrential rain brought flooding to Castlebay damaging and closing the local school and Castlebay Community Hall.

Fortunately, by mid-morning on 6 October the wind had eased considerably and the rain had all but ceased allowing us to get into the field. By 13:00 we hadn't seen a great deal and TOC, Calum Scott and I arrived at Creachan to find Mark Oksien, the ringer amongst our group, in residence with his nets up. We had a quick chat and left him to process the Blackbird he had caught. As I was skirting the southern edge of the site, I caught sight of an alarmingly bright, greenish bird flying toward the woodland proper

from a neighbouring garden. Unable to put a name to it immediately, I was about to get my bins on it when it disappeared behind a couple of conifers. However, as it didn't emerge from the other side, I had a good idea where it must have landed. Rounding the conifers, a movement in a small *Fuchsia* clump caused me to raise my bins whereupon I was confronted with a very smart female-type Scarlet Tanager! I somehow managed to remain remarkably calm and alerted the others who were quickly on hand and we were all treated to good views as the bird sat unobtrusively, occasionally feeding on the fuchsia buds. I managed to rattle off a few record shots before the bird flew into the woodland proper.

Creachan is in a 'black hole' for mobile phone coverage on Barra, and so a short drive was necessitated to alert the remaining birders on the island and to put the news out nationally. It didn't take long for everyone to assemble and, fortunately, the bird was quickly relocated and everyone was able to obtain good views before

the tension level ramped up too much. The identification was fairly straightforward. Although it lacked the solid black wing coverts of a young male, there was enough contrast between the wing and the body to eliminate Summer Tanager, the only other feasible option.

The following day, during the course of Mark's routine ringing activities, the bird was caught in the garden adjacent to the woodland. Further in-the-hand details confirmed that the identity was correct. The underwing coverts were whitish (they would be pink in Summer Tanager), while the bill showed the curious notch or 'tooth' on the cutting edge of the upper mandible found in Scarlet Tanager, but not in Summer. If anything, the bird looked even brighter in the hand, being generally lime green above with a complete yellow orbital ring, notably darker wing coverts and tail and bright yellow underparts extending to the undertail coverts. The bill was strong and conical and fairly bright orange, while the legs were an unremarkable greyish colour. The tail showed evenly spaced fault bars indicating it was a first-winter, while the lack of jet black feathers in the wing coverts indicated that it was a female. It had a fat score of 0.5 and a muscle score of zero indicating that it had recently arrived, presumably a result of the overnight gales.

Barra isn't the easiest island to twitch and while a car-load from the Uists was able to get across and connect with the bird on 7th, it wasn't until 8th that the first twitchers from the mainland were able to look for the bird. While things looked bleak for a while the bird eventually showed mid-afternoon. It was again present on the following day, but despite all-day coverage on 10 October it could not be found.

We have been fortunate to find a number of American passerines on Barra since we started our annual trips in 2002, this being our eighth individual and seventh different species.

Keith Gillon, Musselburgh, Lothian.
Email: keith_gillon@o2.co.uk

Plates 74–76. First-year female Scarlet Tanager, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2014. © Mark Oksien & Keith Gillon





Plate 77. First-year female Scarlet Tanager, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2014. © Keith Gillon

The status of Scarlet Tanager in Scotland

This species breeds in eastern North America from southern Manitoba eastwards to New Brunswick, and south to Arkansas, Alabama and the Appalachian Mountains. The entire population is migratory and winters in north-western South America from Columbia to north-west Bolivia.

The Barra individual constitutes the first record for Scotland, with six previous records in Britain: a first-winter male on St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly on 4 October 1970; a first-winter male on Tresco, Scilly on 28 September to 3 October; a first-winter male at Nanquidno, Cornwall on 11 October 1981; a female on St. Mary's, Scilly on 12–18 October 1982; a first-winter male at St. Levan, Cornwall on 20–21 October 2011, and a first-winter male on St. Mary's, Scilly on 22 October 2011.

These records all fall between 28 September and 22 October, and fit well with the species typical southward migration period of mid to late September. The Barra individual's discovery falls in the middle of this 'window' and also reflects the strong south-westerly bias to the occurrences.

There have been four records in Ireland: a female on Copeland, Co. Down on 12 October 1963; a first-winter female at Firkeel, Co. Cork on 12–14 October 1985, with an adult male there on 18 October 1985, and a first winter male at Garinish Point, Co. Cork on 7–11 October 2008. Elsewhere in the Western Palearctic there have been multiple records from Iceland (4+) and the Azores (7+), and one in France.

Cetti's Warbler, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 12 October 2014 - the second Scottish record

C. Scott

Having birded Barra with a like-minded group every autumn since 2002 it never ceases to amaze us as to what avian surprises this small Hebridean island can throw up at times. Although by far not on a par with such places as Fair Isle or Shetland, birds from as far as Asia such as Paddyfield Warbler and White's Thrush have somehow found this isle to their liking at times. In recent years a *Catharus* thrush bonanza from the opposite direction had us salivating over evening dinner(s) as we discussed what species we could expect next, a Veery or Wood Thrush perhaps! The latest of these *Catharus* thrushes, a Grey-cheeked Thrush in October 2014 (after our departure!) was to become the tenth American passerine recorded on Barra since 2002.

The weather conditions on Barra can be grim at times, but occasionally a lull in the constant barrage of westerlies (due thanks largely to the North American hurricane season) can be halted by a high pressure system sitting over western Scotland for a few days. As such we take full advantage of this by splitting up into our usual small teams and concentrating all of our efforts into searching gardens, plantations and any other suitable cover around the island for migrant passerines. This type of 'High' weather system has also over the years been found to be very beneficial towards finding rare birds on Barra in that it has the desired effect of migrants taking advantage of such fine weather by continuing on their journey from further northwards and drifting down the Hebridean chain to arrive on Barra. The 2006 Isabelline Shrike was a particularly clear cut example of this.

