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

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

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

More about the SOC...

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

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

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

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Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation **SC 009859**

Scottish Birds 35:2 (2015)

Plate 88. Chris McInerny, Aberlady, February 2015. © *Karen Bidgood*

President's Foreword

I am delighted to say that the Club has now been converted to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). The final signing off occurred on 31 March when office bearers visited Morton Fraser, the Club's lawyers (see page 143). We thank Elizabeth Robertson of Morton Fraser for her work in making the process so smooth from beginning to end. Can I remind members that, as part of this conversion, the Club's Constitution has been updated; the new version is available to view/download from the SOC website: www.the-soc.org.uk/constitution. Please take a moment to look at it.

We have just had the spring conference in Glasgow, hosted by the Clyde branch of the SOC, which was a huge success. Many folk came to hear a series of excellent and varied talks, the venue was great, and the lunch tasty (see pages 134–142). The only catch was that we were all 'trapped' inside on a beautiful sunny day! I thank Ian Fulton and the Clyde branch for running this super event. Next year's spring conference will be held in Peebles on the 19 March 2016, with BTO Scotland and SOC Borders branch taking a lead role in its organisation.

Preparations are already well underway for this autumn's SOC conference, which will be at the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry at the end of October (see booking information enclosed). The programme has been built around the theme of upland birds and their management. We hope that the talks will prove very topical and create much debate and discussion about what we all can do to help to manage and preserve an important part of the Scottish countryside. We hope to see you there.

Some members will also receive their annual renewal reminder with this issue of the journal. I hope the Club can continue to count on your support. I would also ask any members not already signed up to Direct Debit to strongly consider switching to this convenient method of paying your subscription. Not only does it make the renewal process automatic, so there is less chance of you forgetting and missing out, it also makes a considerable difference in terms of staff time and resources. To switch to Direct Debit, visit the renew page on the SOC website (www.the-soc.org.uk/renew) or speak to a member of staff at Headquarters.

As I write, I am hearing the roof-nesting gulls of Glasgow establishing territory in the city with their evocative calls. In our garden and at my study sites on Loch Lomond many resident birds are already setting up territories, the first migrant Chiffchaffs have been calling, and I have already seen some juvenile Common Crossbills. With Rooks, Ravens and Grey Herons all nest building, I find this a wonderfully invigorating time of the year.

Best wishes to all and good birding.

Chris McInerny, SOC President

Plate 89. Greenland White-fronted Goose, Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve, Islay, February 2009. © *Michal Šúr/www.michalsur.sk*

Habitat selection by Greenland White-fronted Geese at RSPB Loch Gruinart, Islay

J. HOW & G. GILBERT

The Islay population of Greenland White-fronted Geese has dropped from a high of 13,000 in 1999 to 5,000 in 2013. The global decline in these geese is a conservation concern. The Loch Gruinart reserve has undertaken monthly field-by-field goose counts since 1984/85. This data set, combined with grassland habitat mapping, has been used to test habitat selection by the White-fronted Geese that use the reserve. 'Frequency of field use' has been used as a measure of field selection, which has been mapped and compared with available grassland habitats. The results indicate that White-fronted Geese show a preference for wet (flooded and wet rush pasture and wet grassland) areas over drier (un-/less improved grassland and improved grassland). This preference has become stronger over the last 15 years. The preferred fields have some standing water and a diversity of grass sward, which includes areas of managed soft rush.

Introduction

The Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve covers an area of 1700 ha in the north-west of the Isle of Islay, Argyll. The reserve comprises approximately 700 ha of grassland, 800 ha of hill moorland/blanket bog mosaic and 200 ha of intertidal mud and saltmarsh. It is part of the Gruinart Flats SSSI/SPA and RAMSAR site for wintering Barnacle *Branta leucopsis* and Greenland White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris*. It is particularly important for the geese as they arrive and depart from Islay. The reserve can hold up to 36,000 Barnacle Geese and 1000 Greenland White-fronted Geese at these times.

Plate 90. Greenland White-fronted Geese, Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve, Islay, April 2010. © *Michal Šúr/www.michalsur.sk*

The Greenland White-fronted Goose population has recently experienced a global decline which has been very severe within the Islay population, decreasing from 13,000 in 1998/99 to 5,000 in 2013/14 (Fox *et al.* 2014). This population change has been mirrored in the number of White-fronted Geese using the reserve. The Barnacle Goose population has increased and appears to have plateaued at approximately 40,000 (SNH 2014).

The level of goose grazing on Islay has been of concern to the island's agricultural community for some years. In 1992, the Islay goose management scheme was established to create and run government funded schemes to manage and subsidise agriculture for income forgone due to goose damage. Over the last 10 years, Greenland White-fronted Goose declines have become a growing worry, and efforts are being made to see if anything more can be done to maintain or improve conditions for over-wintering White-fronted Geese.

White-fronted Geese appear to use less improved grassland compared to Barnacle Geese (Bignal & McCracken 1996). This paper uses the Loch Gruinart goose count data to look at habitat preferences, which could inform future goose management for White-fronted Geese.

Method

Staff at the Loch Gruinart reserve have undertaken monthly field-by-field counts of all wintering geese since 1984/85. Each year these counts are undertaken using the same route which gives views of all fields. The counts are carried out during October to April (inclusive) during the day time between 10:00 and 15:00 to monitor goose feeding behaviour.

The reserve's grassland habitats have been divided into four broad grassland types (Figure 1):

- FRG (flood and wet rush pasture) - grassland with a diverse sward including rush *Juncus sp.* and large areas of winter pooled water.
- WG (wet grassland) - reseeded and managed permanent pasture, mostly ryegrass *Lolium* sp. with areas of winter pooled water.
- UG (un- or less improved grassland) - unimproved grassland with a diverse sward, mostly dry.
- IG (improved grassland) - improved grassland, reseeded or fertilised permanent pasture, dry.

Monthly goose count data was used in the form of 'frequency of field use. For each season, frequency of field use is the number of visits to each field where White-fronted Geese were present. The figure is comparable across fields and seasons, given that the same seven visits were made to each field - October to April each year. The mean of this number was calculated across fields of each habitat type each season. There were occasional years when counts were made in September and May, these month counts were excluded in the data analysed across all fields. Over the survey period the number of White-fronted Geese using the reserve each year has changed. The simplest way to avoid the variability of the population and still test habitat selection by White-fronted Geese, is to use the frequency of field use over the whole study period. To make this data more visual and to compare it with grassland habitat type (Figure 1), it has then been mapped with the data split into three usage bands (Figure 2).

A generalised linear mixed model was used to test if the frequency with which geese use each field in each season was explained by the following fixed variables: habitat category, season and area of field. Flock size and field id were inserted as random variables. In this case habitat categories were wet (FRG + WG), dry (IG +UG) and other. Seasons spanned from 1985/86 through to 2012/13. The hectarage of each field in which geese were recorded was measured from digitised maps. Flock size was the average size of the flock in each season in each field. Field id was an individual code for each field. An interaction term of Habitat*Season was included in the analysis. The field use frequency response variable had a poisson distribution and we used a log link function with a maximum likelihood estimation and a laplace approximation to account for the large number of small (<5) counts or frequencies.

Results

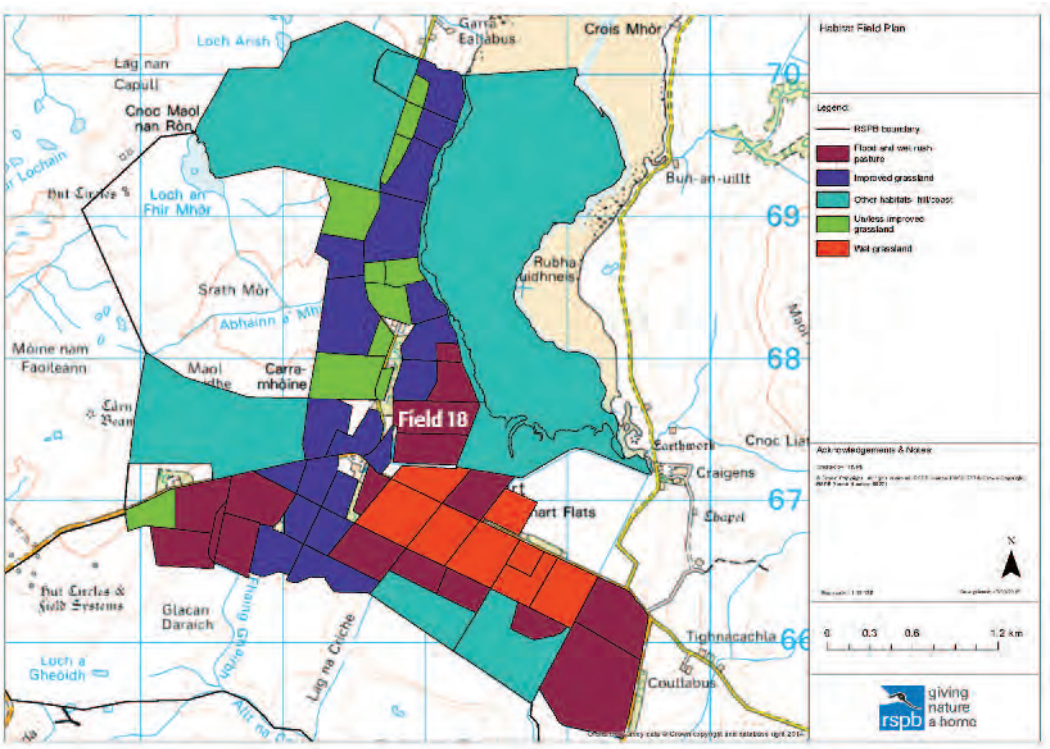

Figure 1. Habitat field plan of the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve, 2013. This maps shows all the habitats on the reserve where feeding geese were recorded.

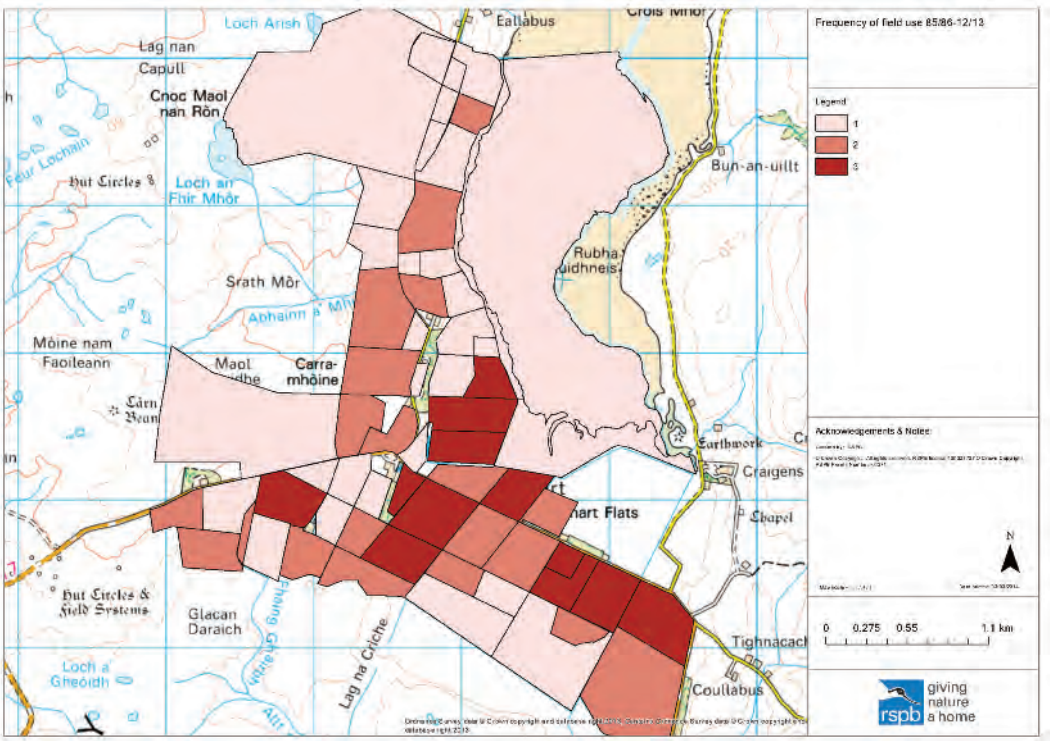

Figure 2. Frequency of field use by Greenland White-fronted Goose on the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve, Islay, 1985/86 to 2012/13. 1 = low usage, 2 = medium usage, 3 = high usage.

Table 1. The significance of the fixed effects in their explanation of the frequency of goose presence in fields across the years. Both the habitat and an interaction between habitat and season significantly contributed. The interaction between habitat and season can be seen in Figure 3, where we can see the effect of the difference between goose usage of wet and dry habitats start to occur after 1994/95. The numerator degrees of freedom (DF) are given and the denominator degrees of freedom (Den DF) are 1063.

Effect	DF	Den DF	F Value	Pr > F
Habitat	2	1063	60.46	<0.0001
Habitat*Season	49	1063	2.29	<0.0001
Season	27	1063	1.24	0.1818
Area (ha)	1	1063	0.18	0.6757

A least means squares investigation of where the significance was in the habitat variable showed significant difference between wet (FRG + WG) and dry (IG + UG) habitats, (wet vs dry t= 10.87, P<0.0001, DF=1063), with the positive effect in terms of goose frequency being in the wet habitats.

The data in Figure 3 shows that the tendency for White-fronted Geese to use wet habitats (FRG and WG) increases after 1993/94. We looked to see if this could be linked to any habitat change in compartments. There have been few changes between the habitat categories over the time period, but there has been an improvement in hydrological control and rush management, increasing areas of pooled water and reducing the area of rank rush *Juncus sp*. One area where we were able to find a noticeable change in management over the period was in Field 18, so we looked more closely at the White-fronted Geese use of this compartment (Figure 4). In the 1993/94 season, Field 18 was taken out of the reseeding rotation and then partially flooded. This prompted an increase in the frequency of use by White-fronted Geese.

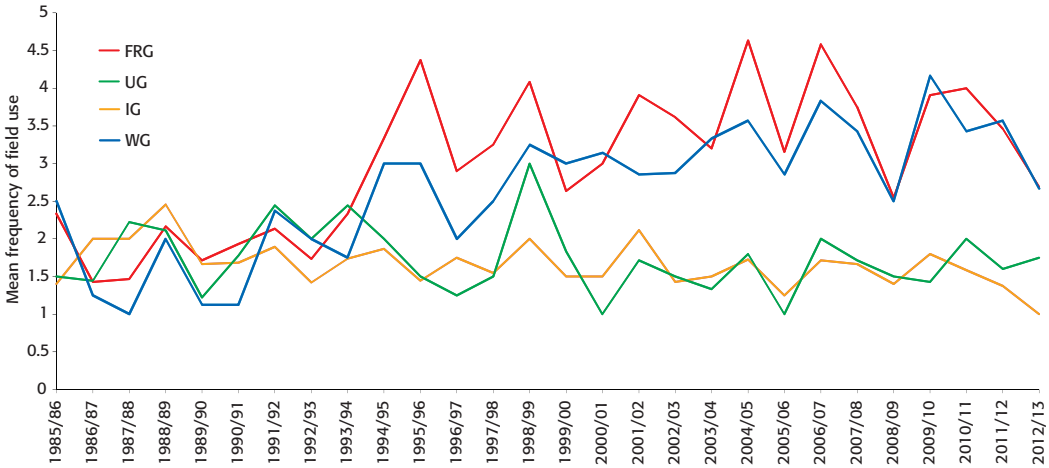

Figure 3. The annual mean frequency of field use by Greenland White-fronted Geese by habitat type from 1985/86 to 2012/13. FRG = flooded wet rush pasture; IG = improved grassland; UG = un- and less improved grassland and WG = wet grassland.

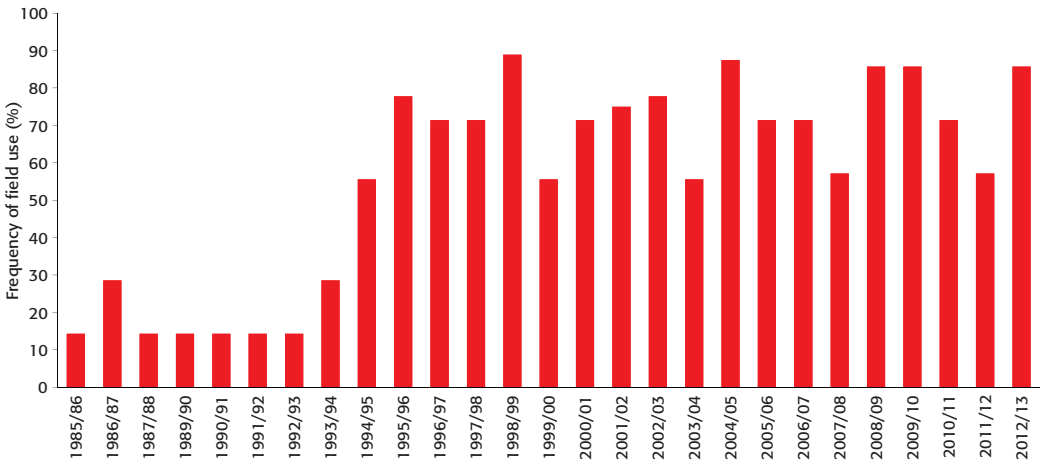

Figure 4. The frequency of field use of Field 18 by Greenland White-fronted Geese on the RSPB Loch Gruinart reserve, Islay by season. The percentage frequency is used to account for additional count months in September and May in a few years. The location of Field 18 is shown on Figure 1.

Discussion

The results show a clear preference by Greenland White-fronted Geese to select wetter grassland habitats. It would appear that the geese choose compartments with some standing water and a more diverse sward, with managed rush being a component. They choose these habitats more frequently than intensive drier grassland.