The lull in the weather also allows the observer the welcome break of being able to look into trees and bushes that are at other times

persistently in perpetual motion, and so are able to detect birds that have perhaps already made landfall, but remained unseen.

So with all of this in mind, and the fact that a Scarlet Tanager was already in the bag this autumn for our merry band, our thoughts were ever more hopeful of further gems from across the pond, or perhaps from even eastwards from the direction of Siberia and Asia given the extraordinary day counts of c.30 Yellow-browed Warblers on the island on the previous few days. However, what the events of 12 October threw up was totally off of our radar and mindset, and was just another example of a birding conundrum that islands such as Barra can throw up from time to time for the observer!

The morning of 12th dawned bright, sunny and calm, so Keith Gillon, Tony O'Connor and I (CDS) set off in search of migrants. By late afternoon nothing of any real value had been found other than an interesting pale *Acrocephalus* warbler at Glean, which was trapped and subsequently identified as a European Reed Warbler. We then turned our attention to Nasg, a settlement of houses and gardens on the road to Vatersay that lies just to the west of the island's main settlement of Castlebay.

I approached and stood overlooking a shoreline clump of scrub that bordered a nearby garden near to the road junction of the island's main road with Nasg. There I soon saw a Blackcap enjoying the last of the day's sunshine low in some vegetation that was growing through a fence-line some 30–40 ft away and just below me. As I watched it I was aware of a second bird literally right next to it which appeared through the fence. On raising my binoculars I was surprised to see myself looking at a Cetti's Warbler and not

another Blackcap as expected! What's more it was showing extremely well and fully out in the open!

Identification was instantaneous, but knowing just how rare this species was in Scotland, and that this was the first ever live record, I began to doubt my initial identification by thinking to myself "don't be silly, it's a Wren". However, try as I might this Wren failed to change into anything else than a Cetti's Warbler as it once more reappeared through vegetation on the fence. It continued to show well right in front of me allowing me to see its short, rounded, rather blunt-looking wings, along with a long, broad tail that it cocked at times.

The cogs of my mind were in full gear by now and it began to churn out thoughts of perhaps something even rarer in the shape or form of an Asian Stubtail or even one of the Asian bush-warblers given the amount of Yellow-broweds around at that time. Any such thoughts were soon dispelled however as the bird continued to show well and I was quickly brought back down to my senses.

I immediately alerted KG & TOC who were both nearby, and they agreed with my identification and to the fact that I wasn't hallucinating after all! At this point via mobile phone I alerted Birdline Scotland as well as other observers on the island whom I had the numbers of, fortunately all were in reception range and thus a total of ten observers were soon assembled after a range of unprintable comments were made down the phone regarding my good luck. These comments, the result of sheer incredulity and astonishment towards such a totally unexpected arrival of a bird that was not only in Scotland, but was also in the far west of the country and on the Hebrides to boot!

By the time all observers had assembled the sun had dropped even further behind a nearby hill and the general lull of activity on the bird front was evident as the bird, along with other nearby species, became increasingly difficult to see as they retreated back into the shelter of the deep undergrowth. All was not lost however, as the bird had been very vocal at the point of initial contact, and remained so as it moved about in deep cover, so at least we were able to

follow its whereabouts within the scrub or garden. After an agonizing wait for some the bird reappeared in trees within the garden before being seen well by all as it fed along the edge of a small burn leading back up to the roadside. However all attempts to photograph or video it failed at this point due to a combination of failing light and the bird's much more secretive and mobile nature, I had also left my camera back at the house that day and was left kicking myself given the initial views I had. All birders present agreed on the identification, including Somerset birder, Bruce Taylor, who sees and hears this species almost daily in his local area. The bird was not seen or heard on subsequent days despite several searches for it.

With our group now on a cumulative total of 199 species over our autumn birding trips to Barra, 2015 will become an important landmark for us all next year, perhaps we should hope for another Scottish Dartford Warbler or Lesser Spotted Woodpecker rather than that mega Yank or Sibe that we all desperately long for!

Description

Size and shape: similar in size and build to nearby Blackcap. Primary projection very short, leaving the bird with a very short, rounded-winged appearance. The tail was often cocked whilst perched revealing the undertail coverts.

Upperparts: crown, back, rump and rather broad squared tail all reddish-brown. The wings were similarly coloured with the exception of the primaries which had a richer reddish-brown tinge to the edges that created a brighter-toned wing panel. The head pattern consisted of a fine, narrow white supercillium (i.e. not as broad as a Yellow-browed Warbler for instance) that ran from the bill to beyond the eye. The bird showed an obvious whitish eye-ring. **Underparts:** The throat was white, with the sides of head and breast tinged grey. This coupled with the head pattern gave the bird a distinctive look in my opinion. The rest of the underparts were a rather dusky looking off-white colour, with the flanks and undertail brownish. The short wings along with the bird's habit of often cocking its tail when perched meant that the brownish undertail coverts were seen well, and as such were seen to be tipped off-white. **Bare parts:** The bill was rather fine - exact colouration not noted though, with the leg colour

similarly not noted. **Call:** the bird was continually heard to be uttering a series of single short, sharp 'tchecks' both whilst on view and as it was in deep undergrowth. This call sounded similar in rhythm to a Lesser Whitethroat say, but definitely sounding different in tone. Both Bruce Taylor (Somerset) and Ian Ricketts (Birmingham) commented that this call was what they typically heard from Cetti's south of the border. I have often heard them singing abroad (including England), but to my knowledge have never heard them call.

Calum Scott, Edinburgh.

Email: calumscott@blueyonder.co.uk

Status of Cetti's Warbler in Scotland

This Palearctic species occurs across south and central latitudes of Europe eastwards the Caucasus to south-west Russia, Kazakhstan, western China, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and north-west India. Three subspecies are currently recognised, with the nominate form the one present in Europe, found from northern Morocco to Tunisia and southern Britain, France, Iberia to Morocco and east along the Mediterranean coast to Turkey. This form is generally considered sedentary, but some post-breeding dispersive and coastal movements have been recorded.