The selection of wet grassland and rush pasture increases from 1993/94, with the Greenland White-fronted Geese showing a greater trend to selecting wet and rushy pastures. The increasing trend for the White-fronted Geese to select wet grassland and rushy pastues may have been influenced by several factors. During this time period Greenland White-fronted Geese numbers wintering on Islay have decreased and Barnacle Goose numbers have increased, although high densities of Barnacle Geese have been recorded on the Loch Gruinart reserve throughout the study period. The

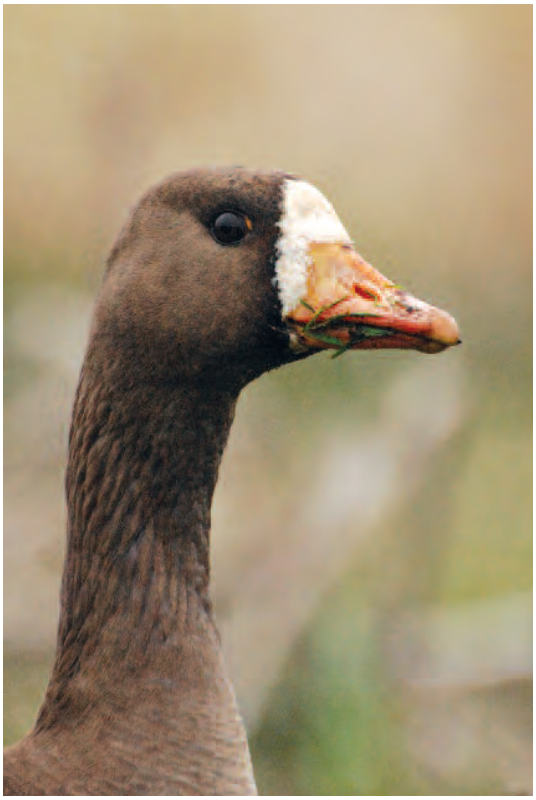

Plate 91. Greenland White-fronted Goose, Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve, Islay, April 2010. © *Michal Šúr/www.michalsur.sk*

management of the wet grassland on the reserve has increased with improved hydrological management giving a greater area of standing water in winter and the management of rush has changed to reduce the area of rank, uncut rush, hence improving the suitability of these areas for goose use. Another change that may affect day time habitat selection by the White-fronted Geese is a change in roost selection. The count data refers to day-time feeding habitat use, other observations of the White-fronted Geese during the evening and morning have noted the geese making use of available areas of standing water as roost sites. In fact, these fields have become one of the most important roosts on Islay and together they may hold up to 1000 White-fronted Geese. The proximity of the roost areas to the feeding areas may have an affect on feeding preference.

It seems that Greenland White-fronted Geese, when given the opportunity on the Loch Gruinart Reserve, select areas of grassland with pooling, and diverse swards over other grassland habitats. It also seems likely that Greenland White-fronted Geese can adapt to make use of these habitats as they become available and, if suitable, change their roosting behaviour.

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Bignal, E.M. & McCraken, D.I. 1996. Low intensity farming systems in the conservation of the countryside. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 33: 413–434.

Fox, A.D., Francis I., Norriss, D. & Walsh, A. 2014. *Report of the 2013/2014 International census of Greenland White-fronted Geese*. Greenland White-fronted Goose Study Group.

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Revised ms accepted February 2015

Plate 92. White-rumped Sandpiper, Findhorn, Moray & Nairn, 11–14 June 2013. © *Tony Back*

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2013

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

This is the sixth annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), covering 2013. Previous reports have covered the periods 2005–08, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, McGowan *et al.* 2013, 2014).

Three species and one subspecies are dropped from this year's report as they are considered sufficiently numerous to permit assessment of records at local level; these are Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*, Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* and Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*. Recently accepted records of some of these taxa to 31 December 2012 are still presented here. Similarly, as the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) no longer assesses records of Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* or Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, their occurrences in Scotland are reviewed by SBRC from 1 January 2013.

From 1 January 2015 a number of other changes have occurred, which will affect future reports, but which we highlight here. BBRC will assess Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, and so these will not be SBRC species. BBRC will not assess Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, and so these become SBRC species. White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* remains on the SBRC list, but with local assessment in Shetland and the Outer Hebrides. Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* remains on the SBRC list, but with local assessment in Shetland, Fair Isle and Orkney.

A summary of these changes is given in Appendix 2 and shown on www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc-list-2015.

In 2013, there was a striking influx of Glossy Ibises, with flocks on both the Outer Hebrides and Orkney; the year count of 11 birds was the highest since 1907, when 19–20 were seen. The observation of up to 13 White-billed Divers off the Portsoy coast (North-east Scotland) in late April and early May confirmed the importance of this area during spring migration of the species through Scotland (Baxter *et al.* 2013). The Northern Isles' near-monopoly of passerine species was maintained for a further year. Only 20 individual passerines on the SBRC list were seen outwith the Northern Isles in 2013, and only ten of these were on the mainland. However, notable amongst these was the arrival of seven Greenish Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides* along the east coast in Caithness, Highland and North-east Scotland on 23–25 August.

Format of the report

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

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

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year. Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
- Total number in the current year (2013).

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2013, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2013 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years are sometimes accepted locally without formal submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided. Revised details are also provided for some pre-2013 records published previously.

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

- Year (unless this is 2013).
- Recording area (www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network).
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present throughout; in some cases it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Existence of a photograph, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'.
- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, local recorder and/or others.

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

Species coverage

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

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

SBRC

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

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

Acknowledgements

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

Next, we thank the following current and former recorders and report compilers for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Yvonne Benting, Paul Baxter, Mark Chapman, Paul Collin, Jon Cook, Martin Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Rob Fray, Keith Gillon, Pete Gordon, Angus Hogg, Hywel Maggs, Ray Murray, David Parnaby, Scott Paterson, Chris Pendlebury, Mike Pennington, Brian Rabbitts, Ian Thompson, Malcolm Ware, Stephen Welch, Jim Williams, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas.

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

Systematic list of accepted records

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*
0: 7: 1

Table 1. Accepted records of Egyptian Goose in Scotland, 2013, with additional records, 2011 and 2008.

2013:	**Dumfries & Galloway** Loch Ryan, 29 December (P.N. Collin).
2011:	**Clyde** Carbarns, Motherwell, 16–20 March, photo (I. English *et al.*).
2008:	**North-east Scotland** New Deer, 12 April (D. Parnaby).

Egyptian Goose was added to Category C of the *Scottish List* in 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012). This species appears to be a rare, but near annual visitor, with observations throughout the country.

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

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*
197: 173: 41

Table 2. Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2013.

2013:	**Argyll** Uisead Point, second-calendar-year, 5 March, photo (J.M. Dickson, I. McMillan, E. Maguire *et al.*).
	Highland Gairloch, Ross & Cromarty, moulting to adult, 8 April (K. Evans).
	Highland Opinan Bay, Ross & Cromarty, 10 April (K. Evans).
	Highland Gruinard Bay, Ross & Cromarty, moulting to adult, 11 April (K. Evans).
	Highland Gruinard Island, Ross & Cromarty, adult, 11–13 April (A. Coia, K.D. Shaw *et al.*).
	Highland Gruinard Island, Ross & Cromarty, second-calendar-year, 13 April (A. Coia, K.D. Shaw).
	Highland Loch Ewe, Ross & Cromarty, adult winter or second-summer, 15 April (A. Coia, K.D. Shaw).
	Highland Gruinard Bay, Ross & Cromarty, 19 April (S. Elliott, D. Jones).
	Isle of May adult winter, 23 January, photo (W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).
	North-east Scotland Portsoy, 13, 17 March to 12 May (P.A.A. Baxter, C. Gibbins *et al.*)
	Orkney Water Sound & Widewall Bay, South Ronaldsay, adult, 29 January to 4 May, photo (P. Higson).
	Orkney Holm, Mainland, 10 February (I. Bainbridge *et al.*).
	Orkney Sacquoy Head, Rousay, second-calendar-year, 28 March (R. Schofield *et al.*).
	Orkney Faraclett Head, Rousay, adult, 29 March (R. Schofield *et al.*).
	Outer Hebrides Port Nis, Port Sgiogarstaigh & Chuidhsiasair (Port of Ness, Port Skigersta & Cuishiadar), Lewis, 12, 27 March to 29 May, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).
	Outer Hebrides Ceann an t-Siumpain (Tiumpan Head), Lewis, adult or second-summer, 8 April (J.S. Nadin, S.L. Rivers, K.D. Shaw *et al.*).
	Outer Hebrides Àird an Rùnair, North Uist, adult, 20 May (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
	Shetland Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), 1 February (B.H. Thomason), Sound Gruney, 8 February (G.F. Bell, J. Dunn, M. Heubeck, R. Riddington, J.W.G. Wills), and again 28 October to **2014,** photo (B.H. Thomason).
	Shetland Kirkabister, Mainland, adult (returning), 10–13 November (M. Heubeck *et al.*).
	Shetland Bluemull Sound, adult, 14 November to **2014** (B.H. Thomason).

Plate 93. White-billed Diver, adult, Water Sound & Widewall Bay, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, 29 January to 4 May 2013. © *Paul Higson*

White-billed Diver is a scarce, though increasing, visitor to Scotland, with 15–25 being reported each year since around 2000. Most occur in Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Highland, with some preferred localities being used in spring as stop-overs between wintering and summering areas. In Shetland, a small number of wintering individuals are believed to return to the same sites in successive years and summering birds have become almost annual. There may be some overlap among these records given the birds' mobility.

It now appears that another spring stop-over locality has been discovered in Scotland, off Portsoy in North-east Scotland. A number of birds have been seen along this coast and nearby off Moray & Nairn in previous years (McGowan *et al.* 2013, 2014) and this prompted more systematic surveying by chartered boat in 2013 to search offshore (Baxter *et al.* 2013). This resulted in a total of 13 birds being counted in 2013.

The occurrence off the Isle of May was the first for the recording area (Miles & Newell 2013).

Note that minor adjustments and/or corrections have been made to totals following the species header.

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

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*
c. 228: 24: 1

Table 3. Accepted records of Cory's Shearwater in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 13 August (M.D. Warren).

Cory's Shearwater is a rare visitor to Scottish waters, recorded near-annually, with most seen off North Ronaldsay and the Outer Hebrides. Although a marked increase in sightings from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s occurred (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a), numbers since have decreased, with no more than two seen annually between 2007 and 2011, and none in 2012.

(Breeds on the Azores, Canary Islands and other nearby Atlantic islands, with the closely related Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea* breeding in the Mediterranean. Both species can occur in North Atlantic waters in autumn and are on the *British List*, but most are assumed to be Cory's and no confirmed Scopoli's yet recorded in Scottish waters.)

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*
c. 522 (1950–2004): 9,217: 2
(excluding 'at sea' records)

Table 4. Accepted records of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2013.

2013: **Highland** Loch Snizort, Skye & Lochalsh, 18 August (A. Stevenson).
Orkney Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 12 September (M.D. Warren).

Great Shearwater was rarely observed in Scotland until the large number of sightings during 2005–07. Since then, however, no more than six have been recorded in any one year, if 'at sea' records are discounted, with none observed in 2012. This underlines the exceptional nature of the influxes witnessed during that period.

This species is almost entirely a late summer and autumn visitor to Scotland, with most sightings from the Outer Hebrides and North Ronaldsay.

(Breeds on South Atlantic islands and carries out a clockwise loop migration in the North Atlantic outside the breeding season. In the north-east Atlantic occurs most regularly off the west coast of Ireland.)

Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
46: 10: 0

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

2012: **Outer Hebrides** Boreray, St Kilda, adult, 4 May, photo (A. Campbell).
Shetland Sandvoe, North Roe, Mainland, immature, wing from corpse, 28 June (R.M. Mellor).

Night-heron is a less-than-annual visitor to Scotland, with a spring peak in observations. There is a wide geographical spread, but most are seen in the Northern Isles and the Outer Hebrides. None were observed in 2013, but two records are reported from 2012. The Shetland occurrence was based solely on a wing found on the tideline; the observer recognised it was unusual and identified it as that of an immature Night Heron.

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

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
22: 4: 0

Table 6. Additional record of Purple Heron in Scotland, 2011.

2011: **Outer Hebrides** Hirta, St Kilda, 14 April, photo (R.C. Hewitt *et al.* per B. Rabbitts).

Purple Heron is a very rare visitor to Scotland, with a peak of sightings in May and June, a few in April, and the majority of the remainder occurring in September and October.

The observers on Hirta saw a Purple Heron separately twice on 14 April, and it is possible that two were present on the island. However, only one bird was photographed and so two individuals could not be established by plumage differences; SBRC took the prudent approach of accepting a single bird.

(Breeds from western Europe across to south-east Asia, and also in sub-Saharan Africa, where Western Palearctic populations winter. These populations belong to the nominate subspecies *purpurea*, with two other subspecies breeding in Madagascar and the eastern part of the range, respectively.)

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*
c. 65: 17: 11

Table 7. Accepted records of Glossy Ibis in Scotland, 2013

2013: **North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, 1 November (T. Marshall *et al.*).
Orkney Swannay, Mainland, 17–29 December, photo (D.M. Armstrong, L. Harvey, M. Rendall *et al.*).
Orkney Skelwick & Tuquoy, Westray, 19 December **into 2014,** photo (D. & S. Otter).
Orkney Tankerness, Mainland, 23 December **into 2014,** photo (M. Rendall *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Paiblesgearraidh (Paiblesgarry), North Uist, five, 25–28 October, photo (C. Newton, B. Rabbitts *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Càirinis (Carinish), North Uist, 3 December, photo (B. Rabbitts).

Outer Hebrides Loch na Reivil, Hogha Gearraidh (Hougharry), North Uist, found dead, but corpse not salvaged, 15 December (S.E. Duffield).
Outer Hebrides Gabhsann bho Tuath (North Galson), Lewis, 12 December **into 2014,** photo, (J.S. Nadin *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Dalabrog (Daliburgh), South Uist, two, 16 December **into 2014,** photo (Y. Benting, A. Stevenson, I.R. Thompson *et al*.).
Outer Hebrides Loch nam Fèithean, Hogha Gearraidh (Hougharry), North Uist, 28 December **into 2014,** photo (S.E. Duffield, A. McDonald, B. Rabbitts, S. & C. Smith).
Outer Hebrides Cill Amhlaidh (Kilaulay) & Càrnan, South Uist, 29 December **into 2014,** photo (C. Johnson *et al*.).

Plate 95. Glossy Ibis, Dalabrog (Daliburgh), South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 16 December 2013 to 12 January 2014. © *Yvonne Benting*

Glossy Ibis is a rare, though increasing, visitor to Scotland. In the early 20th century a few flocks were observed, including a group of 19–20 in Orkney in September 1907, but it subsequently became much rarer (Forrester *et al*. 2007). In the 21st century, larger numbers and flocks were seen again in the UK and, accordingly, the species is no longer considered by BBRC with, since the start of 2013, Scottish occurrences judged by SBRC. This change coincided with significant numbers being observed, with groups in Orkney and the Outer Hebrides.

On both archipelagos the birds moved around and were seen on multiple occasions which made the determination of total numbers problematic. SBRC decided on eight in the Outer Hebrides and two in Orkney (Figures 1a

Plate 94. Glossy Ibis, Balivanich (Baile a' Mhanaich), Benbecula, Outer Hebrides, 1–6 January 2014. © *Stuart Taylor*

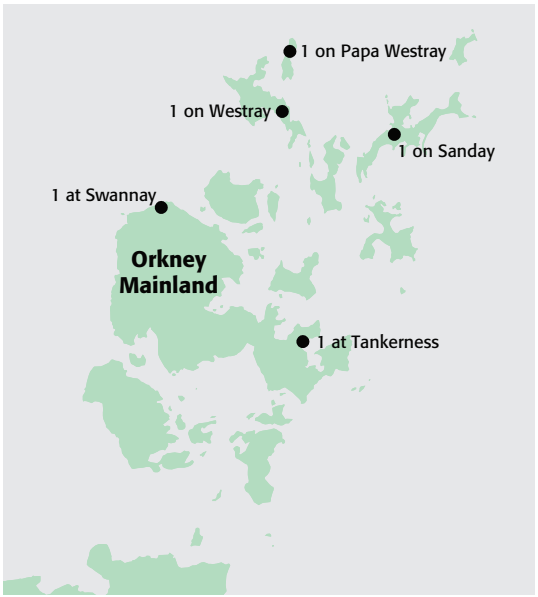

Figure 1a. Locations and numbers of Glossy Ibis in Orkney, 2013/14; SBRC determined that two birds were involved.

Figure 1b. Locations and numbers of Glossy Ibis in Outer Hebrides, 2013/14; SBRC determined that eight birds were involved.

and 1b); it is also possible that the Orkney birds were previously seen in the Outer Hebrides. Some of these were sighted into 2014: on Outer Hebrides three were seen at Baile a' Mhanaich (Balivanich), Benbecula on 1–6 January and one at Borgh, Beàrnaraigh (Borve, Berneray) on 2–6 January; and on Orkney one each was seen on Papa Westray on 1 January and Sanday on 8 February. We mention these records here for completeness as they formed part of the same arrival, but they will formally listed in the SBRC report for 2014. Including the Strathbeg bird, this brings the 2013 count to 11 birds, which is the second highest annual total since 1907 (2012 having 12). It will be interesting to see if this increased incidence continues in the future.

(Nominate *falcinellus* breeds from Spain and France, through the Balkans to central Asia, in sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian subcontinent, south-east Asia, the east coast of the USA and the Caribbean. Most European birds migrate to Africa with others short distance migrants or resident. Another subspecies in the Far East and Australia).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
19: 17: 3

Table 8. Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2013 with additional records, 2012.

2013:	**Highland** Bernisdale, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, 21 June (A., S. & S. Harris). **Orkney** Decca station, Dounby, Mainland, 1 May, photo (T. & E. Wooton). **Outer Hebrides** Gleann Dail bho Dheas (South Glendale), South Uist, second-calendar-year, 11 September, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*).
2012:	**Shetland** Virkie & Clumlie, Mainland, 7 April (M. Heubeck, R.M. Mellor *et al.*). **Shetland** Sumburgh, Gremista, Lerwick & North Roe, Mainland, Hermaness & Watlee, Unst, Funzie, Fetlar, 19–27 June (R.M. Fray *et al.*).

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most individuals have been seen in spring, from April to June, with just a handful of sightings later in the season. There have also been instances of summering and a single case of hybridisation with Red Kite *Milvus milvus* (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a).

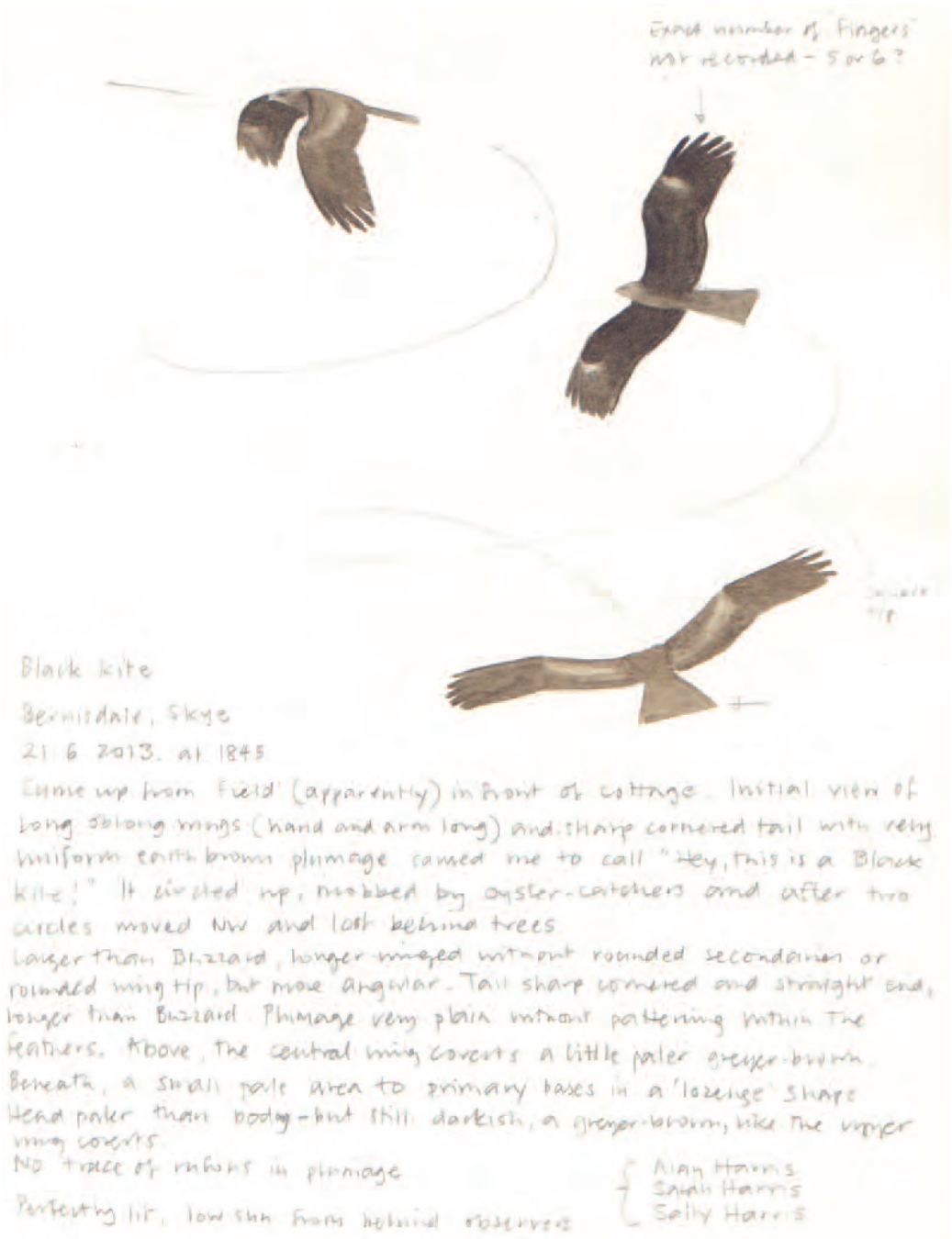

Plate 96. Black Kite, Bernisdale, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, 21 June 2013. © *Alan Harris*

The sighting on South Uist was the third for the Outer Hebrides, and only the first there in autumn.

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

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*
c. 325 (1968–2004): 47:-

Table 9. Additional records of Rough-legged Buzzard in Scotland, 2012.

2012: **Shetland** Hermaness, Unst, 12 February to 2 March, photo (R.J. Brookes, A. & R. Foyster).
Shetland Gunnister, Unst, 10 May, photo (R.J. Brookes).

Rough-legged Buzzard is a scarce passage migrant to Scotland, occurring mostly on the eastern side of the country and in the Northern Isles, with numbers tending to peak in late autumn. Birds occasionally overwinter. This species is no longer judged by SBRC since 1 January 2013, though two 2012 records from Shetland are noted here.

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

Red-footed Falcon *Falco verpertinus*
83: 14: 0

Noted in this report is a correction to the total to the end of 2004. Two records missing from the SBRC database (Shetland, 1981) have been added, and the adjusted total is given above.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
29: 2: 1

Table 10. Accepted record of Stone-curlew in Scotland, 2013.

2013: **Shetland** Loch of Brough, Bressay & Papil Geo, Noss, 4–19 June, photo (R.M. Fray, P.V. Harvey, C. Neideman *et al.*).

Stone-curlew is a very rare visitor to Scotland; there were just 31 accepted records to the end of 2012 and half of these were in the Northern Isles, with the remainder scattered across the country. There is a peak in occurrence in late May and early June (Forrester *et al.* 2007), and the Bressay/Noss bird fits this pattern. This bird was only seen twice, 15 days apart. This fact illustrates how even a large bird in a relatively well watched area can be overlooked.

(Nominate *oedicnemus* breeds in open habitats in southern Europe east to the Caucasus, extending as far north as England and Poland; migrates south to winter in Spain and North Africa. Five other subspecies.)

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
69: 67: 5

Table 11. Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2013, with an additional record, 2012.

2013: **Moray & Nairn** Findhorn Bay, adult, 10–14 June, photo (R.S. Cocks, M. Cook *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Àird a' Mhachair (Ardivachar), South Uist, juvenile, 29–30 October, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Outer Hebrides Àird an Rùnair, North Uist, juvenile, 3 November, photo (S.E. Duffield).
Outer Hebrides Bàgh a Tuath, Àird a' Mhachair (Ardivachar Point) and Baile Gharbhaidh, South Uist, juvenile, two, same as two above, 5–9 November, then single until 24 November, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
Shetland Hametoun & South Ness, Foula, adult, 2–3 September, photo (G. & D. Atherton).
Shetland Scord, Virkie & Boddam, Mainland, juvenile, 11–21 October, photo (R.M. Fray, S.J. Minton *et al.*).

2012: **Outer Hebrides** Rubha Àird na Machrach (Ardivachar Point) & South Ford, South Uist, two, adults, 18–23 September (J.B. Kemp).

Plate 97. White-rumped Sandpiper, Findhorn Bay, Moray & Nairn, 10–14 June 2013. © *Richard Cocks*

White-rumped Sandpiper is a scarce, but annual, visitor to Scotland from North America, with most observations in autumn in the Outer Hebrides. The spring record at Findhorn is noteworthy, being the second for the recording area.

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

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
12: 11: 2

Table 12. Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2013.

2013:	**Outer Hebrides** Coig Peighinnean ('Fivepenny'), Ness, Lewis, adult, 2 October, photo (B.A.E. Marr).
	Dumfries & Galloway Bishop Burn, Stranraer, fourth-calendar-year, returning, 7 July, photo (B. Henderson).
	Dumfries & Galloway WWT Caerlaverock, adult, 5 August, photo (M. Youdale *et al.*).

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

Three were seen in 2013, including the third sighting in Outer Hebrides. The individual in Stranraer was a returning bird and is not included in the totals.

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

Plate 99. Yellow-legged Gull, adult, Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway, 5 August 2013. © *Mike Youdale*

Plate 98. Yellow-legged Gull, adult, Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway, 5 August 2013. © *Mike Youdale*

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*
0: 4: 1

Table 13. Accepted records of Caspian Gull in Scotland, 2013.

2013: **Lothian** Belhaven Bay, adult, 27 December (C. Gibbins).

Caspian Gull is extremely rare in Scotland, observed on just four occasions up to the end of 2012. All occurrences were in late autumn or winter. Three records, including the 2013 observation, involved birds in East Lothian at Dunbar and Belhaven Bay, and it is possible that some of these refer to the same returning individual. The last Scottish sighting was in 2009, found by the same observer as the 2013 individual, at Peterhead, North-east Scotland (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011).

It is now known that a regular movement of this species takes place each year through England, mainly in the east and south. Generally, immatures are involved, in late summer and autumn. It remains rare elsewhere in the UK, as shown by the few records here. However, under-recording of this difficult to identify species is also likely.

(Breeds at inland lakes in eastern Europe and the Middle East, wintering mostly in the eastern Mediterranean, but with smaller numbers reaching western maritime Europe.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
86: 12: 4

Table 14. Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2013.

2013: **Argyll** Carnan Mòr, Tiree, female, 19–21 May, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).
Isle of May male, first-summer, 31 May to 1 June, photo (J. Harrison, C. Scott *et al.*).
Shetland Baltasound, Unst, female, 1 June, photo (M.G. & M.J. Pennington *et al.*).

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland, with most in the Northern Isles. Adults and sub-adults are seen in spring as overshoots from their continental breeding areas, along with dispersing juveniles recorded in autumn.

The sighting on Tiree was the second for Argyll, with the first in September 1996 on Islay.

In addition, two Scottish occurrences of Balearic Woodchat Shrike *L. s. badius* were accepted by BBRC (Hudson *et al.* 2014). The same bird was involved on both occasions, the first on Westray, Orkney on 26 May, and later on Foula, Shetland on 28 May. This is the first record of this subspecies for Scotland and only the tenth for Britain (Wynn 2013).

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

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
286: 53: 9

Table 15. Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2013.

2013: **Outer Hebrides** Àird an Rùnair, North Uist, 19 May, (R. Wyatt *et al.*).

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

Following the single occurrence in 2012, the annual total for 2013 returned to a more typical number. The bird seen on North Uist was only the third on the Outer Hebrides since 2000, whilst the six on Shetland represented the highest annual total there since 1999. The August occurrence was only the sixth for that month in Scotland, but the third since 2008.

Table 16. Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2013.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	1	-	9–10 Oct
Orkney	1	-	26 May	-
Shetland	2	4	16–29 May	25 Aug–12 Oct

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

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
68 (1950–2004): 20: 2

Table 17. Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Isle of May 26–28 March, photo (M. Newell *et al.*).
Orkney Thrave, Sanday, 5–7 October (T. Sykes).

Plate 100. Woodlark, Isle of May, 26–28 March 2013. © *Mark Newell*

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

The spring record on the Isle of May was the fifth for the island since 1950. Since 1950 the vast majority of occurrences have been on the Northern Isles, but only 7% have been on Orkney, compared to 72% on Fair Isle and Shetland, making the Sanday bird notable.

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

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

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
40: 34: 3

Table 18. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Highland Scourie, Sutherland, 20 May, photo (R. Burton).
Shetland Hillswick, Mainland, 29 May (R.M. Mellor).
Shetland Asta golf course, Tingwall, Mainland, 13 June, photo (I.S. Robertson *et al.*).

Plate 101. Red-rumped Swallow, Scourie, Sutherland, 20 May 2013. © *Rona Burton*

Red-rumped Swallow is observed in Scotland annually in small but increasing numbers from April through to November, mainly along the east coast and on islands. This recent increase is thought to reflect a northward expansion of the Continental breeding range. One individual of an eastern subspecies, either *daurica* or *japonica*, has been observed on Orkney and then Skye (Highland) in June 2011 (McGowan *et al.* 2013).

The May occurrence at Scourie was at the peak time for arrivals in Scotland and was only the third seen in Highland. Sightings on Shetland were typical, this recording area having 28% of the total Scottish records since 1950.

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

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
157: 34: 20

Table 19. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Caithness Lybster, 24 August (S. Pinder *et al.*).
Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 24 August (D. MacAskill *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Girdle Ness, 23 August, photo (M. Lewis).
North-east Scotland Girdle Ness, 24–25 August, photo (M. Lewis *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Longhaven, 24 August, photo (I. Broadbent *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Altens, 25 August (M. Lewis).
North-east Scotland Blackdog, 25 August, photo (N. Littlewood).

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

The occurrences for 2013 represented the highest annual total for Scotland, with seven on the mainland, and 13 on the Northern Isles. The observations in Caithness and Highland were the first records for both areas.

Table 20. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2013.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	2	5 Jun–2 Jul	26–27 Aug
Orkney	-	1	-	23–29 Aug
Shetland	1	9	1 Jun	23 Aug–5 Sep

The dates reported for 2013 are typical of the consistently narrow spread of arrival dates in both spring and autumn.

The total to the end of 2004 is also adjusted down by one (to 157) following the removal of a duplicate record from 1996.

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

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
46: 15: 2

Table 21. Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2013, with a additional record for 2010.

2013: Borders St Abb's Head, 19 October, photo (G. Guthrie, C. Hatsell, J. Ibbotson *et al.*).
Isle of May 3–4 October, photo (D. Pickett, J.J. Squire,).
2010: Shetland Toab, Mainland, 14 October (C. Fentiman, T. Wilson *et al.*).

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

Both occurrences in 2013 were at typical localities and during the peak period. The Borders sighting was the third for that recording area, with previous birds also at St Abb's Head, in 1988 and 2000. The last Isle of May occurrence was in 2005.

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

Plate 102. Dusky Warbler, Fife Ness, Fife, 18–20 October 2013. © *Rob Armstrong*

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
60: 25: 5

Table 22. Accepted records of Dusky Warbler in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Fife Fife Ness, 18–20 October (R. Armstrong *et al.*).

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

There were two sightings on Fair Isle, one on 13–15 October and the other on 15–17 October. There were also two on Shetland, one at Lerwick, Mainland on 26–28 October and the other at Quendale, Mainland on 22 November, which is the latest recorded date for Shetland and Scotland.

An additional record for 2012 from Shetland (19 October, Sandwick, Mainland) increases the total for that year to three; the total above has been adjusted accordingly.

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

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*
194: 56: 5

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

There were four occurrences of *cantillans*, or unassigned individuals, on Fair Isle: three in June, and one in July–September. There was also a single occurrence in Shetland, at Scatness, Mainland in May.

In addition, two records of *moltoni* in 2009 have been accepted by BBRC (Hudson *et al.* 2014): both were from Shetland; one at Scatness, Mainland, and the other at Skaw, Unst. The total for that year is increased to eight. The first British record was found on Hirta, St Kilda on 13 June 1894 (Sharpe 1894, Elliot 1895, Harvie-Brown 1902), but was only recently recognised as *moltoni* (Svensson 2013).

The British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) has recently adopted recommendations to recognise two species in the *S. cantillans* complex (BOU 2015):

Subalpine Warbler *S. cantillans* and Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler *S. moltoni*. Once these are formally adopted by SBRC, a review of Scottish records will be necessary.

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

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
53: 8: 1

Table 23. Accepted record of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Fair Isle North Raeva to Chalet & Barkland, 15–16 May, photo (R. Cope *et al.*).

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

The single sighting for 2013 represents the 18th for Fair Isle, which has 29% of the total for Scotland and the highest number for all recording areas.

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

Plate 103. Melodious Warbler, North Raeva to Chalet & Barkland, Fair Isle, 15–16 May 2013. © *Richard Cope*

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
many: *c.* 242: 42

Table 24. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Highland Uig Bay, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, male, singing, 16–28 June, photo (R. McMillan *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Taobh a Tuath Loch Aineort (North Loch Eynort), South Uist, male, singing, 24 May (S.E. Duffield).
Outer Hebrides Mingulay, 5–6 June, photo (A. Cross).

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

There were no sightings on the Scottish mainland in 2013.

Table 25. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2013.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	16	3	18 May–12 Jul	27 Jul–13 Sep
Orkney	3	3	18 May–20 Jun	10 Jul–26 Sep
Shetland	9	5	28 May–22 Jun	11 Sep–8 Oct

The number of Marsh Warblers recorded in Scotland in 2013 (43) was the second highest total since 2008 when 68 were sighted. The annual mean is 30 for the period 2005–12. With the exception of 2006, autumn sightings in the same period have been in single figures, so the 11 recorded in 2013 is noteworthy. The fluctuating annual abundance of this species is related, for spring birds at least, to variation in the prevalence of easterly winds in late May and early June, which are presumed to cause them to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Typically, most birds in 2013 only stayed for a few days.

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

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*
44: 6: 1

Table 26. Accepted record of Tawny Pipit in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Orkney Strom Ness, North Ronaldsay, first-summer, 25 May, photo (M.D. Warren *et al.*).

Tawny Pipit is very rare in Scotland with just ten individuals seen during the period 2000–12, most being presumed spring overshoots on islands.

The North Ronaldsay bird in 2013 was the fourth for Orkney, though remarkably the third on the island since 2010. The late May date is typical.

(Nominate *campestris* breeds in dry, sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to western Siberia; two other Asian subspecies. Winters in Africa, the Middle East and India.)

Plates 104–105. Olive-backed Pipit, Setters Hill Estate, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, 30 September 2013. © *Dougie Preston*

Plate 106. Olive-backed Pipit, Observatory, Fair Isle, 25 September 2013. © *David Parkin*

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
151: 100: 14

Table 27. Accepted records of Olive-backed Pipit in Scotland, 2013.

2013: Fair Isle Observatory, 25 September, trapped, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Fair Isle Sheep Cru, 2 October (N. Andrews, C. Fulcher, C. Holden & L. Woods).
Fair Isle Hesswalls to Lower Leogh, 8 October to 2 November, photo (G.K. Gordon, W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).
Fair Isle Midway, 14 October, photo (G.K. Gordon *et al.*).
Orkney, School, Papa Westray, 26 September (J.B. Bell).
Orkney Rue, North Ronaldsay, 4–6 October, photo (S.J Davies *et al.*).
Orkney Sangar, North Ronaldsay, 15 October (S.J. Davies).
Orkney Twingness, North Ronaldsay, 20 October, photo (G. Woodbridge *et al.*).
Shetland Frakkafield, Mainland, 25–26 September (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).
Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, 30 September, photo (R. Haughton *et al.*).
Shetland Setters Hill Estate, Baltasound, Unst, 30 September, photo (D. Preston).
Shetland Hamister, Whalsay, 4–5 October, photo (J.L. Irvine *et al.*).
Shetland Vidlin, Mainland, 19–20 October, photo (D.J. Bradnum, M.R. Eade, J. Lethbridge *et al.*).
Shetland Ham, Foula, 26–28 October, photo (G. & D. Atherton).

Olive-backed Pipit is a rare but regular autumn migrant in Scotland. There was a marked increase in occurrences in Britain and Europe

generally in the 1980s and the species was dropped from BBRC review in 2013.