There is one previous record in Scotland, a ringed adult male found freshly dead below a window at the SNH offices at Leith, Edinburgh on 4 October 1993. It was 649 km from its original ringing site (Wissant, near Calais, France), the largest movement recorded in Europe to date for this species.

The first British record was as recent as 1961 - a singing male at Titchfield Haven, Hampshire from 4 March to 10 April. A remarkable colonisation of southern England and Wales followed, with birds now breeding as far north as Lancashire and Yorkshire, and a population of around 1,900 breeding pairs. Though analysis of British ringing data suggests adults are generally sedentary, with most ringing controls/recoveries found within 10 km of the ringing site, first-winter birds can be more dispersive. The eastern form albiventris which breeds from Iran to western China is largely migratory and winters in the south of its breeding range and Afghanistan and north-west Pakistan. Whether the Barra individual came from the British/European population or further east is a matter for speculation.

Black-billed Cuckoo, North Ronaldsay, 23 October 2014 - first record for Orkney

M. Warren

It would be certainly true to say that North Ronaldsay has always had a decent reputation for turning up rarities, but 2014 was proving to be an exceptional year with headline making birds arriving with astonishing regularity. It would also be fair to say that in 2014 we'd had plenty of luck along the way, be it the Scops Owl inadvertently flushed from its daytime roost into

a mist net while walking through the Holland garden sycamores, or the Eyebrowed Thrush found during a volunteers final stroll around the observatory before catching the flight home. But the slice of luck three of the staff (myself included) had on 23 October reached a new level, resulting in a day never to be forgotten and we owe it all to a 'frosty' looking redpoll.

A Grey Phalarope had been the star bird from my designated census route of the eastern side of the island, but upon completion of this the gardens at Holland House on my way home are always worthy of a look. It was as I made my way along a path through the *Fuscia* I caught sight of said 'frosty' redpoll, but 20 minutes of frustration as the bird remained elusive continued once Rael Butcher and Sara Macias arrived at the gardens having finished their respective routes too. We split up, RB and SM took the lawn and I staked out the middle and then it all went a bit crazy...

I got on to a bird dropping out of the sky, realising it was trying to evade the seriously quick Merlin which was after it. It managed this and expecting it to be one of the thousand or so Redwing present on the island was surprised when it wasn't, it was however thrush-sized, but with an additional long, floppy tail a bit like a Cuckoo! My brain was basically hitting the panic button as I registered greyish upperparts, clean white underparts and as it glided right past me contrasting brown edges to the primaries. But they weren't that bright, not as bright as they should be if the bird was going to be a Yellow-billed Cuckoo! My panic developed to hysteria as the bird continued through the Sycamores to a perch at the back, but still only 10–12 metres away as I dropped to my knees - lucky as my legs were on the verge of turning to jelly anyway. I was quickly onto the bird again and I could see the 'cuckoo' with its wings drooping at its side, below its body in that pose I'd seen so many times in photographs and illustrations, but the head and bill were obscured by a branch. Shuffling about a bit it wasn't long before the magic moment when I saw its greyish-black bill for the first time. Yes, a Black-billed Cuckoo really had just dropped out of the sky right in front of me!

I managed to just about remain calm enough to take note of additional features such as a narrow yellowish eye-ring, the decurved bill shape, white 'wedge' shaped markings on the greater coverts and similar, larger such markings on the tertials. Next, I instinctively began to reach for my camera, but realised I was still alone with RB and SM having not joined me. Surely they too had seen the bird

drop into the garden, but they weren't at my side and there was no irrational screaming to get my attention. Realising they couldn't have, I had to go for them and after regaining the use of my legs, I nervously backed away until out of sight of the bird, sprinted out of the garden and think I got the words "black, billed and cuckoo" out in the right order when I found them. Not even waiting for a reply I was back at my original position rather quickly and with the bird still present got both of them onto it after a short time. After a minute or so of watching the bird, the cameras were reached for again, but the bird had other ideas, strongly flew out of the back of the garden in a westerly direction and that was it. This first for North Ronaldsay and Orkney was never seen again, despite an extensive search of the southern end of the island. We later learnt it had briefly been seen by the Holland House caretaker just after our sighting.

But the madness of that day didn't quite end there as during the subsequent search a Grey-cheeked Thrush was found - another first for North Ronaldsay, and on the same day to boot! There can't have been too many instances where two American landbirds have been found within a few hours of each other (although two Buff-bellied Pipits were found here, side-by-side in 2011!) on an island of this size. We eventually sorted out the 'redpoll' that had kept us from enjoying our lunch that day - it wasn't the hoped for *hornemanni* Arctic Redpoll, rather an *islandica*/north-western type, but we weren't too bothered. While it was a shame the Black-billed Cuckoo didn't perform for the masses, I would have loved to have got a photographic record shot in a year which also featured Short-billed Dowitcher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Isabelline Shrike, two Pechora Pipits, Paddyfield Warbler, Spotted Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover plus the rest.

In the rarity stakes at least, North Ronaldsay was the place to be in 2014. I for one, can't wait to see what 2015 brings our way.

**Mark Warren, North Ronaldsay
Bird Observatory, Orkney.**
Email: markwarren1980@hotmail.co.uk



Plate 78. Spotted Sandpiper, Inverallochy, North-east Scotland, October 2014. © Harry Scott

Spotted Sandpiper, Inverallochy, October 2014 to January 2015 - first record for North-east Scotland

P.A.A. Baxter, S.J. Baxter & M.B. Cowie

On 12 October 2014, Margaret Cowie (MBC) had been checking the rocky shoreline at Inverallochy, east of Fraserburgh, for waders, a spot she frequently visits. A bird that looked like a Common Sandpiper flew into the bay and started to feed among the rocks and piles of seaweed, but because of the yellow legs, she considered the possibility of it being a Spotted Sandpiper. Frustratingly, a sustained view eluded her. After checking the field guides and returning to the site, the bird couldn't be relocated. Having phoned out the news of the possibility of a potential Spotted Sandpiper, persistence paid off and returning to the site again that afternoon, the bird was back in the original place, allowing further views which disappointingly seemed to suggest that it was a Common Sandpiper. However, the fact that the tail projection was exceedingly short was puzzling and with this in mind, she took several photographs of the bird (in pouring rain which appeared to thankfully slow down the bird's activity). At home, she looked through the photos, ready to delete the



Plate 79. Spotted Sandpiper, Inverallochy, North-east Scotland, October 2014. © Tim Marshall



Plate 80. Spotted Sandpiper, Inverallochy, North-east Scotland, January 2015. © Stefan McElwee



Plate 81. Spotted Sandpiper, Inverallochy, North-east Scotland, October 2014. © Harry Scott

lot, but one stopped her in her tracks. It was blurred (as they all were), but the overall image just didn't have the 'look' of a Common Sandpiper. The following week she returned to the site three times, but failed to see the bird, so it was presumed to have moved on.

Paul Baxter heard about the bird during a conversation with Chris Gibbins (CG). However, nothing more came of it over the next few days and it just fizzled away from memory.

On 18 October, Paul and CG were birding at Cruden Bay when they bumped into MBC and the sandpiper came up in conversation. PAAB and CG were a little surprised to discover that MBC had managed to get some images of the bird, and, even on the back of her camera, they looked very interesting - indeed both PAAB and CNG thought the images looked good for Spotted Sandpiper. PAAB arranged to take the camera home that afternoon to view them on a computer screen. He was then happy that the bird was indeed a Spotted Sandpiper - the first record for North-east Scotland.

The following morning, PAAB decided to head to Inverallochy with his son, four-year-old Samuel and to walk the shoreline in the hope that the bird might still be present (although MBC had been there three times earlier that week and hadn't seen it). Given the long-staying habit of some Spotted Sandpipers in the UK (even over-wintering) it had to be worth a try. We arrived mid-morning and walked the area that the bird had been seen in the previous weekend. Thankfully it was still present and a quick look through the scope confirmed the identification as a first-winter Spotted Sandpiper. The news was released and MBC was first to arrive. She was overjoyed that the bird had been identified correctly.

The bird stayed to delight many observers and remained faithful to its favoured bay into the New Year and was still present at the time of writing (19 January 2015).

*Paul & Samuel Baxter, 1 Abbey Street,
Old Deer, Peterhead, Aberdeenshire.
Email: paulbaxter@hotmail.co.uk*

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



Plate 83. Young Samuel Baxter clinching the Spotted Sandpiper identification, Inverallochy, North-east Scotland, October 2014. © Paul Baxter

Plate 82. Spotted Sandpiper, Inverallochy, North-east Scotland, October 2014. © Harry Scott



Scottish Bird Sightings

1 October to 31 December 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.

In yet another phenomenal autumn for rarities, it was no surprise that the Northern Isles were host to the large majority. Less expected was that the three rarest birds, in Scottish terms, were found away from Shetland. Rough-legged Buzzards, Great Grey Shrikes and Olive-backed Pipits appeared in good numbers but the decline of Turtle Dove and other once numerous or regular species continues.

Bewick's Swan: three flew over Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 8 November. **Bean Goose:** away from the Slammanan flock sightings included at least 19 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9 October; two on Islay (Arg) on 19 November; one on Stronsay (Ork) on 22nd, and seven at White Sands Bay (Loth) on 30 November. **Snow Goose:** a white-morph was at Bulls of Buchan (NES) on 9 October; singles were at Loch Davan (NES) and Forteviot (P&K) on 14th; two were near Cuil Bay (High) on 6 November; one near Muir of Ord (High) on 15 November; one at Montgrew, near

Keith (M&N) on 19th, and Mosstodloch (M&N) on 21 November, and one at Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 23 December.

Ross's Goose: one was at Yetholm (Bord) on 2 October, at West Water Reservoir (Bord) on 31 October, and near Dunbar (Loth) on 7–9 December.

Vagrant Canada Geese: one of the form *parvipes* was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve (Arg) on 4–5 October, with two birds there on 8th; one of the form *interior* was at Loch Gorm, Islay on 19–20 October. **Cackling Geese** (form *hutchinsii*) included singles at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 15 October; at Loch Gruinart from 21 October into November; near Scrabster (Caith) on 23 October, at Loch Indaal, Islay on 26–29 October, at Craigens, Islay on 19 November; at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) from 17 December, and at Loch Gorm, Islay from 19 December. **Red-breasted Goose:** one was at Tormiston/Loch of Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 10–26 November. **Egyptian Goose:** one was at Cambusmore GP (UF) on 19 October and at Lower Rhynd Loch (P&K) on 22 October.

American Wigeon: up to four were reported from both OH and Ork; other drakes were at Bishopburn, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 7–11 October; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) from 12 October to 19 November; a drake at Loch Leven (P&K) on 18th; one at Norby/Loch of Collaster, Mainland (Shet) from 10 November into 2015; one at Cloddach Quarry, near Elgin (M&N) from 30 November to 22 December; one at Meikle Loch (NES) from 13 December. **Green-winged Teal:**

15 drakes were reported from widely scattered localities in the north and west.