The occurrences in 2013 are typical for localities and timing. It will be interesting to see if the frequency in Scotland is sustained over the coming years.

The vast majority of sightings in Scotland are in the Northern Isles, with only 12 elsewhere; the most recent was one on Barra, Outer Hebrides in October 2010. There have been only seven mainland records, the last at Blackdog, North-east Scotland in October 2006.

(*A. h. yunnanensis* breeds from Urals east to Kamchatka, Manchuria and Japan; one other subspecies. Winters in south-east Asia.)

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*
135: 13: 1

Red-throated Pipit is a rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, found almost exclusively on islands, with the majority of birds appearing in the Northern Isles where claims are assessed locally.

In 2013 there was a single occurrence, one seen on 12 October on Fair Isle at Pund, Haa and Utra, which lingered until the 24th.

(Breeds widely in northern boreal Palearctic regions, migrating to winter in Africa and south-east Asia.)

Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni*
366: 91: 15

Arctic Redpoll is a scarce though annual visitor to Scotland. Most sightings since 2005 have involved the race *C. h. hornemanni* (Hornemann's Redpoll), claims of which are assessed by BBRC, while many earlier occurrences referred to *C. h. exilipes* (Coues's Redpoll). All but eight of the 91 birds during 2005–12 were in the Northern Isles, with the majority occurring in autumn. Claims of Coues's Redpoll in the Northern Isles are assessed locally.

In 2013, most Arctic Redpolls seen in Scotland were in the Northern Isles in autumn. A total of four were accepted as Coues's Redpoll (or unassigned to race), claims of which are assessed locally within those islands.

Table 28. Accepted records of Coues's Redpoll in the Northern Isles, 2013.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	-	1	-	17 Oct
Shetland	-	3	-	15 Oct–30 Dec

In addition, BBRC accepted 11 records of Hornemann's Redpoll in Scotland (Hudson *et al.* 2014), all but one occurring in autumn. There was a single on Fair Isle, two in Orkney, one in Outer Hebrides, and seven in Shetland.

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

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
many: 36: 5

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

There were only five individuals in Scotland in 2013. Two were present on Fair Isle, one on 12–19 May and the other on 10–14 June. On Shetland, there were sightings on 17 May on Foula, 24 September at Grutness, Mainland and 25 September on Unst. The recent general trend of declining numbers appears to be continuing.

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

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*
276: 40: 5

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

Table 29. Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2013.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	2	-	19 May–3 Jun	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	2	1	20–29 May	8–9 Oct

Since 2006, only two sightings from a total of 35 in Scotland have been made outwith the Northern Isles.

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

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*
593: 137: 37

Table 30. Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2013. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 31.

2013: Isle of May 29 September, photo (D. Pickett, J.J. Squire).
Outer Hebrides Ardmhor plantation, Barra, 22 October, photo (B.A. Taylor *et al.*).

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

Occurrences in Scotland in 2013 correspond well to the established pattern. The sighting on Barra was the ninth for Outer Hebrides, and only the third since 2001. The total number of Scottish observations in 2013 is the highest since 50 were sighted in 2000.

Table 31. Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2013.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	10	-	10 Sep–26 Oct
Orkney	-	3	-	21 Oct–8 Nov
Shetland	1	21	28 May	18 Sep–1 Dec

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

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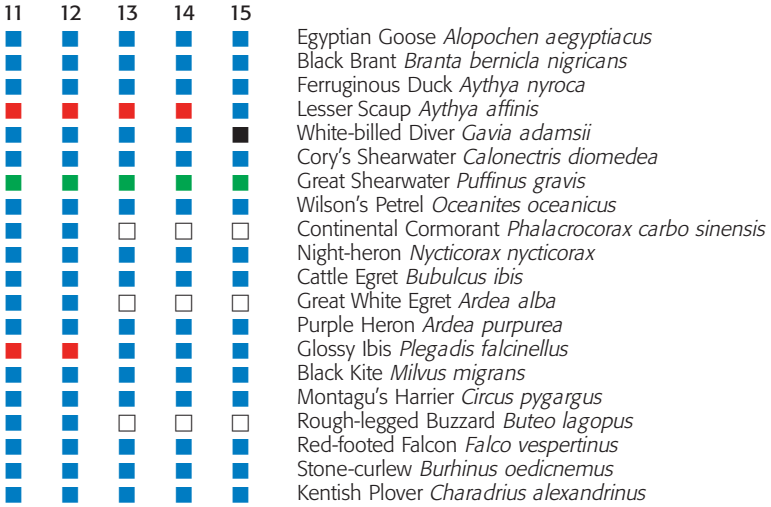
Appendix 1.

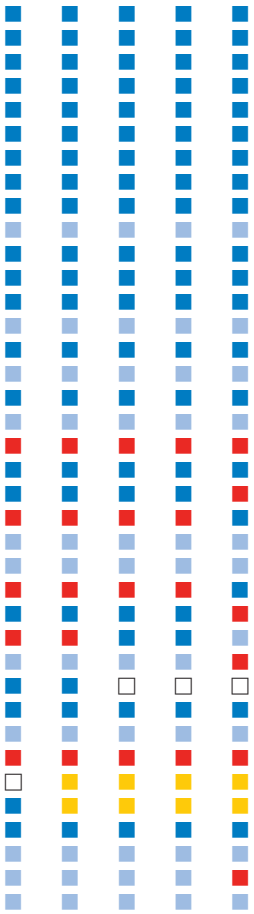
List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

2013: White-billed Diver Àird an Rùnair, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 28 April. **Small harrier sp. (Montagu's/Pallid)** Musselburgh, Lothian, 29 June. **Yellow-legged Gull** Largs, Ayrshire, 28 March. **Arctic Redpoll** (2) Gelston, Dumfries & Galloway, 8 May; Tongue, Highland, 21–22 April.
2012: Yellow-legged Gull Port Chaligaig, Highland, 13 February.

Appendix 2.

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) and other committees, 2011–15. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included, with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species assessed by SBRC have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC but not shown here.





White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
Continental Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Franz Josef Land Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*
Alpine Swift *Apus melba*
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* (except *L. s. badius*)
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (except *C. d. daurica* or *japonica*)
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*
Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* (except *S. c. albistriata*)
Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata*
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*
Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
Serin *Serinus serinus*
Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* (except *C. h. hornemanni*)
Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni hornemanni*
Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*
Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

■ = BBRC ■ = SBRC ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) and Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC outside core range (see www.the-soc.org.uk/sbrc-crossbill-id.htm) □ = local assessment

Appendix 3.

Corrections to previous SBRC reports:

Report year 2012:

Egyptian Goose, **Dalswinton Loch**, Dumfries & Galloway, 13 **September** 2007.
Great White Egret, Whalsay, Shetland, (returning), end 2011, **through to 13 January** 2012
Red-footed Falcon, Dalrawer, Aberfeldy, Perth & Kinross, 30 May to 1 June **2012**.
Marsh Warbler, Table 23, date range for Shetland autumn record is **18–22 September**.

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Plate 107. Trail camera in situ. © *Harry Scott*

The use of trail cameras for the audio monitoring of birds and detection of Spotted Crakes

I. Francis & C.B. Smith

Trail cameras, also termed stealth cameras or camera traps, have become very widely used in recent years as they have become cheaper and ever more sophisticated. These devices typically record photographs or video, and the detection of shy species in remote areas has been advanced enormously, with great insights gained into bird behaviour, including at nests. However, they may also be used purely for audio monitoring - a novel purpose which is not immediately obvious, but which saves effort and requires little time, equipment or travel cost. This simply requires the trail camera to be placed on a site, left it for a period of weeks or longer and then retrieved. We demonstrate below that the observer can be confident that if the target species is within recording distance at any time in the period it will be recorded. This offers the chance for cheap, passive audio monitoring to assist with bird surveys, especially at night or in remote places.

Method

In 2012, we tried this method in association with field visits as part of the national survey of Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* at a wet fen in mid-Deeside, near the Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve, North-east Scotland. This area held Spotted Crakes in past years (Francis &

Thorpe 1999), though not recently. A Bushnell Trophy Cam Trail Camera was set to be triggered by motion, but also to take videos with sound at regular intervals. We chose to set it from 18:55 on 10 June until 12:14 the next day. It recorded a 20 second video every 15 minutes. This led to 71 20-second videos with sound - accounting for c.24 minutes of coverage in total, or 2.3% of the actual time elapsed. It took c.25 minutes to view and listen to the videos, which compares favourably with being out on site for 17 hours. The videos gained show very little (though might have done if placed in a good site), but the aim was to obtain regular sound samples.

In 2014, the camera was placed at the same Deeside site for 15 nights from 9 to 24 May, set to operate from 21:00 to 04:45, with 20 second videos recorded every 15 minutes, plus occasional triggers. This led to c.500 clips with sound (10.66 minutes per night - a total of 149 minutes, or c.2.5 hrs during the period). This was c.2.5% of the eligible time (5,880 minutes, or 98 hours). It took less than the 2.5 hours to listen to the clips as each could be checked quickly by skipping the media player on the computer. We spent around 1.5 hours listening to the clips - a similar duration to the drive to and from the site just to place the camera. Also in 2014, a Bushnell NatureView HD Camera was placed at a wetland site in Perthshire where Spotted Crakes had been recorded irregularly. The camera was positioned on the edge of a wetland, left for 17 nights from 16 June to 2 July and set to operate from 21:00 to 05:00, recording 10 second videos with sound every five minutes. This resulted in 1,632 clips with sound (approximately 4.5 hours).

Results

In Deeside, on 10 June 2012 it was dark from c.23:30 to 03:30, and we recorded infrared or colour videos but with audio sound tracks. Although the camera is not built to be a sensitive sound recording device, it works quite well. During the dark period, peak bird activity was from 00:00 to 01:30. We also heard sheep often, which were >200 m away from the camera - a good indicator of the minimum area of coverage. Species known to be present at the site in 2012, but not heard, included Water Rail, Teal *Anas crecca*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, so sampling for a short period is not perfect. In 2014, the recording period was longer and provided a representative sample of the dusk to dawn period for over two weeks. Spotted Crakes were not detected in either year in Deeside. However, at the Perthshire site, one bird was recorded on 18 June, with singing noted three times at 23:25, 23:30 and 23:45; details were submitted to the county recorder. All results are shown in Table 1 for both years.

Table 1. Species heard in Trail camera audio monitoring, 2012 and 2014.

Deeside 2012 (one night)
Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

In daylight hours: Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret*, Willow Warbler, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Curlew, Chaffinch, Song Thrush, Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* and Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*.

Deeside 2014 (15 nights, dusk to dawn)
Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*
Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*
Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
Blackbird *Turdus merula*
Oystercatcher
Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*
Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*
Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*
Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*: heard in 46 audio clips - all but one during 9–14 May (1 on 24th)

Perthshire 2014 (17 nights, dusk to dawn)
Spotted Crake
Tawny Owl
Water Rail
Moorhen
Oystercatcher
Snipe
Mallard
Willow Warbler
Whitethroat
Lesser Redpoll
Robin
Song Thrush
Wren
Chaffinch
Buzzard
Sedge Warbler

Discussion

The aim of testing this method was primarily to discover whether it was likely to be effective in detecting singing Spotted Crakes. It clearly was in Perthshire, and the fact that they were not recorded in Deeside most likely reflects true absence following significant recent declines (Holling *et al.* 2014). The level of effort necessary to survey this bird is often very high, which inevitably influences how comprehensively it is undertaken in most years. Its song behaviour is poorly understood (Stroud *et al.* 2012) - both in terms of incidence through the season and pattern during the night if birds are present. The song is known to be audible for at least 1 km on still nights, and it is clear that if crakes are singing they would be detected using this method. The number of recordings captured of Water Rail (a quieter call) also reinforces this; Water Rails call much more at night and the method worked well in detecting them.

Playback methods can also be used to detect nocturnal birds. However, this requires greater time input by the observer, with multiple visits, and the possible need for a Schedule 1 licence for Spotted Crake (since it would be active disturbance). We show here that passive audio monitoring provides a different, additional approach - it does not replace call playback. We were aiming to detect Spotted Crake, and there is as yet no clear evidence that playback methods work consistently for this species. With this passive monitoring method, they would be recorded if singing at a site. The method shows there is no need to visit places after dark night after night - the device can just be left, and can also be placed at sites where it is not clear whether the target birds are present or not, saving much observer effort.

It could also potentially be used to listen for other nocturnal birds whose calls or song are not always predictable or which require demanding programmes of survey, sometimes in remote places. These might include Long-eared *Asio otus* or Tawny Owls, Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus,* Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* or even Bittern *Botaurus stellatus*. It could also help understand the pattern of vocalisations through the night, though it is of less use in determining numbers of birds unless they are calling simultaneously. If sited in places suitable for bird movement, then there is also the added bonus of interesting or unexpected video or photographic images, as well as audio files.

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Behaviour of a newly established pair of urban-nesting Lesser Black-backed Gulls in Ayrshire

Between mid-June and mid-September 2014, a pair of Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* successfully bred for the first time in my housing estate, situated in the small village of Coylton, Ayrshire. It was interesting to contrast the behavioural differences between the pair in Coylton and those from a nearby densely populated coastal colony, Lady Isle.

Lady Isle has a dense breeding population of Lesser Black-backed Gulls with a mean nearest-neighbour distance of 3.75±0.7 m, range 0.22–20.45 m, n=438 (Grant *et al.* 2013), whereas the nearest breeding neighbour for the pair under observation was approximately 300 m away. Whilst there was only one pair breeding, there were at least four other adult birds that were regularly present within the area. During the early stages of egg incubation, the non-breeding adults were subject to attacks by the breeding pair, but once the chicks had hatched there appeared to be greater tolerance by the breeding pair. Post-hatching, the breeding and non-breeding adults were often seen flying together over the area. This relationship was likely to be beneficial to the breeding pair, as it provided extra eyes for security (Gotmark & Andersson 1984).

Unlike on Lady Isle, where each pair tended to protect its nest and the immediate area within a few metres of the nest, the Coylton pair indulged in 'mock' attacks to protect their territory up to 50 m away from their nest site. These 'mock' attacks were invariably aimed at humans and took the form of diving towards their target and pulling out 2–3 m above the person's head. By contrast, Lady Isle gulls regularly attack resulting in near or actual physical contact. Whilst 'mock' attacks were performed on humans, it was a different scenario when a cat or dog came within sight of the parent birds. In this case, the Coylton adult birds did not pull out of their attack, but went in for physical contact wherever possible. This apparent ability of the gulls to differentiate the level of threat is an example of counter-predator adaptation (Nocera & Ratcliffe 2009).

Plate 108. Adult Lesser Black-backed Gull in attack mode, Coylton, Ayrshire, 7 July 2014 © *Dave Grant*

This behaviour had a noticeable impact upon the local cat population. From early on the gulls were very aggressive towards the cats, swooping and attacking whenever the cats came into view of the breeding adults. This obviously had an impact upon the cats, as from early July until early September no cats were seen anywhere near the breeding territory. This in turn meant that the local passerines had a relatively free run of local gardens with minimal disturbance by cats. Maybe the secret to curbing domestic cat predation of our garden birds is to encourage breeding gulls to nest on your house.

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Feeding association between Kingfisher and European Otter in Glasgow

Some rivers in the Glasgow area (Clyde) have large numbers of Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis* that have been observed for many years (Forrester *et al.* 2007). On the south side of the city, the population along the White Cart Water was first studied in the 1930s by Robert Brown and Philip Clancey, who observed and recorded much fascinating Kingfisher breeding biology (Brown 1934a, 1934b, Clancey 1934, 1935a, 1935b, 1937).

During the past three years, since 2013, I have watched, on at least five occasions, a previously unrecorded feeding association between Kingfisher and European Otter *Lutra lutra* (hereafter referred to as 'Otter') on the White Cart Water. Otters, either singles, or a family party of a mother and three pups, have been followed by a Kingfisher, with all observed catching food.

At this site Otters often hunt for prey items under water amongst partially submerged tree branches and vegetation, as these act as refuges for fish and other aquatic creatures. On each occasion, as the Otters swam and moved through the branches and vegetation, disturbing fish which they caught and ate, a Kingfisher would follow, perching and waiting for food. This behaviour lasted from a few minutes to up to half an hour, with the Kingfisher sometimes directly above the Otter, less than 50 cm away. A few times I saw the Kingfisher dive and catch fish, which had just been disturbed by the Otters. On some occasions it was apparent that the Otters were aware of the Kingfisher's presence, but they never seemed perturbed or interacted.

The feeding association occurred on the same stretch of the White Cart Water over the three years, most recently in February 2015. I do not know if this was the behaviour of a single Kingfisher or more than one. Kingfisher is a long-lived species, with the oldest ringed individual from Belgium surviving over 21 years (Fransson *et al.* 2010), so this could have been just one bird. However, it seems plausible that the success of such a feeding method could be learnt by more than one individual.

It is also possible that the behaviour might be shown by parents to young, although immature Kingfishers leave the nest area only a few days after fledging (Clancey 1935a, Morgan & Glue 1977, Cramp 1985), so there would only be a very short period for them to observe and learn.

As far as I am aware this behaviour of Kingfisher and European Otter has not been recorded before. However, feeding associations have been noted between kingfishers with other species of otter throughout the world. For example, Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* has been seen to catch fish with Kingfisher and Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis* in Thailand (Kruuk *et al*. 1993), Stork-billed Kingfisher in Malaysia, and Collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris* in Indonesia (van Helvoort *et al*. 1996). Similar feeding activity, described as commensalism, was observed with Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* and African Clawless Otter *Aonyx capensis* in South Africa (Boshoff 1978). Furthermore, an American Pygmy Kingfisher *Chloroceryle aenea* was watched as it 'retrieved small fish scales dropping into the water as the [Giant River Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*]...continued to eat a fish and ignored this scavenger's swoops right past his nose' in Suriname, South America (Duplaix 1980).

Brown and Clancey did not describe the feeding association between Kingfisher and European Otter on the White Cart Water in the 1930s, I suspect because Otters were absent at the time. However, with the general increase in Otter numbers being noted throughout Scotland in the early 21st century, following their protection from human persecution, it will be interesting to see if this behaviour by Kingfishers is observed elsewhere, where both species are present.