Ring-necked Duck: a drake was St John's Loch (Caith) from 4 October; two at Loch Strumore, North Uist (OH) on 8th; a female at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 25 October, with two juveniles there on 28th, and a first-winter drake from 3 November to 28 December; a drake was at Loch of Skene (NES) on 2–5 November; a female/juv was at West Loch Ollay, South Uist (OH) on 2 November; a first-winter female on Policy Loch, Dunecht (NES) on 4 November; a female was at Loch Sandary, North Uist on 7 December into 2015, and two fem/imms were on Carlingwark Loch (D&G) on 21 December into 2015. **Lesser Scaup:** a female was at Ardnave Loch, Islay (Arg) on 23 October; a first-winter drake was at Trabboch Loch (Ayr) from 15 December into 2015, and a drake was at Linlithgow Loch (Loth) on 16–24 December. **King Eider:** a female remained in Basta Voe, off Yell (Shet) throughout into 2015; a drake was in Burghead Bay (M&N) up to 11 October, then an eclipse drake off Nairn golf course (M&N) on 22–23 October, and the drake again in Burghead Bay on 8–9 November; a female was off Belmont, Unst on 29 October; a female was off Rudden's Point, Largo Bay (Fife) from 30 November into 2015, and a drake was again off Burghead (M&N) from 28 December. **Surf Scoter:** a drake was off Embo, Loch Fleet (High) on 1–10 October; a female was at Blackdog (NES) on 2–3rd, with a drake there on 3–5th; a drake in Largo Bay (Fife) from 5 October to 4 December; a drake was in

Burghead Bay (M&N) on 9–11 October; a drake was off Musselburgh (Loth) from 9 October into 2015; a drake was in Inganess Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 12–15 October; a female was in Lunan Bay (A&D) on 20 October, with a drake there on 28–29 October, and both present from 30 October to 9 November. **Black Scoter:** one was in Lunan Bay (A&D) on 20–31 October. **Bufflehead:** a drake was at Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 30 October to 2 November.

White-billed Diver: an adult/second-winter flew past Fife Ness (Fife) on 13 October; one was off Brough, Fetlar (Shet) on 16 October, and one was off Kirkabister, Mainland (Shet) on 10 November. **Bittern:** one remained at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) throughout into 2015; one was at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 18 October, with it, or another, nearby at Loch of Hillwell on 1–3 November; one was at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 9 November, and one at Loch Ken (D&G) on 17 November. **Little Egret:** incompletely reported, especially from SW sites, but peak count was of six at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 8 October. Otherwise noted in ones and twos as far north as Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES). **Cormorant:** one showing characteristics of the race *sinensis* was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 13 October - a first for Argyll if accepted. **Great White Egret:** one was at Coldstream (Bord) on 5 October. **White Stork:** one was seen briefly on a roof at Lenzie (Clyde) on 4 October. **Spoonbill:** one at Findhorn (M&N) remained to 10 October; one was at Guardbridge, Eden Estuary (Fife) on 12 October, and three flew over Mossbank, Mainland (Shet) on 5 November.

Pallid Harrier: a juvenile was near Tingwall Airfield, Mainland (Shet) on 1–5 October; one at Dullans, Fetlar (Shet) on 7 October, and a juvenile at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB



Plate 84. Rough-legged Buzzard, Mennock Pass, Dumfries & Galloway, February 2015. © Angus Hogg

Reserve (NES) on 8 October. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** singles were near Gunnister, Unst (Shet) on 3 October; on Fair Isle on 17th; at Fladdabister, Mainland (Shet) on 18th; at Otterswick, Yell (Shet) on 19th; at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 20th; at Breckon, Kirk Loch and Basta Voe, Yell from 24 October to 3 November; at Tomintoul (NES) on 7th; near Wanlockhead (D&G) from 7 November into 2015; at Baltasound, Unst and Gutcher, Yell on 8th; two at Whiteadder Reservoir or nearby at Faseny Bridge (Loth) on 9–18 November, with one still on 19th November; one near Northdale/Norwick, Unst on 11–13th and 23 November; one was near Pirnmill, Isle of Arran (Ayr) on 26 November; one over the Rendall Hills, Mainland (Ork) at the end of November; one near Currie (Loth) on 7 December, and one near Feteresso Forest, near Stonehaven (NES) on 11 December. **Gyrfalcon:** a white-morph was near Loch Gorm, Islay (Arg) on 3 October; a grey-morph was at Butt of Lewis, then nearby at Loch Stiaphabat, Lewis (OH) on 4 October, and again at Butt of Lewis on 9 October; a white-morph was at Glen Ey, near Braemar (NES) on 29 December. **Spotted Crane:** one was at Clingera, Unst (Shet) on 1 October, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25 October. **American Coot:** one was at Loch nam Feithean/Balranald, North Uist

(OH) from 16 November into 2015. **Crane:** three flew south Arbroath (A&D) on 11 October; four flew over the Ythan Estuary and then Meikle Loch (both NES) on 30 November.

Avocet: one was at Crombie Point, near Torryburn (Fife) on 4 November. **American Golden Plover:** an adult was near Widewall, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5 October; one was in fields north of Traigh Mhor, Barra (OH) on 5 October; an adult was at Sconser, Isle of Skye (High) on 6th; a juvenile at Maidens (Ayr) on 17 October and 1–3 November, and one at Balevulin, Tiree (Arg) on 17–19 October. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 5th and 13–18 October, and one near Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 27 October. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** one was at Clevigarth, Mainland (Shet) on 2 October, and nearby at Exnaboe on 3rd; two were at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 4 October; one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 21st, with two there on 22–24th and one still on 29 October. **Temminck's Stint:** one remained at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) to 1 October. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was still at Drums (NES) on 1 October and one was seen at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 2 October. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was at Inverallochy (NES) from 19 October into 2015.

Grey Phalarope: in October singles were off Fair Isle on 2nd; off Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 8th; at Piltanton Burn, (D&G) on 11th; off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23rd; off Peninerine, South Uist (OH) on 25th, and at Fair Isle on 25–27 October. In November there were singles off Peterhead (NES) on 3rd and 7th; past Fife Ness (Fife) on 5th; in White Sands Bay (Loth) on 5–6th, and at Haroldswick, Unst on 8th and 11th. Up to three were at Dalgety Bay (Fife) on 14th; one passed Embo (High) on 14th, and one flew past Kinghorn (Fife) on 15 November. One was at Newark Bay, Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 16 December and one at Musselburgh (Loth) on 22 December.

Ivory Gull: a first-winter was at various sites on Benbecula (OH) on 13–18 December, with it or another at Uig harbour, Isle of Skye (High) from 23 December into 2015. **Sabine's Gull:** a juvenile was off Lossiemouth (M&N) on 2 October; a juvenile around the Rona Bank in the Minch (High) on 4 October; two in Broadford Bay, Skye (High) on 6th; one off the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry (OH) on 7th; a juvenile was off St Abbs (Bord) on 13th; an adult at Arbroath (A&D) on 15th; a juvenile at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 18th, and a juvenile flew

south at Troon (Ayr) on 21 October. A juvenile was at Musselburgh (Loth) on 4 November, and one was seen from the Oban–Tiree ferry in Gunna Sound (Arg) on 11 November. **Bonaparte's Gull:** an adult was at Loch Gilp (Arg) on 1st and 30–31 December.

Mediterranean Gull: noted in fairly small numbers, with a peak count of five at Loch Gilp (Arg) on 1st and 26 December. A first-winter at Embo (High) on 14 December was the furthest north, with an adult at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 26 November and single first-winters at Ardvule/Ardvachar, South Uist (OH) on 18–28 October, and on Rhum (High) on 1 November also notable. **Ring-billed Gull:** the returning adult was still at Dingwall (High) throughout the period and into 2015; a first-winter flew past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 22 October, and an adult was at Barshaw Park, Paisley (Clyde) on 16 December, with presumed same then at Strathclyde CP (Clyde) from 27 December into 2015. **Kumlien's Gull:** a second-winter was on Fair Isle on 22 December; a juvenile was at Scord Beach, Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 22–23 December; a juvenile at Loch Caolisport, Ormsary. (Arg) on 30–31 December, and a second-

winter was at Shetland Catch fish factory, Lerwick (Shet) on 31 December. **Black Tern:** one was at Inchgarth Reservoir, Cults (NES) on 6 October, one flew past Hound Point (Loth) on 7th, and two were off Kinghorn (Fife) on 9 October. **Brünnich's Guillemot:** one was seen in the Little Minch from the Lochmaddy–Uig ferry (OH) on 18 December.

Turtle Dove: one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11 October; one at Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 13th, and a juvenile was at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 15–16 October. **Black-billed Cuckoo:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23 October. **Chimney Swift:** one was at Loch Stiapbhat, Lewis (OH) on 23–25 October. **Snowy Owl:** the adult male remained near Ben Macdui/ Cairngorm (High/M&N) to 18 October at least; a male was seen near Thurso (Caith) on 15 October and near Camster (Caith) on 18 October to 6 November. **Hoopoe:** one was at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 8–12 October; one at Alturrie Point, near Inverness (High) on 9 October; one at Gott, Mainland (Shet) on 12th; one between Lochfoot and Cargenbridge (D&G) on 20th; one at Keldabister, Bressay (Shet) on 25 October, and presumed same at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 3–6 November. **Wryneck:** one remained at Norwick, Unst (Shet) to 7 October, and one was at Voxter, Mainland (Shet) on 19 October.

Red-backed Shrike: one was still on Sanday (Ork) to 1 October; one was at Baelans, Fetlar on 13 October and one at Southdale, Tresta (Shet) on 18 October. **Great Grey Shrike:** up to eight were on Shetland in October, and six in November. At least four were on Fair Isle, with first on 8 October and last sighting on 10 November. On Orkney there were two on North Ronaldsay on 7 November, with one still to 9 November. Elsewhere there were singles at Leuchars (Fife) on 11–12 October; near

Plate 85. Ivory Gull, Uig Pier, Skye, Highland, December 2014. © David Main



Kinathy Haughs, near Glamis (A&D) on 31 October to 1 November; at Mossdale, near Laurieston (D&G) on 2–4th and 16 November; at Forsinard RSPB Reserve (Caith) on 28 November; at Bonchester Bridge (Bord) on 1 December; at Teindland Forest, Elgin (M&N) on 6 December, and at Fetteresso Forest, near Stonehaven (NES) on 11 December. **Firecrest:** Singles were at Torness (Loth) on 5 October; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 7–8th; near Kirbuster Museum, Mainland (Ork) on 11th; on Fair Isle on 15–19th and 22nd; on Foula (Shet) on 17–19th; at Gairloch (High) from 28 October to 13 November, with two there on 19–20 November and one still on 21st; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 2 November; at Grenitote, North Uist (OH) from 16 November into 2015; at Trotternish, Isle of Skye (High) on 17th; at Loch of Strathbeg again from 24 November to 7 December. **Short-toed Lark:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6–7 October; two at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 8th; one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 15th; one on Oronsay (Arg) on 23rd, and one on North Ronaldsay from 30 October to 11 November. **Shorelark:** one was at Askernish, South Uist (OH) on 9–10 October; two were seen at Wool Law, near Leadhills (Clyde) on 29 October - the first record for the county; one was on Fair Isle on 10 November; one at Dowlaw (Bord) on 12–17 November, and one at Newark Bay, Deerness (Ork) on 22 December.

Cetti's Warbler: one was at Nasg, Barra (OH) on 14 October - the second (first live) record for Scotland. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** although not quite as abundant as last autumn's record showing, it was another notable influx, particularly on Shetland. High counts included 11 on Bressay (Shet) on 1 October, six at Frakkafield and seven at Tingwall on 4th and six at Geosetter on 7th (all Mainland Shetland); four

at Durness (High) and seven on the Isle of May on 7th; four at Johnshaven (NES) on 8th; up to 30 daily on Barra (OH) on 8–10th, with at least five at Castlebay, Barra on 13th, and four on Fair Isle on 14–15 October. At least 14 were noted in November with the last one at Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 21–23rd. A probable was at Dale, Evie (Ork) again on 7 December. **Hume's Leaf Warbler:** one was at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 19–23 October; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 31 October and 16 November, and one at Collieston (NES) on 15 November. **Pallas's Warbler:** one was at St. Abbs Head (Bord) on 7 October. **Radde's Warbler:** one was near Sumburgh Hotel, Mainland (Shet) on 6 October, with one near Walls, Mainland (Shet) and one at Troup Head (NES) on 8 October. **Eastern Bonelli's Warbler:** a first-winter was at Scalloway, Mainland (Shet) on 10–13 October.