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Obituaries

William Clunie (1948–2014)

Plate 109. Bill Clunie. © *photographer unknown*

It was with great sadness that we learned of the sudden demise of Bill in December 2014. In 1974, he became a founder member of the Edinburgh local RSPB group and also in the early 1970s became a member of the SOC and also of the Edinburgh Natural History Society. He was a regular attender at all their indoor meetings and the latter society often called on him as a projectionist and to help with technical matters. At meetings my group of friends were fond of chatting to Bill because he seemed to do more bird watching than most and we were often in awe of the various rarities that he had managed to spot. He even went as far as catching the early morning buses to as far afield as Dundee to search for rare migrants. Back in the 1980s, he visited the Uists where he met up with fellow Club members. He helped with tern wardening at Aberlady and sometimes went on the Gardyloo trips which offered birders the chance to seawatch as Edinburgh's sewage was dumped into the North Sea; a practice now discontinued. Because he liked the outdoors so much, he delighted in working as a surveyor for the Water Board as this meant regular visits to reservoirs all over the Lothians. He was also a keen hill walker. Many of us had thought that Bill rather quiet and reserved, but at the funeral we discovered that he was a much loved icon of his family as an uncle and brother and to several nephews and nieces for whom he delighted in making wooden toys, setting up Wendy houses and generally amusing them. He will be greatly missed.

Douglas R. McKean

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Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Glasgow, 21 March 2015

Plate 110. Question time. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

This year's joint BTO/SOC conference was hosted by the SOC Clyde branch. The venue was Glasgow University's Western Infirmary Lecture Theatre in the heart of the city's west end. The event attracted just short of 190 birdwatchers from across the country, who were greeted with blue skies and warm spring sunshine, which remained for the day and prompted many delegates to enjoy their refreshments *al fresco*.

Plate 111. Ian Fulton. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Chris McInerny, SOC President, opened the conference with a warm welcome to attendees, who filled the well-equipped auditorium. Chris also gave a nod to the previous evening's much-talked-about solar eclipse and showed an eerie image he had managed to capture of the spectacle in a slightly overcast Glasgow sky - a nice local lead-in to the general theme for the day's programme - ornithology in the West of Scotland. Chris handed over to Clyde Branch secretary, Ian Fulton, who provided very slick chairing of the morning session.

Scotland's Bean Geese: looking through the telescope from both ends

- Carl Mitchell

Carl Mitchell is a Principal Research Officer with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). He is an experienced waterfowl ecologist, bird ringer and aerial surveyor and is currently responsible for co-ordinating the WWT goose monitoring, research and conservation work.

Carl became involved with the Central Scotland Taiga Bean Geese flock in 1986 when he tried to catch them, but was unsuccessful. In 2011, he was part of a team that caught and ringed 15

Plate 112. Carl Mitchell. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Bean Geese in October of that year. In subsequent years (2012/13), another 18 Bean Geese were caught, ringed and fitted with neck collars, including some with GPS/GSM devices.

Carl commenced his talk by describing the two races of Bean Geese (Taiga & Tundra). He gave a brief overview of the history of the species in Scotland, talking of the birds seen in the Ken/Dee Marshes in Dumfries and Galloway and then later appearing in the Carron Valley and Slamannan area of central Scotland - myself and fellow local ornithologist, John Simpson, have studied the aforementioned flock for over 20 years, documenting the winter distribution over a 20 square mile area.

Fitting GPS/GSM tags to some of these birds enabled their movements outside Scotland to be monitored for the first time. One migration route takes them from Scotland to Denmark, Norway and finally to Dalarna County in Sweden where they breed. A second route goes from Denmark to south Sweden and then north to Dalarna County. The autumn migration can follow a similar pattern, but includes a more direct flight from Sweden through south-west Norway to Scotland.

Carl spoke of the small ecological footprint of this flock throughout their travels in Scotland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. We certainly know that on the Slamannan Plateau they spend their winters in a clearly defined area and are rarely seen outside it. By using Google maps Carl was able to illustrate the breeding areas around lakes and the extensive sedge beds and forests that the geese utilise during the summer months.

He closed his talk by alerting the audience to the trouble that the various sub-species of Bean Geese appear to be in and that conservation is now very important. There has been a general decrease from c.90,000 to c.50,000 in the last 20 years.

Angus Maciver

Peregrines in Scotland: findings from the 2014 survey
- Mark Wilson

Now as a highly experienced research ecologist working for BTO, Mark Wilson comes with a 20-year background of bird study. A large part of his work was carried out in Ireland following a post-doctorate period at University College Cork. Here he spent time on the ecology of Hen Harriers in relation to upland land use. His work with BTO Scotland, helping with the Peregrine Survey and Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme data, was a natural follow-on from his Irish studies. This showed up to great effect in his highly technical talk.

Plate 113. Mark Wilson. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Mark's presentation began by describing the two main approaches used during the Peregrine survey. As in previous surveys, a huge amount of volunteer effort went into checking known Peregrine breeding sites. However, a new element introduced in the 2014 survey was the surveying of randomly selected 5-km squares, to try and ensure that survey findings were robust in the face of regional variation in survey effort, and the potential for occupation of new, previously unknown, sites. Although analysis of the survey results is ongoing, preliminary findings suggest that breeding Peregrine numbers have continued to decline in Scotland since the previous survey, in 2002.

However, Peregrines have enjoyed mixed fortunes in different parts of Scotland, with increases around the Central Belt and re-colonisation of Shetland, contrasting with declines in most other regions. On the whole, upland populations seem to have suffered more than lowland and coastal sites. Possible reasons for these differences include poor weather, lack of prey, increase in competition from other raptors and the ever-present problems associated with some management for shooting, especially of Red Grouse.

In winding up his very thought-provoking talk, Mark noted that further work had to include increasing the awareness among ornithologists and others of the requirements of this particular raptor.

Roger Gooch

RSPB Loch Lomond: wetland, woodland and wildlife
- Paula Baker

Paula was appointed as the site manager at the RSPB's newly acquired reserve at Loch Lomond two years ago - a post with tremendous potential and significant challenges. Her survey of the past, present and future was engrossing.

The Loch Lomond nature reserve is more properly the conservation of the loch's southern shore and the downstream flood plain of the river Endrick. Despite the spectacular scenery to the north, this is not wild countryside but the result of historic management; part of a planned landscape. The Shore Wood and Ring Point have been well known to west of Scotland naturalists but parts of the nature reserve area were normally inaccessible. Generally it was not possible to visit Ward's Farm but the occasional glimpses suggested endless attractions. And this is the focus of the new reserve.

Paula has the exciting prospect of restoring the structure of the estate. As it is essentially a wetland with fen, marsh, open water and river, the management of its hydrology is a major challenge. She described the historic land usage and how a return to some of the earlier practices has taken effect.

The unusual situation of the major organisations, the RSPB, the National Nature Reserve and the National Park all having a voice in the management could be threatened by bureaucratic wrangling and is another challenge that she faces.

Paula's clear and well-illustrated presentation of this study, the conservation options and the hopes for the future was a model of what a persuasive informative talk should be. The hints of the possibilities of what lie in store are biologically exciting, good for the environment and wildlife and encouraging for potential visitors.

Ivan T. Draper

Plate 114. Paula Baker. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Plate 115. Chris Waltho. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Monitoring Eider in the Firth of Clyde: witnessing dramatic change

- Chris Waltho

For the last 44 years, Chris has been involved with WEBS counts on the Clyde, with a special interest in Eider Ducks. Aged 12 he was invited to assist with the count at Tighnabruaich in 1971 and has been counting at Helensburgh since 1972, covering the 7 km from Seabank to Craigendoran. The mist at Ardmore Point can prove challenging in winter. In 1985, range extended to cover Gare Loch from Rhu to Coulport, a distance of 34 km which takes six hours.

Gare Loch is a nutrient rich area, ideal habitat for Common Mussels (up to 14 mm) on which Eiders feed to a depth of 19 m, but it does have one impediment - the nuclear submarine base at Faslane, heavily guarded by the MOD. Chris has to notify them each time he is surveying.

WEBS counts were carried out from September to April, but from 2000, counts changed to all year round. Chris watched the Eider flock peak at 1,600 birds in September 1985. By March they have nearly all left the area.

For 15 years, numbers rose by 7% per year but the following 15 years showed a 7% per year decline with numbers now back at the 1985 level, a strong correlation to that found with the breeding birds on Horse Island by Zul Bahtia, who found an increase of 8.5% to peak at 2000 followed by a decrease of 8.5%.

Chris was keen to extend his survey to the whole Inner Clyde area, adding the Ayrshire coast in 1996 and Argyll in 1997. Now 850 km is counted by an army of volunteers every year. The decrease in population has been estimated at 6.8%. Eiders were first recorded in 1910 by Harvie Brown with five pairs at Skipness on Loch Fyne. There are no records for the war years but in 1920 they were breeding around Bute and gradually spread out. For the current Atlas, Eider were recorded in 61 coastal squares on the Clyde (80%). This has increased to 100%, BUT all showing a decline, with the tipping point around 2000. The range is moving south at 2 km per year. Flocks show a sex ratio of 2 males to 1 female.

There is no obvious cause of decline - no oil spills, no variation in body condition or clutch size. Mink may kill some females on nests but male numbers are also declining. Mussels rely on sewerage outflow into the Clyde but the clean-up is leading to poorer feeding and thus less food for the Eider. Human disturbance may also contribute to decline.

Chris ended his very informative talk by mentioning that Tighnabruaich had adopted the Eider as its mascot - after 40 years.

Anne M. Dick

Lunch break saw delegates dig in to a very tasty (albeit not entirely plentiful, with the exception of the fresh fruit platters) finger buffet, served in the bright and spacious seminar rooms where delegates also had the opportunity to browse the many exhibitor stands. As well as BTO and SOC stalls, this year we were delighted to host displays from Chris Rose, Glasgow Natural History Society, Glasgow University PhD students, Photoscot, RSPB Scotland, SWT and Second Nature. The BTO stand also offered a drop-in 'live' demo during intervals for anyone wishing to learn more about using the BirdTrack online sightings and records system.

Plate 116. Bernie Zonfrillo and Nina O'Hanlon. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

The afternoon session was entertainingly chaired by Bernie Zonfrillo, SOC Clyde branch committee member as well as Honorary Lecturer at Glasgow University. First up were two PhD students from the university itself, who each had a 12-minute slot to give delegates a whistle stop tour of their current projects.

Spatial variation in Herring Gull traits across south-west Scotland and Northern Ireland

- Nina O'Hanlon

Nina was first up, with her offering of ornithology in the 'West wing' coming in the form of her Herring Gull study area. The Herring Gull is a ubiquitous aspect of our British coastline. However, Nina revealed that all is not well for this familiar and charismatic bird. She combined several techniques to attempt to unravel the reasons why some of our Herring Gull colonies present healthy numbers, whilst others are in decline.

Pellet analysis revealed the difference in diet between colonies - some favoured refuse sites whilst others fed on a more natural diet of marine fish and invertebrates. Nina also embraced the growing use of modern technology in ornithology by attaching 12 g satellite tags to individual gulls in order to precisely track their foraging trips. These foraging trips were used to indicate how the whole colony feeds and identified areas that are important foraging hotspots for the birds. Nina reminded us of how important seabirds are as indicators of the health of our marine environment, and her study on Herring Gulls will add to our understanding of this important and complex ecosystem.

The factors affecting the status of the Bearded Tit in the Tay Reedbeds

- Iain Malzer

Next, Iain Malzer introduced us to his study on the Bearded Tits of the Tay reedbeds. His study site will be familiar to those who were lucky enough to get fantastic views of the birds on one of the trips at last October's SOC annual conference. Bordering the inner-estuary of the largest river in the UK, the Tay reedbeds are also the largest continuous reedbed in the UK (4.1 km^2).

With help from the Tay Ringing Group, Iain managed to ring and colour ring a total of 330 new birds in 2013, and 764 new birds in 2014 - an incredible total reflective of the effort put into this study. These numbers suggest that the Tay reedbeds are likely to be the most important site for *Beardies* in the UK, holding approximately 50% of the total UK population. It is therefore important that the dynamics of this population, and their relationship with their habitat, are well understood. Iain compared managed (previously cut) and unmanaged (uncut) areas of the reedbed, and used tiny 0.3g radio tags to track where the birds were foraging. This revealed that in the breeding season, birds favoured the cut areas of reedbed, exploiting the huge abundance of invertebrates found amongst the reeds there. However, he found that the birds completely changed their behaviour in autumn to forage in the uncut areas where they could find a high abundance of seeds within the leaf litter - Iain commented that his initial suspicions were backed up by the fact that the birds even had muddy feet!

Such findings reflect the adaptive nature of this true reedbed specialist, with individuals having to change their foraging behaviour and food source in the continually changing conditions of their habitat. Information like this will be used to influence the management techniques used on the reedbeds (currently carried out by the RSPB), ensuring that the Tay reedbeds, as well as others around the country, can be kept in a healthy state for Bearded Tit and other wildlife that depend on this habitat.

James Allison

Grasshopper Warblers
- Gillian Gilbert

Gillian, Senior Conservation Scientist at RSPB, gave an insightful talk on Grasshopper Warblers, starting her presentation by providing background on the species. Grasshopper Warblers are summer visitors to Britain, returning from their wintering grounds in Sub Saharan Africa in mid-April to breed. They are secretive birds and are more often heard than seen. They are also poorly studied, even less well studied than the Savi's Warbler. Research indicates that Grasshopper Warblers sing most at, and just before, dawn. The species is widespread in Britain, but its distribution has a westerly bias. It is not associated with a specific habitat type, but a particular vegetation successional stage is favoured. It is therefore transient, moving to different sites as habitat becomes more or less suitable.

During the mid-1960s and mid-1980s, Grasshopper Warbler underwent a substantial population decline in Britain, leading to its classification as a Red List species. The causes of the decline are not fully understood. More recently, British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data demonstrates fluctuations in abundance. However, this conceals country-scale differences in trends. Birds are faring better in Scotland than in England - trends illustrated in the graphs on Gillian's slides.

Gillian described her research into Grasshopper Warbler breeding habitat in Britain. The research aimed to characterise this habitat and to determine whether it was limited. Twenty-two sites were selected from England and Scotland and the breeding habitat measured. To test whether this habitat was limited, a model was devised to predict suitable areas. These areas were then checked to see if the habitat was occupied. Thirty BTO Common Birds Census (CBC) plots that had lost their breeding Grasshopper Warblers were also visited to ascertain if they still contained suitable habitat. If limited, all of the suitable breeding habitat should be occupied.

Plate 117. Gillian Gilbert. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

The research revealed that breeding habitat for the species is structurally specific, characterised by dense, tussock-forming ground layer vegetation, no closed canopy, damper soil and the presence of song posts. Seventy per cent of predicted suitable habitat was occupied. The majority of former CBC plots no longer contained suitable breeding areas due to vegetation succession or unsuitable management. Gillian emphasised that a positive outcome of the study is that sites are now being actively managed for Grasshopper Warblers. In some cases, non-intervention may be the best advice, as untidy and unattractive habitats are favoured by the species. Gillian is now working to test whether management recommendations have been effective.

Natalie Harmsworth

Behind the scenes: what does a bird artist do all day?
- Chris Rose

Bernie introduced Chris as one of the best bird artists alive in the world today. I would agree and add that he is also pretty good as a speaker and as an ambassador for wildlife art and artists. This fascinating talk came in two parts; firstly book illustration and secondly painting.

Plate 118. Chris Rose. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

He started with an explanation of the meticulous research necessary for the production of illustrations that demand accuracy above all else. The work begins with the examination of skins in museums and photographs of the birds. His most recent work *Grebes of the World* also required knowledge of the lifestyle and environment of each species of grebe without the opportunity of seeing each one in its environment. Then there was the tricky problem of finding 22 different ways of depicting water! Other 'little problems' for the illustrator included having completed a beautiful page of Robins only for the whole sheet to be redrawn because a previously unknown robin was discovered and required inclusion.

I enjoyed hearing about how paintings can sometimes develop from what initially many would consider to be an unlikely source. For example, a jellyfish attracts attention and then develops into a painting of the shoreline with Sand Martins sweeping past in the middle distance. By using Photoshop, Chris was able to show us the painting without the shadows of the birds. This revealed in a quite stunning fashion just how important the shadows are for us to understand where the birds are and yet at the same time are not consciously noticed. I guess it happens to any artist working *en plein air* but for those of us with an interest in wildlife it perhaps has an added spark. Chris also pointed out that painting does have some advantages over photography. For instance, the idea of taking a great composition with Tufted Duck on a loch and supplanting the 'Tufties' with Smew provided the rare birds with a perfect setting. Of course the aware artist with paint must ensure that the lighting of the new ducks fits the setting.

I have only covered part of what was altogether an interesting and highly amusing presentation.

Bill Neill

Are our aerial insect feeders faring better in Scotland?

- Dawn Balmer

The final presentation of the day was expertly delivered by the Head of Surveys for BTO. With over 20 years' experience of surveys, census and ringing projects for the BTO most recently as the atlas co-ordinator of the widely acclaimed *Bird Atlas 2007–11* project, Dawn was ideally placed to answer the question posed in the title of her talk.

The data for four species was considered namely Swift, Swallow, Sand Martin and House Martin. This data included exemplary maps showing distribution, distribution changes over time, abundance and abundance changes over the time. Dawn drew extensively on the Bird Atlas, the on-going Breeding Bird Survey and other long term BTO surveys.

Plate 119. Dawn Balmer. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Each species was considered in turn. In general these species seem to be doing better in the north and west of the UK with the exception of Swift where the decline was more marked in Scotland. For the other species, increases in the north and west were in contrast to declines in the south and east of the UK. This difference was most marked in House Martin, with Scotland holding 19% of the UK population of this species. While there was a 69% decrease in these birds across England between 1967 and 2012, there was a 125% increase in Scotland between 1994 and 2013.

The answer to the question *Are our aerial insect feeders faring better in Scotland?* seems to be 'yes' for Swallow, Sand Martin and House Martin, but 'no' for Swift. Dawn indicated that the changes across the UK may be being influenced by changes in insect abundance, nest site availability, problems in wintering grounds and changes in timing of migration. Dietary differences between Swift and the other species may explain that difference.

Dawn finished by highlighting the need for further research and drew attention to the imminent House Martin Survey and encouraged everyone to take part. She was heartened by the initial response with over 1,500 1-km squares allocated and ten BTO regions already requesting a second batch of squares!

For further information on the survey, visit the website http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey/house-martin-survey-2015/resources

Throughout the day, delegates had the opportunity to test their bird identification knowledge with a pretty tricky quiz (presented as a looping Powerpoint show in the exhibitor area) compiled by Ian Fulton. The two winning entries with the highest score came from John Nadin (Fife) and James Allison (Highland), who were each presented with a family weekend pass to the upcoming Scotland's Big Nature Festival (Scottish Birdfair). The prizes were kindly donated by RSPB Scotland.

The conference ended with a summary and some words of thanks from Chris Wernham, Head of BTO Scotland. Chris highlighted the wonderful variety of the day's talks and gave particular thanks to Ian Fulton and the SOC Clyde branch committee for coordinating such an excellent programme. Advance thanks also went to the leaders of the following day's planned outings to some key birdwatching sites in the area.

Plate 120. Group at Ardmore Point, Clyde, March 2015. From left to right: Colin Shepherd, John Clark, Ben Darvill, David Mitchell, Ivan Draper, Rob Smith and Julie Lang. © John Simpson

Many delegates chose to make a weekend of it and a group of around 30 attendees joined BTO staff for an enjoyable evening at a nearby Italian restaurant.

The weather on the Sunday was cooler but still pleasant. The outing to Dalzell Woods and Baron's Haugh was led by SOC Clyde branch member, Lang Stewart, alongside Chris Wernham and Dawn Balmer. The walk started with a quick visit to the Tawny Owl roost where everyone saw the bird and it was easily photographed. Then it was a short drive to Dalzell car park where Great Spotted Woodpeckers were chasing around the trees. Nuthatches were soon heard and then seen high up, along with good views of Treecreeper. A walk down to the metal bridge eventually produced great views of a Goldcrest fly-catching. Moving back to Baron's Haugh, the group watched Long-tailed Tits nest-building by the path to the Marsh Hide. At the hide everyone had good views of the Water Rail and a Green Sandpiper.

Meanwhile, a small group explored Ardmore Point, led by John Simpson (SOC Clyde branch) and Ben Darvill (BTO Scotland) (Plate 120), where some 46 species were recorded, with great views of Slavonian Grebes, some in full summer plumage, being the highlight.

At both sites, the BTO Scotland leaders provided helpful instruction on how the records from the outings could be entered into BirdTrack www.birdtrack.net

Special thanks to David Palmar for kindly being conference photographer for the day.

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Ayrshire: Miss S. Adel, Mr & Mrs H. Cant, **Borders**: Mr C. Coombs, Mrs N. Pearson, Ms D. Small, **Central Scotland**: Mr R. Gladwell & Ms L. Armitage, Miss E. Sheard, **Clyde**: Mr D. Bell, Mr S. Langford, Mr G. Mackinnon, Miss M. Panek, Mr & Mrs D. Rogerson, Mr J. Timmins, **Dumfries**: Mr A. Banwell, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr J. Anderson, Mr K. Betton, Mr D. Oxley, **Fife**: Mr & Mrs R. Alexander, Mr & Mrs S. Collier, Miss H. McCallum, **Highland**: Mr J. Eaton, Mr & Mrs P. Winterburn, **Lothian**: Miss R. Atanasova, Mr G. Cockburn, Dr K. Crosbie, Mr J. Dickson, Ms A. Donaldson, Mr F. Dussart, Mr G.R. Forster, Ms V. Hardie, Mrs M. Harper, Mr W. Hayward, Dr B. Henricot, Ms K. Keogan, Mr D. Massey, Mr J. Menigall, Mr H. Morrison, Miss L. Newton, Mr & Mrs T.D. Richmond, Mr & Mrs G. Smith, Dr K. Swa, Mr M. & Mr W. Waterston, **Moray**: Mr W. Logan, Ms S. Nicolson, Mr P. Swainson, **North-East Scotland**: Ms P. Lackova, Miss C. Wilkinson, **Scotland - no branch**: Mr A. Paton, Mr H. Towll, **Stewartry**: Miss F. Cargill, **Tayside**: Mr F. Clark, Rev D. Meredith, Mr & Mrs A. Oliver, **West Galloway**: Mr R. Newdick.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are **February**: 1st £30 R.S. Smith, 2nd £20 D.S. Omand, 3rd £10 Mrs W. Shaw. **March**: 1st £50 Dr R. Jenkins, 2nd £30 R.G. Allen, 3rd £20 P. Tooley, 4th £10 Miss G. Horsburgh. **April**: 1st £30 R.S. Craig, 2nd £20 S.F. Jackson, 3rd £10 D. Boomer.

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

The SOC is now a SCIO - a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation

On 31 March 2015, the Club Officers visited the offices of Morton Fraser in Edinburgh, to complete paperwork for the conversion of the SOC to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

With the help of Elizabeth Robertson of Morton Fraser all was completed successfully on the last day of the financial year, with the SOC now registered as a SCIO on the OSCR (The Scottish Charity Regulator) website:www.oscr.org.uk/charities/search-scottish-charity-register/charity-details?number=SC009859

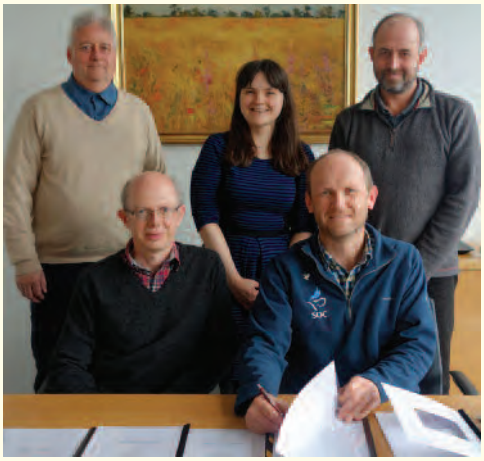

Plate 121. David Heely (Honorary Secretary), Alan Fox (Honorary Treasurer), Elizabeth Robertson (Morton Fraser), Chris McInerny (President) and Ian Thomson (Vice President) signing documentation to convert the SOC to a SCIO, Edinburgh, 31 March 2015.

I thank all Club members for their contribution and support during this important change, and I particularly thank Alan Fox for taking a leading role in organising the process. It has been much work, but we on Council are certain that this is a positive step forward for the Club.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of Council

SBRC - seeking a new member for the committee

The Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) is seeking a new member for the committee to replace Hywel Maggs, who retires later this year. To maintain geographical representation across Scotland SBRC would prefer a candidate from north and east mainland Scotland. Any potential candidates should send their name to the Secretary (Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk). If more than one name is put forward, a ballot will be instigated, with Local Recorders having one vote each.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC

Changes to the list of species requiring descriptions by SBRC

The following changes took effect from 1 January 2015:

- Blyth's Reed Warbler, Citrine Wagtail and Lesser Scaup were added to the SBRC list, being no longer assessed by BBRC.
- Tawny Pipit, Red-throated Pipit, Aquatic Warbler and Rustic Bunting were removed from the SBRC list, being now assessed by BBRC.
- Olive-backed Pipit remains on the SBRC list, but with local assessment in Shetland, Fair Isle and Orkney.
- White-billed Diver remains on the SBRC list, but with local assessment in Shetland and the Outer Hebrides.

Waterston House

Art exhibitions

- Lucy Newton, showing until 22 July.
- Brin Edwards, Saturday 25 July to Wednesday 9 September.
- Keith Brockie, Saturday 12 September to Wednesday 4 November.

Conference

SOC Annual Conference, 30 October–1 November 2015, Atholl Palace, Pitlochry (programme and booking information enclosed with this issue).

Branch updates

Fife, new branch secretary: Caroline Gordon, 25 Mackie Crescent, Markinch, Glenrothes KY7 6BB, tel: 07833 918365, email: sweetbank101@gmail.com

Ayrshire, assistant recorder: Angus Hogg, email: dcgos@globalnet.co.uk

For full details of branch committee members, please visit the relevant branch page on the SOC website.

NEW Birding Guide to North-East Scotland! Now available to purchase!

North-east Scotland is an incredibly rich area for birds. Over 150 species are known to nest, and regular winter and passage visitors and vagrants bring the total to 387. This detailed illustrated guide shows how to find birds and other wildlife at many sites and contains a full checklist of birds recorded.

It is the most comprehensive guide yet published on where to see birds in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City.

Production of the guide was supported by the local RSPB team, Aberdeenshire Council and via the SOC's 'Birds of Scotland Fund'. To order your copy, please send a cheque for £7.50 per copy + £2 p+p made payable to 'Aberdeen and District RSPB Group', to M. Sullivan, 29 Earlswells Road, Cults, Aberdeen AB15 9NY or contact Mark at: geolbird_abz@btinternet.com

PSNS Ornithological Section Bulletins online

The Perthshire Society of Natural Science (PSNS) is one of the oldest natural history societies in the country, now approaching its 150th anniversary, and for more than one-third of that time it has had an Ornithological Section. The Section was formed early in 1963, and included a number of SOC stalwarts in its membership; Valerie Thom was its first Chair. From its inception, the Section produced a duplicated Bulletin for its members, with varying frequency. At one time the Bulletins appeared monthly, but in other years they appeared roughly every two months, and more recently they dwindled to four, three and finally two issues per year. Although the Section continues, the last issue of the Bulletin was published in 2012 - there are now other methods for birdwatchers to share recent sightings. Nevertheless, the Bulletins provide a useful historical record of the activities of the Section, and the sightings record the changing birdlife of the area, including the rise of the Collared Dove, the rise and fall of the Black-necked Grebe, and the decline of the Capercaillie. (It is scarcely credible to today's birdwatchers that as recently as the mid-1980s, Capercaillie were present in some numbers in lowland woods within a few miles of Perth). From 1990, coverage was extended to include mammals and other wildlife. However, with at most a few dozen copies printed, the Bulletins are very scarce. The archive of all 175 surviving copies has been scanned, and are now available online at www.psns.tsohost.co.uk/ornithological/orn_bulletins.htm. The PSNS website www.psns.org.uk also carries details of the present-day activities of the Society.

Plate 122. Gannets fishing off Shetland, May 2012. © *Richard Shucksmith*

Dense fog and a Gannet frenzy

R. SHUCKSMITH

Bouncing around in a small inflatable boat, I was heading to one of the remotest coastal cliffs in Shetland and I was starting to feel a little nervous. There is nothing between these cliffs and Norway and they get pounded by huge storms and large swells. For me to make the images I wanted of diving Gannets I had to carefully pick my days, it needed to be relatively calm. Fortunately, a good friend and photographer Ivan had agreed to come along and help me for the day.

As we ploughed through a wave a wall of spray hit us in the face leaving me squinting to see the shoreline, I wondered if I had overdone the loading of the boat. I looked at Ivan and he gave me a wild grin back - the thought of turning back went straight out my mind. Weighted down by the 150 kg of Mackerel, camera gear and dive kit and the fact that thick fog was making navigating round the headlands difficult I started to question my sanity. I knew once we made it

Plate 123. Dr Richard Shucksmith is an award-winning photographer and ecologist who lives on Shetland. He has spent many years exploring the natural world above and beneath the waves and these coastal environments is where he likes to spend his time. © *Richard Shucksmith*

Plate 124. Gannets fishing off Shetland, May 2012. © *Richard Shucksmith*

Plate 125. Gannets fishing off Shetland, May 2012. © *Richard Shucksmith*

Plate 126. Gannets fishing off Shetland, May 2012. © *Richard Shucksmith*

Plate 127. Gannets fishing off Shetland, May 2012. © *Richard Shucksmith*

Plate 128. Gannets fishing off Shetland, May 2012. © *Richard Shucksmith*

Plate 129. 'The Otter and the Puffin' won the animal behaviour category in British Wildlife Photography Awards (BWPA) 2014, along with several highly commended images that included underwater diving Gannets and marine life from around Scotland. Shetland, June 2013. © *Richard Shucksmith*

to the cliffs we would be sheltered, but the fog seemed to be getting denser. It was a gamble, but the forecast was for the fog to clear.

It was very eerie sitting there in dense fog, listening to the Gannets, the crashing of the waves on the base of the cliffs and not being able to see either the Gannets or the cliffs. I was pleased Ivan had agreed to come along but I wasn't so sure he was. I felt my sense of hearing heighten expecting to see the Black Pearl and Captain Jack Sparrow appear through the fog. Three hours later, with the constant rolling of the boat and the strong smell of Mackerel I was starting to feel a little queasy. I really started to wonder what the hell was I doing, feeling very exposed and vulnerable to the elements perhaps it was time to head back as the fog was not clearing.

Then suddenly I sensed it was getting brighter. A faded sun could be made out through the white filter of fog. Miraculously, I could see the shape of the cliffs and more importantly I started to see Gannets. Within ten minutes the fog was halfway up the cliffs and it was getting brighter. I started the boat engine with excitement and headed out, away from the base of the cliffs.

On cue a swirling mass of Gannets started circling the boat. Ivan threw a Mackerel into the water and the gulls and skuas came in. He threw some more Mackerel and within seconds the Gannets were diving. Within minutes it turned into a Gannet frenzy, several times Gannets skimming my head and wings hitting me in the face as I tried to capture the raw emotion of the feeding frenzy. All the anxiety was forgotten and the fog proved to be a blessing more than a hindrance, filtering the sun to create bright white light protecting the image from the harsh direct midday sun which on white birds can cause the highlights to burn out. One hour later, a card full of images and 150 kg of Mackerel lighter we headed back with not a worry in the world.

Richard Shucksmith, Shetland.
www.ecologicalphotography.co.uk

Blast from the Past

Plate 130. Bee-eater. © *Angus Hogg*

The attempted nesting of Bee-eaters in Scotland in 1920

When discussing the recent nesting (and attempted nesting) of Bee-eaters in England in 1955 (Sussex), 2002 (County Durham), 2005 (Herefordshire), 2006 (Dorset) and 2014 (Isle of Wight) reference is often made to the first breeding attempt in the UK in 1920. Rather bizarrely this took place along the River Esk near Musselburgh, Lothian, in the summer of 1920. The precise location was never documented, but Hamilton (1929) wrote that at the time he was walking "along the river side near Inveresk Church". This occurrence was officially documented by William Eagle Clarke in the *Scottish Naturalist* in 1920 (Clarke 1920) and a more personal account was later published by Kirke Nash in his *Birds of Midlothian* (Nash 1935). The original announcement of this event (Nash 1920), however, is less frequently quoted as it appeared in a less accessible publication - at least until *The Scotsman* newspaper archive was recently published online. With permission of *The Scotsman*, this original letter to the newspaper from Kirke Nash is reproduced in full below:

THE BEE-EATER IN SCOTLAND - A UNIQUE ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORD

Kirke Nash, 1, Inverleith Row, Edinburgh, June 17, 1920.

Sir, - On the 3rd of June my friend D.H. [David Hamilton] informed me he had that day, when accompanied by A.B.C., seen a pair of bee-eaters near Musselburgh. Such an extraordinary occurrence naturally interested me intensely, and I went down early next morning to try and see them at the place indicated. As soon as I arrived I had the great pleasure of observing both birds perching on a wire fence above a sand bank and every now and then making short flights, evidently capturing insects and reminding one of the actions of a flycatcher. Twice I saw each of the birds with a large bee in its possession as it perched on the fence, and after repeatedly hammering it on the wire and moving it about in its bill for some time it suddenly swallowed the insect whole.

At intervals the birds mounted high into mid-air and made rapid circling flights with an airy, undulating motion, soaring at times and exhibiting a grace of action seldom equalled by

any of our native birds. Often when rising into the air the beautiful green tail with elongated central feathers was spread out fanwise.

This feature attracted D.H.'s experienced eye when the birds first came under his observation.

Bee-eaters (Meropidae) are birds of the Old World, and the majority of the species - thirty-one in number - are peculiar to the Ethiopian region. Only four inhabit the Palæarctic area, and one of them (Merops apiaster) appears irregularly in Northern Europe during summer, thought since first observed in the British Isles in 1793 the number of records probably does not amount to fifty.

In the Mediterranean countries the bee-eater is abundant, and in the Spanish Peninsula it swarms from the beginning of April until the end of August. It usually breeds in colonies like the sand martin, and the banks of river, sand pits, &tc., are honeycombed with its excavations, and the bill of the bird is said to be worn down at times by the operation. The holes penetrate from three to nine feet, and the pure glossy white eggs, usually 5 or 6 in number and nearly globular in form, are laid on the bare earth in a small chamber at the end of the shaft. They are not reached by the egg collector without considerable labour.

The bird is a purely insectivorous feeder, its diet consisting of wasps, locusts, grasshoppers, beetles, and other insects, and as it has a special fondness for bees it is greatly hated by the Spanish peasants owing to the ravages it inflicts in their hives. They capture the birds in large numbers by spreading a net over the face of an occupied bank. A parallel trench, dug at some distance back, is then filled with water, which percolates down to the occupied shafts, and compels the birds to make a hasty exit. The bee-eater is a perfect revelation in colour. The main features which catch the eye are the rich chestnut head and upper back merging into a beautiful tawny yellow or primrose on the lower back. With the exception of the orange yellow throat bordered with a black band, the under parts are a vivid greenish blue or bluish green - the green distinctly predominates in certain lights. The white frontal band and the black patch extending from the bill to the ear coverts are also easily noticed, and the characteristic green tail has already been remarked upon.

We had a unique opportunity of observing all these features, as the birds were under close observation for several hours daily for over a week. That they intended nesting we have not the slightest doubt, as on the 7th of June we independently discovered that they were frequenting a special hole in the sand bank, and one afternoon, in bright sunshine, within three hours I counted fifteen visits, most of them being paid by the female, though once or twice both birds were in the hole at the same time, and they also displayed great excitement when they approached it, giving utterance to the characteristic liquid notes which have been described as sounding like the syllable "quilp", but this, in our opinion, is a poor representation, as there is undoubtedly a liquid "r" in the note. What helped to confirm our impression as to the intending nesting site was that from the time the birds were seen at the hole referred to they never entered any other of the numerous holes in the bank.