Barred Warbler: in October there were 15 on Shetland; one on Fair Isle on 11–14th; one on Sanday (Ork) on 2nd, and one on Barra (OH) on 8th. One was at Kilminning, Fife Ness (Fife) on 7–13th; singles at Staxigoe, near Wick (Caith) and Melvich (High) on 9th; at Fife Ness Muir (Fife) on 12th and 22–28th, and at Barns Ness (Loth) on 17–20 October. One was at Houbie, Fetlar (Shet) on 9 November. **Eastern Subalpine Warbler:** a male remained at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) to 4 October. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 7–8 October. **Booted Warbler:** a moulting adult was at Torness (Loth) on 11–23 October - the first Lothian record. **Icterine Warbler:** one was at Cruden Bay (NES) on 9 October. **Melodious Warbler:** one was still at Scarinish, Tiree (Arg) to 4 October, and one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 6 October. **Reed Warbler:** one was at Glean, Barra (OH) on 12–14 October. **Marsh Warbler:** one lingered at

Lund, Unst (Shet) to 2 October.

Waxwing: very low numbers reported, with only a handful of double-figure counts and 35 in Oxfgangs, Edinburgh (Loth) on 30 December the highest count.

Rose-coloured Starling: all records were juveniles - one remained on Fair Isle to 3 October; one was still at Balnakeil, Durness (High) to 10 October; one was at Gott, Mainland (Shet) on 4 October; one at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 6 October; one at Voe, Mainland (Shet) from 15 October to 3 November; one at Meningie, Tiree (Arg) on 25–27 October; one at Leven, Fife from 26 October to 3 November, and one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 2 November.

White's Thrush: one at Durigarth, Mainland (Shet) remained to 1 October, and one was on Fair Isle on 4 October. **Hermit Thrush:** one was at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 22–23 October. **Grey-cheeked Thrush:** one was at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 23 October; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23rd; a first-winter was on Fair Isle on 24–25 October; one was at Strandburgh Ness, Fetlar (Shet) on 29 October, and a first-winter was at Renwick, Mainland (Shet) on 8–19 November.

Bluethroat: around 16 were reported in October and one lingered on North Ronaldsay (Ork) to 4 November. All were on the Northern Isles except for one at Whinnifield (NES) on 8th and one at Torness Point (Loth) on 14 October. **Siberian Rubythroat:** an adult male was at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 3–8 October. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** one was at Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 3–17 November, and one at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 8–9 November. **Desert Wheatear:** one was at Montrose (A&D) on 16–19 November - the first record for the county. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** In October there were up to 11 on Shetland, three on Fair Isle, one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30th,



Plate 86. Siberian Rubythroat, Levenwick, Shetland, October 2014. © Rebecca Nason

and up to four on the Outer Hebrides. Elsewhere there were singles on the Isle of May on 5–7 October; at Collieston (NES) on 7–8th; at Balephuil, Tiree (Arg) on 8–9th; at Losiemouth (M&N) on 8th, and at Mains of Usan (A&D) on 18 October. One was at Rendall, Mainland (Ork) on 8 November. **Siberian Stonechat:** one was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 6 October; one at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 8th; one was at Everland, Fetlar (Shet) on 8–13 October; one was at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 11 October; a female was at Torness (Loth) on 14–17 October - the first county record, and one showing characteristics of the form *stejnegeri* was on Fair Isle from 31 October to 2 November.

Yellow Wagtail: two were on Out Skerries (Shet) on 6 October; one at Balnakeil (High) on 12 October; one at Tynninghame and it or another nearby over Seafield Pond (both Loth) on 22 November. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were at Eswick, Mainland (Shet) on 2 October; on Fair Isle on 4th and 25 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28 October; at Skateraw (Loth) on 2 November; at Cunningsburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 4th; at

Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 11th, and at Balranald RSPB, North Uist (OH) on 19 November. **Olive-backed Pipit:** a large influx occurred - all on the Northern Isles. Over 20 were seen on Shetland in October, with a late bird at Toab, Mainland on 17 November. At least seven were on Fair Isle in October, with three present on 13th and 18th, and a late bird from 19 November to 2 December. Up to eight were on Orkney in October, with a peak count of four on North Ronaldsay on 8th. **Pechora Pipit:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8 October, and one at Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 11 October. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 13 October; an adult was on Fair Isle on 13–17 October, with another bird on 17th and one still to 20 October, and one was at Norby, Mainland (Shet) on 16 October. **Water Pipit:** one was at White Sands Bay (Loth) on 5–7 November.

Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll: one was at Veensgarth, Mainland (Shet) again on 5–6 October. **Common Rosefinch:** one was at Balemartin, Tiree (Arg) on 4 October; one near Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 12–14th; one at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 13

October; a juvenile at Uisaed Point, Machrihanish (Arg) on 12 November, and a juvenile at Bunessan, Mull (Arg) on 30 November. **Snow Bunting:** peak counts were 100 on Foula (Shet) on 13 October, 70 at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 15 November; 71 on Scald Law, Pentland Hills (Loth) on 23 November, and 130 at Turquoy, Westray (Ork) on 26 December. **Lapland Bunting:** all reports were in single figures and mostly from the Northern and Western Isles where peak counts were five on Foula (Shet) on 13 October, seven on Fair Isle on 20 October, three on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5 October, and three near Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 4 October. Elsewhere there were singles at Aberdeen (NES) and Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 4 October; at Tynninghame (Loth) on 10th & 12th; at Skateraw (Loth) on 15th; at Noss Head (Caith) on 16th; at Duncansby Head (Caith) on 17th, and at Barns Ness (Loth) on 24 October; at Collieston (NES) on 15 November; Elie Ness (Fife) on 16th, at Hough, Tiree (Arg) on 18th, at Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 27 November and 7 December, and one at Gott, Tiree on 15 December. **Scarlet Tanager:** a first-winter female was at Creachan, Barra (OH) on 6–9 October - the first Scottish record. **Rustic Bunting:** the long-staying bird at Halligarth/Baltsound, Unst (Shet) remained to 13 October, with it or another at Uyeasound, Unst on 14 October. **Little Bunting:** up to 20 were on Shetland in October and one was on Foula (Shet) on 14 November. On Fair Isle at least nine birds were noted between 4–31 October. On Orkney there was one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6 October, and one at St Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay on 10 October, while the only record elsewhere was one at Bullers of Buchan (NES) on 8 October. **Yellow-rumped Warbler:** one at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) remained to 1 October.