As this is the first occasion on which such a rare visitor as the bee-eater was apparently going to nest in the British Isles, it will be easily understood with what anxiety we daily watched their proceedings especially as people were in close proximity to the place nearly every hour of the day. All went well, apparently, until the 12th of the month when we only observed the male bird. Had the female actually commenced to incubate the eggs was the thought that came to us, but we were doomed to disappointment as we definitely learned on the 15th that it had been captured late at night on the 13th by a local gardener as it was perching on the branch of a tree. The following day it laid an egg thus confirming our belief as to the bird's intention of rearing a brood, and, unfortunately, owing to its captor's lack of knowledge as to the habits of the species, he was quite unable to feed it and we have good reason to fear it has now ceased to exist.

Thus a great Scottish record has been spoiled through the propensity of the average individual to capture or destroy any unusual or beautiful creature that unluckily comes within his reach. - I am, &tc

J. Kirke Nashe

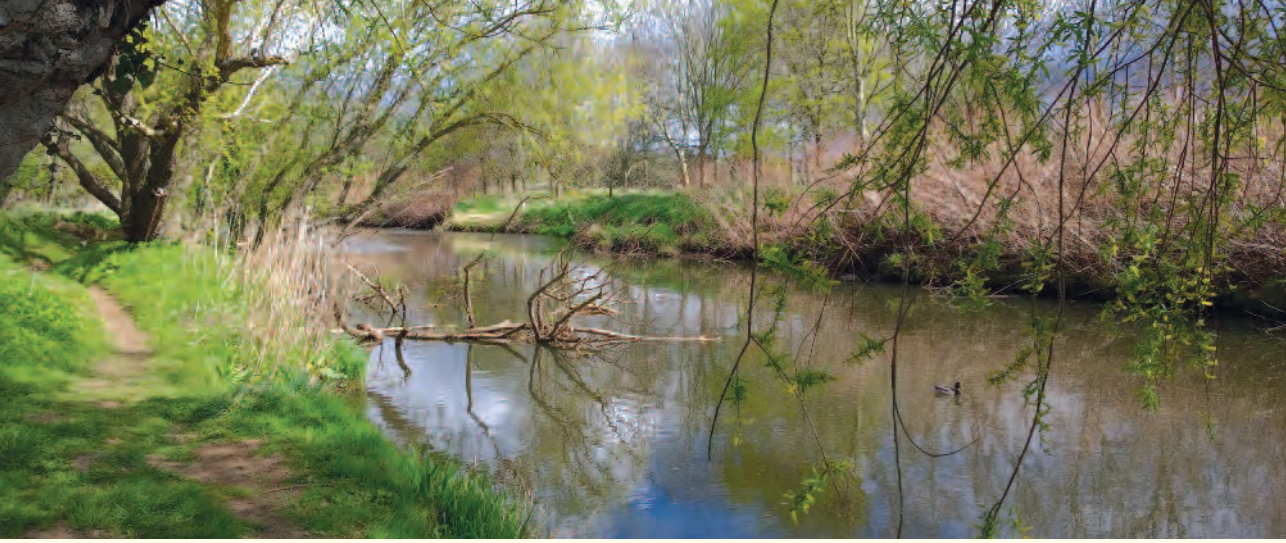

Plate 131. The Esk as it is today. © *Ian Andrews*

In the following week, this was also published in *The Scotsman*:

THE BEE-EATER IN SCOTLAND
23 Queen Anne's Gate, London, S.W.1,
June 21, 1920

Sir,–Every naturalist must have read with extraordinary interest the account given by Mr J. Kirke Nash in your columns of the nesting of a bee-eater near Musselburgh.

It is impossible that the matter should rest with the simple statement of the taking of the female bird, and the consequent loss to Scotland of the proud record of a breeding pair of these very rare and beautiful birds. The inhumanity of the action is matched by its illegality; and the offender committed, not only a crime against science and against all nature-lovers, but a distinct offence against the Wild Birds' Protection Acts. The bee-eater is a scheduled bird under the Act of 1880; and it is useless for a man in the position of a gardener to plead ignorance of Acts nearly concerning him. So great an outrage should be visited with the fullest punishment the law permits; and we trust the prosecution will be at once put in hand by the authorities. I am, &c.

L. Gardiner, Secretary.
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Clarke (1920) noted that "At the instigation of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Procurator-Fiscal instituted an enquiry into the circumstances associated with the capture of the female bird. Evidence was obtained from the persons concerned and of those who had any personal knowledge on the subject. From this official enquiry it was clearly proved that no blame whatever could be laid to the charge of anyone, and that Mr Marquis [the gardener] did his best to resuscitate the exhausted bird. It seems possible that the bird may have been injured in an attempt to capture her in the nesting hole, for the site is much visited by boys in quest of the eggs of Sand-martins which breed in the river-bank. Or, perhaps, the ungenial weather conditions may have been unsuited to the food requirements of birds accustomed to sunny climes at all seasons."

The editors would like to thank Brian Reid for raising the possibility of including something on this (so far) unique Scottish event in *Scottish Birds*. With the recent events in England in mind, Brian added that "perhaps a further visitation of breeding Bee-eaters in Scotland will occur in the future, hopefully with better results."

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Ian Andrews, Musselburgh, Lothian.

Plate 132. Long-tailed Tits with Crab Apples - small birds blown through the trees on a windy Suffolk day. © *Brin Edwards*

Artist Profile: Brin Edwards

Plate 133. Brin Edwards, 2011.

I have been fascinated by the appearance of birds for as long as I can remember - in fact one of my earliest memories is as a six-year old drawing a picture of a Black-naped Oriole which I saw in our garden in Singapore. My parents moved there for a couple of years in the early 1960s and the intense, saturated colours of tropical birds made a huge impression on me. Most children, sadly, stop drawing once they reach their teens, but I kept going - making drawings of birds became an itch I had to scratch.

After studying biology and ecology at university, I spent the next 20 years or so as a freelance illustrator producing work for many UK publishers and charities including the National Trust, The RSPB and The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

Nowadays, I spend most of my time painting birds in oils, with a looser, more abstracted style than my precise illustration work. Here I'm trying to make bold statements and capture the essence of the birds rather than get bogged down in too much fussy detail.

Plate 134-135. Dunlin with Pintail and Four sleeping Teal. © *Brin Edwards*

Plate 136. Dunlin with godwit. © *Brin Edwards*

The ideas for my pictures relate to direct observation and often a spit-second glimpse of a bird will set in motion an idea for a composition. Sometimes an image will arrive, fully formed in my head and will demand urgently to be resolved, but often ideas will rattle around in my head for some time before I commit them to canvas.

I will be exhibiting at Waterson House, Aberlady, from 25 July to 9 September. You can see more examples of my work at brin-edwards.com along with details of the wildlife art courses I teach in my straw bale studio. I am a council member of the Society of Wildlife Artists and exhibit at their annual exhibition in The Mall Galleries. I also post new work on my Facebook page - follow the link from the website.

Plate 137. American Golden Plover with the Golden Plover flock, Maidens, Ayrshire, November 2014. © *Angus Hogg*

The American Golden Plover at Maidens – do I have to write a description?

A. HOGG

When I watched a young American Golden Plover descend on to the mud at Maidens harbour, Ayrshire, on 17 October, 2014, along with a small group of its European chums, I was confronted by that thorny problem of having to write a description. A flood of mixed emotions hit me. There are those among us who, for good reasons or not, prefer not to bother with written descriptions in the hope that:

- someone else will do the job (I've just broken my wrist - honest!),
- lots of observers will see the bird (and that'll make it OK), or
- somebody will get a really good photograph (and that saves ***everyone*** a lot of hassle).

Maybe it's down to an era during which I cut my teeth in birding, but I have always been a fan of the written word when it comes to descriptions, throwing in the occasional sketch where appropriate. Nowadays, the importance of the field sketch has, to a large extent, been replaced by the advent of digital photography (although drawings still have their place). Now, not everyone has a camera, or is prepared to add to their equipment loading when crossing what might be 'difficult' terrain. Nor can everyone turn in a Killian Mullarney masterpiece. However, everyone ***can*** write a description of what they saw.

Choosing to leave it to others, or going down the 'mass observer' route is, of course, a matter for the individual, but I suspect that there are a few birders out there who have found a really rare bird and get more than a little irritated when their record doesn't appear in the local or national report. Well, maybe that's where the problem really lies. All such records of what are, after all, only a tiny minority of what's seen every year in the UK, require a description in order to be accepted and documented within an area's avifauna. To achieve this, you have to submit to the judgement of a panel of so-called experts. Not everyone likes this idea, comments heard over the years ranging from "I know fine how to identify a ******!! American Golden Plover" to "Who are this bunch of eejits anyway?" All well and good, but records of rare birds (if submitted) have to be assessed somehow.

Anyway, I know that some birders baulk at the notion of writing up descriptions: indeed, some are not at all confident in doing it. That shouldn't really stand in the way of an honest description though. So, if you ***do*** decide to bite the bullet and submit a description, what should you include (and what should you leave out)? Let's take the Maidens American Golden Plover as an example.

The initial observation

I first caught sight of this bird as it circled slowly above the harbour, with a flock of European Golden Plovers on the morning of 17 October 2014. As the flock wheeled around in the bright sunlight, there was one bird which seemed to be slightly slimmer and longer-winged than the rest - subtle differences, but noticeable. It looked like it had grey underwings, contrasting with the gleaming white underwings of the 'goldies.' At this point, I started to entertain the idea that it ***could*** be an American Golden Plover but, this kind of sighting would clearly be insufficient to be certain of its identity. It could just be a 'small' European Golden Plover, and strong sunlight does amazing things to your perception of underwing tones. After 20 frustrating minutes, the first group of 10 birds landed, and I managed to get a good look at the suspect.

A few seconds later, and it was airborne again, not re-appearing again that morning. However (and a lot of what follows may come down to species familiarity), the key features had been clearly seen in those few seconds - enough to be sure of its identification this time. So, what ***were*** these features and how do you go about noting them down at the time?

Plate 138. American Golden Plover, Maidens, Ayrshire, November 2014. © *Angus Hogg*

Plate 139. American Golden Plover, Maidens, Ayrshire, November 2014. © *Angus Hogg*

Briefly, they included the following:

- A slim, long-winged bird (compared to European Golden Plover), with 3–4 primaries extending beyond the tip of the tail
- Largely greyish body tones, with very little of the golden/yellowish hues of European Golden Plover
- A striking head pattern with a whitish forehead and clear whitish supercilium
- A clearly 'capped' appearance with an almost black crown
- A pale greyish breast with a reasonably clear demarcation between it and a white belly

Additional features which could be added from the prolonged flight views would have included a weak whitish wing-bar and pale grey axillaries. It might have been useful to have heard it call - but it didn't (or I didn't hear it!). Either way, I felt that I now had sufficient evidence to enter into my notebook or, as I've been doing for some years now, dictating it into a small voice recorder, which has the advantage of allowing you to observe the bird without having to take your eyes off it, while you note the details.

OK, what next?

What you decide to do about writing up a description is up to you, but simplicity can often be the key. There is no need to over-embellish the text with details such as "how you've often wished one of these birds would appear on your home patch" or "why you had to leave after 10 minutes to do the shopping." Many of the most appropriate 'additional' details for your sighting will be covered in the first part of the online or printed form e.g. weather, distance from bird, other species present, etc. The main thing is to set out clearly why you thought your bird ***was*** a certain species. Once you've written your description, it may be a good idea to delay finalising it - another sighting may be possible before the bird leaves the area. In the case of the Maidens bird, one fairly useful piece of extra information was later obtained - the call. Although this sound - a short, whistled "*kleee-ih*" with the last part often ***just*** audible - usually stands out clearly from European Golden Plover, the main difficulty facing many birders is just how to transcribe it (don't mention sonograms please). It's still helpful to place your impression of the call on record though.

Photographs of the Maidens bird were later obtained, all adding to the complete picture (Plates 137–139). It was good that many observers were lucky enough to see the bird before it left. This can provide useful corroboration. So, now ***you*** have to decide - what do I do when I find my next rarity? It's your call of course but, can I encourage you to give it some thought - if nothing else, you'll make your local recorder's job a whole lot easier!

Angus Hogg, Ayrshire

Starling eggs on a lawn

J. SAVORY

On 21 May 2014, a neighbour of mine in West Linton, Borders, found three Starling eggs (Plate 140) on her lawn. They were warm to the touch and were in separate positions where part of a flock of about 30 adult and juvenile Starlings had been foraging a short time before. She had not seen them before the flock appeared. A similar flock returned to the lawn the following day but there were no more eggs. On both days, my neighbour saw one or more adult Starlings carrying sticks trying to enter two vertical vents in the wall of the next-door house very close to her lawn, presumably to nest there. Subsequently, she told me she had seen a fledged Starling chick emerging from one of those vents at the end of June. According to the RSPB website, from the start of incubation to fledging of Starling chicks takes about 34 days, so the egg(s) in that vent, obviously a second clutch, must have been laid about the same time as the three eggs on the lawn (on 21 May). At first we assumed the eggs had been laid on the lawn as they appeared while adult Starlings were on the lawn and were not there beforehand. They were warm and, if laid on the ground, must have been laid by three different birds at about the same time because it is not possible for one bird to lay more than one egg in a day. Unfortunately, we did not inspect the two vents closely or break open the eggs to see if embryo development had commenced.

Plate 140. Three Starling eggs found on a West Linton lawn on 21 May 2014. © *J. Savory*

However there is another possible reason for the presence of these eggs. According to Feare (1984, 1991), intraspecific nest parasitism (or "egg dumping" as it is also called) is common in Starlings, with up to a third of first clutches having been found with eggs laid by parasitic females. Feare (1984) also reported that a sample of 58 Starling eggs found on the ground, which are "generally attributed to accidental laying by females who are 'taken short' before they can get back to their nests", had all been laid in nest boxes but subsequently removed, and "since Starlings have been occasionally seen carrying eggs in their bills it is most probable that all of these eggs had been removed from the nests by Starlings". A question then is, as our eggs were likely to be intended for a second clutch, is the incidence of egg dumping by Starlings the same or greater with second clutches than with first ones?

In the case of the eggs on my neighbour's lawn, I think it is possible they were indeed laid there, and not ones ejected after dumping, especially as only the upper vent showed evidence (staining) of nest site occupancy.

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Email: jandesavory@hotmail.com

Site fidelity of Great Northern Diver with a deformed bill

D.C. JARDINE & I.A. FISHER

When the ferry is not around, the pier at Scalasaig, Colonsay, Argyll, is an excellent spot for close viewing of Great Northern Divers in spring. Up to five birds feed in and around the pier and provide great opportunities for photography; the range is such that it is possible to identify their prey from the images - a perfect site for a small study on the diet of this species. On 18–19 May 2014, while photographing divers, IAF found a bird with a broken lower mandible which was feeding particularly close inshore (Plates 141 & 142). On plumage, this bird was aged as an adult, but it was not possible to tell whether this deformity was the result of a genetic defect, present since the bird was young, or whether it was the result of an injury, which had led to the particularly tame nature of this individual. The bill appeared to be callused, with no evidence of a recent injury.

Bill deformities are unusual in wild birds; the BTO estimate that fewer than one in 200 adult birds are believed to be affected (www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/about/background/projects/bgbw). Reporting rates are higher amongst garden birds and in passerines than in other groups and in the wider countryside.

On 4 April 2015, while waiting for the ferry on Colonsay, DCJ noted a diver feeding close inshore and decided to take a few snaps (Plate 143), which on closer scrutiny proved it to be the same bird with the deformed bill. Its deformity clearly has not influenced its feeding ability and survival.

Plate 141. Great Northern Diver, Scalasaig, Colonsay, Argyll, 19 May 2014. © *Ian A. Fisher*

Plate 142. Great Northern Diver, Scalasaig, Colonsay, Argyll, 19 May 2014. © *Ian A. Fisher*

Plate 143. Great Northern Diver, Scalasaig, Colonsay, Argyll, 4 April 2015. © *David C. Jardine*

Suddaby (2010) noted there is little published evidence of winter site fidelity in Great Northern Divers, and was only able to find evidence from a single leucistic individual which returned for at least 19 successive winters to the same bay in Shetland (Pennington *et al*. 2004). A characteristic leucistic Great Northern Diver was also recorded in Loch Ewe, Wester Ross, Highland, in February 1999, February 2001 and February 2008 (Wells & Wightman 2014).

The distinctive appearance of this individual provides further evidence of site fidelity of this species outside the breeding season.

David C. Jardine, The Old Schoolhouse, 26 Kilmartin, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8RN

Ian A. Fisher, 29 Blaketon, Seghill, Cramlington, Northumberland NE23 7EE

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Plate 144. Typical Yew habitat & seeds (**Plate 145. inset;** seed sprig), Dalzell Woodlands, Motherwell, 2015. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

Nuthatch numbers soar at Dalzell

J. MAXWELL

With Nuthatches continuing to appear in new areas all over Scotland, the colony at Dalzell Woodlands, Motherwell, has currently increased by 50%. Last year eight pairs nested successfully in the 32 hectares of parkland, but in this last week (11 April) four new pairs have been found establishing nest sites. These include the male bird in Plate 146 which is nesting in an old woodpecker hole - it is carrying Scots Pine flakes which are used for lining the nest. Significantly, this is the only bird to return to the estate to breed after being ringed there as a chick, since the species first arrived in 2005. It has only been possible to ring broods where a pair has used one of the several plastic bat-boxes, usually one brood each year. Until now, all the fledglings have dispersed elsewhere - the only further sighting being one at Blairgowrie.

I think the main reason for the exceptional density of this population in the Clyde area is down to the huge numbers of Yew trees in the estate. All through the year the Nuthatches are constantly feeding on the little brown seeds just under the fronds (Plate 145). These are carried to a suitably grooved tree nearby to be hammered and eaten, or cached for future use. Nearly all the nest sites are in Oak, in this area an abundant tree, which by its nature seems to supply endless suitable holes for nesting. At this moment the woodland is echoing with their ringing calls as, due to the numbers, each male has several neighbours within earshot.

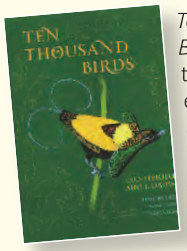
Jimmy Maxwell

Plate 146. Ringed Nuthatch on new territory, Dalzell Woodlands, Motherwell, 2015. © *Lang Stewart*

BOOK REVIEWS

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

Ten Thousand Birds - Ornithology Since Darwin. Tim R. Birkhead, Jo Wimpenny & Bob Montgomerie, 2015. Princeton University Press, ISBN 9780691151977, hardback, 524 pages, £29.95.