SOC Branch Secretaries

Ayrshire: Anne Dick
Rowanmyle House, Tarbolton, Mauchline KA5 5LU.
Tel: 01292 541981
Email: a_m_dick@btinternet.com

Borders: Neil Stratton
Herton Mains, Main Street, Herton, Kelso TD5 8JR.
Tel: 01573 450695.
Email: neildstratton@btinternet.com

Caithness: Angus McBay
Schoolhouse, Weydale, Thurso KW14 8YJ.
Tel: 01847 894663
Email: angmcb@btinternet.com

Central: Neil Bielby
56 Ochiltree, Dunblane FK15 0DF.
Tel: 01786 823830
Email: n.bielby@sky.com

Clyde: Ian Fulton
8 Barrachnie Avenue, Baillieston, Glasgow G69 6SR.
Tel: 0141 773 4329
Email: soc.clyde@btinternet.com

Dumfries: Pat Aberly
East Daylesford, Colvend, Dalbeattie DG5 4QA.
Tel: 01556 630483
Email: eastdaylesford@onetel.com

Fife: Post vacant

Highland: Kathy Bonniface
Alt Dubh, North End, Tomatin,
Inverness-shire IV13 7YP.
Tel: 01808 511740
Email: kathybonniface@aol.com

Lothian: Doreen Main
Seatoller, Broadgait, Gullane EH31 2DH.
Tel: 01620 844532
Email: doreen.main@yahoo.com

Moray: Martin Cook
Rowanbrae, Clochan, Buckie AB56 5EQ.
Tel: 01542 850 296
Email: martin.cook99@btinternet.com

North-East Scotland: Hugh Addelee
31 Ashtree Road, Banchory AB31 5JB.
Tel: 01330 829 949
Email: grampian.secretary@the-soc.org.uk

Orkney: Post vacant

Stewartry: Joan Howie
The Wildemess, High Street, New Galloway,
Castle Douglas DG7 3RL.
Tel: 01644 420 280
Email: joanospreys1@btinternet.com

Tayside: Brian Brocklehurst
146 Balgillo Road, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 3EB.
Tel: 01382 778 348
Email: brian.brocklehurst1@btinternet.com

West Galloway: Geoff Sheppard
The Roddens, Leswalt, Stranraer DG9 0QR.
Tel: 01776 870 685
Email: geoff.roddens@btinternet.com

SOC Local Recorders

Angus & Dundee: Jon Cook
01382 738495
1301 midget@tiscali.co.uk

Argyll: Jim Dickson
01546 603967
meg@jackson5.plus.com

Ayrshire: Fraser Simpson
recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk

Borders: Ray Murray
01721 730677
ray1murray@btinternet.com

Caithness: Sinclair Manson
01847 892379
sinclairmanson@btinternet.com

Clyde: Iain Gibson
01505 705874
iaingibson.soc@btinternet.com

Clyde Islands: Bernard Zonfrillo
0141 557 0791
b.zonfrillo@bio.gla.ac.uk

Dumfries & Galloway:
Paul N. Collin
01671 402861
pncollin@live.co.uk

Fair Isle: David Pamaby
01595 760258
fibo@btconnect.com

Fife: Malcolm Ware
07733 991030
malcolm.ware12@talktalk.net

Forth (Upper): Chris Pendlebury
07798 711134
chris@upperforthbirds.co.uk

Highland: Peter Gordon
01479 821339
gordon890@btinternet.com

Isle of May: Iain English
01698 891788
i.english.t21@btinternet.com

Lothian: Stephen Welch
01875 852802
lothianrecorder@the-soc.org.uk

Moray & Nairn: Martin Cook
01542 850296
martin.cook99@btinternet.com

NE Scotland: Nick Littlewood
07748 965920
nesrecorder@yahoo.co.uk

Orkney: Jim Williams
01856 761317
jim@geniefea.freemove.co.uk

Outer Hebrides: Ian Ricketts
07534 085505
recorder@outerhebridesbirds.org.uk

Perth & Kinross: Scott Paterson
01577 864248
scottpaterson12@yahoo.co.uk

Shetland: Rob Fray
01950 461929
recorder@shetlandbirdclub.co.uk



**WORLD
LAND
TRUST™**

www.carbonbalancedpaper.com
CBP0004061405122150

PhotoSP©T

Plate 87. Water Rails are generally very shy and elusive birds, but if you visit the hide at Loch Spynie in Moray you are almost guaranteed to see one. Until recently, ground feeders have been used at the hide to try and coax the rails into view. Sometimes, if you are lucky, up to three birds can be seen at once!

I always take some seed with me when visiting the Loch Spynie hide, to replenish the feeders, and on this particular day in December 2014, it happened to be a very dull and overcast day. Within five minutes of my arrival this Water Rail crept out of the reeds where I could photograph it in clear view.

Equipment used: Nikon D800 with 300mm f2.8 lens, 2x convertor, ISO 5000, shutter speed 1/400th, aperture 5.6.

David Main, 69 Mayne Road, Elgin, Moray IV30 1PD.
Email: eileen1624@btinternet.com



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