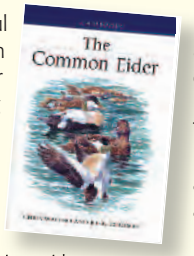


Ten Thousand Birds provides a thoroughly engaging and authoritative history of modern ornithology, tracing how the study of birds has been shaped by a succession of visionary and often-controversial personalities and by the unique social and scientific contexts in which these extraordinary individuals worked. This beautifully illustrated book opens in the middle of the nineteenth century when ornithology was a museum-based discipline focused almost exclusively on the anatomy, taxonomy, and classification of dead birds.

The authors describe how, in the early 1900s, pioneering individuals such as Erwin Stresemann, Ernst Mayr, and Julian Huxley recognized the importance of studying live birds in the field, and how this shift thrust ornithology into the mainstream of the biological sciences. It tells the stories of eccentrics like Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, a pathological liar who stole specimens from museums and quite likely murdered his wife, and describes the breathtaking insights and discoveries of ambitious and influential figures such as David Lack, Niko Tinbergen, Robert MacArthur, and others who through their studies of birds transformed entire fields of biology. The book brings the history of modern ornithology vividly to life through the work and achievements of those who advanced the field. Drawing on a wealth of archival material and in-depth interviews, this fascinating book reveals how research on birds has contributed more to our understanding of animal biology than the study of just about any other group of organisms.

Mike Thornton

The Common Eider. Chris Waltho and John Coulson, 2015. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-25322-8, hardback, 352 pages, £50.00



Another beautiful monograph from the iconic Poyser stable, dealing with a species familiar to Scottish birders. The Eider is almost unique in its relationship with man who has long exploited its insulating down, and I learned a new fact on the first page of the introduction - that 'duvet' is part of the French name for Eider!

This is an in-depth and authoritative account of a well-studied species (really a seabird in all but name) across its circumpolar range. Chapters on key features, distribution, movements and numbers, food and fitness are followed by six chapters on various aspects of breeding. Survival and conservation are discussed later, with several appendices. A final fascinating chapter on the comparison of the four eider species has been added by a Russian biologist.

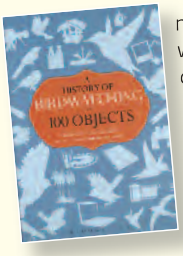
We tend to think that Britain and Ireland have a large number of Eiders, but we only host a tiny proportion of the global population. Much of the research detailed in this book has been made in the Firth of Clyde and Northumberland but there is an enormous amount of factual information from elsewhere in the bird's range. The breadth of the subject matter is indicated by the inclusion of more than 500 citations. Even so, the authors are obliged to steer the reader towards sources of topics only covered superficially in this work. If I have any criticisms at all, it is the relative lack of maps. When I searched for a map of the Eider's range, I eventually found a rather small and indistinct map in the final chapter.

This is a specialised book written by experts (the lead author being a former president of the SOC) and not for the faint-hearted. However, I would fully recommend it to those who wish to find more about a species that we almost disregard daily during our coastal birding.

Norman Elkins

A History of Birdwatching in 100 Objects. David Callahan, 2014. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, ISBN 9781408186183, hardback, 222 pages, £20.00.

In recent years there have been many books about the history of ornithology, but this one takes a rather novel approach by dealing with the gadgets, inventions and



new technology which the author considers to have been milestones in the study of birds. Each account of the chosen 100 items contains about 500 words on a double-page spread and includes a photograph. Whilst agreeing with most of the chosen objects, it is not surprising that I personally would have made some different choices. Having said that, it is a very attractive format and would make an interesting addition to any birder's library and a reminder of how far birdwatching has come, especially in the last 60 years.

David Clugston

Birds and Climate Change: Impacts and Conservation Responses. James Pearce-Higgins & Rhys E. Green, 2014. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, ISBN 978-0-521-13219-0 (paperback); 978-0-521-11428-8 (hardback), 467 pages, paperback £40; hardback £75.

This is the most comprehensive and up-to-date book on birds and climate change so far. The authors are two ornithologists of repute whose grasp of the intricacies of the impacts of climate change on birds, plus the associated conservation challenges, makes this a fascinating, if long and sometimes disturbing, text.

The book begins with a critical review of global and regional climate change, followed by two parts. The first discusses how climate change impacts on birds, such as the timing of seasonal events and the relationships between birds and their environment. The second deals with conservation responses and how potential future impacts can be assessed. Conservation itself must also change and the most important priorities and policies are examined. The topical issue of climate change mitigation is discussed including the threat posed by wind turbines, the mortality from which is quantified for various countries.

Coverage is truly global, with a reference section of 68 pages comprising more than 1500 citations. While some tables and figures are complex, I found this to be an excellent but specialised work, embracing every aspect of the subject and encompassing an extensive range of examples. It should become standard reading both for bird conservationists and decision makers.

Norman Elkins

The Birds of the Iberian Peninsula. Eduardo de Juana and Ernest Garcia, 2015. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-2480-2, hardback, 688 pages, £60.00

Those of us who have watched birds from the Pyrenees to the Strait of Gibraltar will appreciate this first fully English-language avifauna to cover the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. The dust jacket illustrates the Spanish Imperial Eagle, Black-eared Wheatear and Great Bustard, whetting one's appetite for what goes between. The subject matter covers not only the two mainland countries, but also the Balearic Islands and both Andorra and Gibraltar. The authors are eminent ornithologists native to the region.

Introductory chapters include geography, climate, habitats and a fascinating section on the Iberian avifauna as a whole. This is followed by the heart of the book - accounts of every species recorded in the area, including vagrants and endemic subspecies. The texts display contemporary maps, graphs and tables where appropriate, and describe breeding and wintering populations, their trends, distribution and conservation. Migration sections include results from ringing and tracking devices; conversant as we are of British birds' travels, it is refreshing to learn where Iberian birds go. There is a section of stunning colour photographs, 16 of which illustrate typical habitats and a further 48 of the more iconic Iberian species.

The sheer diversity of the region entailed a long gestation period for this book but the result was well worth waiting for. The reference section alone runs to 60 pages of almost 2000 citations. The small font, no doubt necessary to encompass the richness of the material within a manageable book, may be considered a shortcoming. This is only a minor problem and certainly does not detract from an authoritative and absorbing work. I can recommend it to all those who, like me, yearn for the next visit although, at nearly 2 kg, it's not a book to pack in your hold baggage!

Norman Elkins

The Faroese Bird Migration Atlas. Sjúður Hammer, Jesper J Madsen, Jens-Kjeld Jensen, Kjeld T. Pedersen, Dorete Bloch og Kasper Thorup, 2014. Faroe University Press, Tóshavn, ISBN 978-99918-65-52-2, paperback, 264 pages, £27 from Amazon.

In the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, nestled halfway between Iceland, Scotland and Norway lie the magnificent Faroe Islands. Those of us who have visited will know what a fascinating place it is culturally, geologically and ornithologically.

This book will appeal to those interested in atlases and the ornithology of the North Atlantic and is a much needed addition to fill the gap between Scotland and Iceland.

The 90 species of birds each have their own chapter with a fact file of statistics of ringing and recoveries. There are numerous comprehensive distribution maps showing ringing and recovery sites, not just of the Faroes but covering Western Europe too.

There is a comprehensive bibliography and an appendix of Faroese ringing and recovery data of nearly 100,000 birds from 1912 to 2009. An English index is also useful.

Written mostly in Danish, this is not a light read; however, there are English summaries for each species of bird and for each fact file, map and diagram, of which there are many.

Karen Bidgood

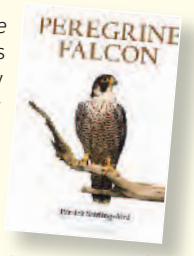
Tales of Remarkable Birds. Dominic Couzens, 2015. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 9781408190234, hardback, 224 pages, £19.99.

Tales of Remarkable Birds is just that. This book covers a vast range of interesting and bizarre behaviour throughout the bird world. Many aspects may be familiar, but the species not, or *vice versa*, depending on the reader. As stated in the introduction, this book is intended as a taster which whets the appetite of the reader and leaves them wanting to learn more. Indeed, I often found myself looking up the bird in question on the internet after reading its behavioural account. This book covers all seven continents plus a section on islands and the author has handpicked five species from each area to illustrate a particular aspect of behaviour often associated with that region. All in all 32 different behaviours displayed by 40 species are detailed in this book, with each account being accompanied by stunning photographs. Many species may be familiar, such as the Wren and Oystercatcher, but these are counterbalanced with less-well-known species such as Swallow-tailed Gull and Varied Sittella.

This is another enjoyable book written by Dominic Couzens who always finds a way of getting facts across in an entertaining and informative fashion. It's certainly a book worth purchasing and enjoying in the garden on our (hopefully) long sunshine-filled summer days.

Hayley Anne Douglas

Peregrine Falcon. Patrick Stirling-Aird, 2015. Bloomsbury Publishing, London, ISBN 978-147291-866-6, paperback, 128 pages, £12.99.



The Peregrine Falcon was previously published by New Holland in 2013 and has now been republished by Bloomsbury in paperback. The classification and facts about the falcon family is discussed along with the Peregrine distribution worldwide. Behaviour, ecology and interaction with humans are all comprehensively covered and accompanied by fabulous photos. The previous review can be found in *Scottish Birds* 33(3), September 2013.

Karen Bidgood

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

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

North Ronaldsay

So 2014 is over and we'll try not to dwell too much on last year but it must be said, we finished things off in some style. Last time we 'rounded things up' we boasted of an already fantastic birding year, especially for rarities, but there was one more twist to come when on 23 October hurricane Gonzalo delivered us Orkney's first Black-billed Cuckoo and third Grey-cheeked Thrush - both on the same magical day. That leaves just one thing left to do - to shamelessly plug our own 'round up' in the form of our 2014 Bird Report, which has been worked on through the winter and is soon to be finished and dispatched to 'friends of NRBO' in May/June. It features the usual summary of the year's sightings, over 60 quality photographs (most of which have never been seen before including a belter of June's Scops Owl on the front cover!), a full ringing report, a study into the island's Fulmar population, gripping rarity articles and much more and can also be ordered directly from the observatory.

Plate 147. Migrants' view of Holland House gardens, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, July 2007. © *Alison Duncan*

Moving forward into this, the new term. Kevin, Alison, Mark and Fleur are all still in-situ, but there have been some changes. Stephen Rutt joined us as Volunteer in early-March and plans to be here until the end of June, although the infectious nature of NRBO life and lure of Storm Petrel ringing in summer already has him threatening to stay longer! A literature student and keen writer beginning a masters in September - for his take on the North Ronaldsay experience stephenrutt.blogspot.co.uk is well worth a read. Sara Raj Pant has also just arrived, keen to strengthen her birding knowledge and ringing skills before partaking in a PhD and with two more volunteers to come by mid-April, we'll have another strong team in place as the guest house becomes busier and spring progresses.

The biggest winter development has been the completion of the new shop and display in the area which was once the staff room. Shelving, freezer and fridge space and a significant expansion in available products now means we're fully equipped to serve both islanders and observatory guests using the hostel or camping facilities in much the same way as any modern day convenience store. Other recent practical jobs ticked-off include finishing touches and in-built stiles to T5 - the double-dyke trap on the west coast, half a re-wire of T1 after winter damage and much repair of the sheep pund and stone dykes which surround the observatorie's croft fields.

In terms of the birding, 2015 has started off a little slowly (but we can't really complain after last year) although a long-staying Green-winged Teal and a good showing of Glaucous and Iceland Gulls have been notable and there's been good variety among the wintering Geese with both Tundra Bean and Greenland White-fronts regularly recorded. Unfavourable conditions for migrants in March resulted in no real falls of Thrushes or Robins as has been the case recently,

but a record breaking influx of Stonechats was nice to see. Bird of the year so far has been the female Goshawk present from 27 to 29 March, but as we moved into April highlights continued to be distinctly raptor themed with a good run of Sparrowhawks caught and ringed at the Holland House gardens ringing site and there was a mad scramble to follow an immature White-tailed Eagle around the island on 10th.

We're now getting to the time when North Ronaldsay is at its best and anything can happened or could turn up as May draws closer and bookings for the main spring period are coming in fast. Accommodation information and all the latest sightings, details on 'friends' membership etc can be found at www.nrbo.co.uk or you can contact us directly on 01857 633200 or alison@nrbo.prestel.co.uk. You can also follow us on Twitter and Facebook for sightings and news.

Mark Warren

Fair Isle

After the galloping start to spring 2014, it's fair to say that the first part of 2015 has been quieter bird-wise. A selection of unusual overwintering species (including Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Bean Goose) added a little to the ornithological interest and were joined by Fair Isle's sixth Goshawk (presumably the same individual that visited North Ronaldsay), 10th Mute Swan and a cracking breeding-plumaged Slavonian Grebe, but with generally persistent westerly winds, spring migration has been slow so far. On the plus side, that's been good for habitat and trap work, whilst it also surely means there are a deluge of birds just waiting to come through…

Plate 149. Goshawk, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 27th–29th March 2015. © *Stephen Rutt*

We're expecting a busy year for monitoring work, with a national seabird census looming and over 60,000 pairs of seabirds to count. Although a large part of this is in our work programme anyway as one of JNCC's key sites for the Seabird Monitoring Programme, it will also present a few challenges (counting the west coast Tysties or working out how many Storm Petrels we have for example), but that's all part of the fun. We're all just hoping that the breeding season is as productive as the last one, with many species recording their best productivity for many years.

Although seabird monitoring has traditionally been a large part of the work at FIBO, there are other tasks that are a somewhat more modern invention and the updating of the FIBO website over recent months is one of those. Thankfully, we have a team of Directors who are willing to take on some of these more onerous tasks and as a result the new website www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk is now coming together as what will hopefully become not just the first port of call for planning visits to Fair Isle and keeping up to date with sightings, but also a historical archive, birding resource and an online shop. If you'd like to

Plate 148. Slavonian Grebe, Fair Isle, Shetland, April 2015. © *David Parnaby*

Plate 150. Assistant Warden, Ciaran Hatsell, at work on Fair Isle, April 2015. © *David Parnaby*

contribute photographs to the website then please get in touch with Ian Andrews at ijandrews@live.com. We're after pictures, modern or historical, of birds, people, scenery - anything to do with Fair Isle that you think is of interest really! In particular, we are interested in images of Subalpine Warblers (particularly any that show the tail pattern) and Dippers taken on the island, as part of reviews of the records of these species. Please send images as uncropped hi-res files, labelled as fully as possible (place, date, photographer and birds or people pictured). Ian is also overseeing the 2014 FIBO Annual Report and so if you have any photos from 2014 that may be of interest (birds, people or scenery) please send them to the above address.

The Obs guesthouse opened officially for the 2015 season on 20 April and it looks set to be another busy year for visitors, although there are still spaces outside the peak seasons. Bookings have also opened now for 2016, so get in touch if you'd like to plan a visit.

David Parnaby

Isle of May

As stated in our last round-up, 2014 marked the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Observatory, and that as part of our promotion of the Obs and its work in the future, a new logo had been designed. There has never been an 'official' logo for the Observatory, though a line drawing of the Low Light by Derek Robertson has been regularly used for T-shirts, letterheads and in recent annual reports etc. We are particularly grateful to Harry Scott (Pica Design) who created the new image. Sharp-eyed readers will have noticed its first public appearance on the 'Young Birders Training Course 2015' advert in the last issue.

The Bluethroat was chosen as it is an eye-catching migrant which has a special connection with the island. On 14 May 1985, a fall occurred which included 100 Bluethroats - still the largest day count for a site in Britain (omitted in *BS3*, but see Murray, R.D. 1987. Bluethroats in Scotland during 1985. *Scottish Birds* 14: 168–174, and SBR 1985). The Isle of May continues to be one of the most reliable places to see this species, with only two blank years (1967 & 2006) in the last 50, and over 460 recorded.

Slightly too late to be a contender for the logo image, but still generating a huge amount of interest was the appearance of a Red Grouse on the island on 5 April - see pages 186–187 for an account of this remarkable record.

Plate 151. The new patio outside the Observatory, Isle of May, 2015. © *Mark Oksien*

The improvement of the facilities at the Low Light continues. This spring saw the installation of new concrete plinths and water tanks which will provide greater storage capacity and help ensure improved water availability throughout the year - providing, of course, that we get a wee drop of rain!

Slabs were also laid in the patio area at the back door, but further rock excavations are required to extend the slabs further down the pathway.

Plate 152. The new water storage tanks outside the Observatory, Isle of May, 2015. © *Mark Oksien*

Further maintenance and improvements are planned and will be phased in over the coming years, not least addressing problems with the porosity of the south wall of the original building and the re-slating of the roof.

It is also hoped that the next year will see the start of a rolling programme to rebuild/repair the four Heligoland traps.

Saturday 4 July sees the start of the second SOC-IoMBOT 'Young Birders Training Course'. Thirty applications were received, and six participants have been chosen - more about this next time.

Stuart Rivers & Mark Oksien

Plate 153. Little Egrets, Wigtown Bay, Dumfries & Galloway, 2014. © *Gavin Chambers*

Little Egrets in Dumfries & Galloway

P.N. Collin

Dumfries & Galloway is the most southerly district in Scotland having an attractive mix of habitats supporting both upland species: Golden Eagle, Merlin, Hen Harrier, occasional Dotterel and also a range of southern species - Lesser Whitethroat, Nightjar, Willow Tit and now Little Egrets.

The first record of Little Egret is of a dead bird found on 28 April 1968 in a field near Mochrum, followed by a single bird, present between 19 April and 6 May 1970, not far away at the Isle of Whithorn, which later moved to Garlieston. Significant numbers started appearing in southern England in 1989, but it was still on the BBRC rarities list until 1991. Little Egrets first bred in the UK in Dorset in 1996, spreading north to breed in Cheshire by 2001 (Norman 2008), Nottinghamshire in 2013 (BBC news website) and Lancashire in 2014 (Steve White pers. comm.).

Little Egrets didn't start appearing regularly in Dumfries & Galloway until 1991, when one was present at Caerlaverock WWT in November, and then the same or a different bird was at Rockcliffe in December and later at Glencaple on the River Nith. Presumably the same bird stayed on into 1992. The outer Nith estuary and Caerlaverock became a regular area, with a single for much of 1993 and two reported in July of that year. Three were reported overflying Caerlaverock in May 1995. By 1996 reports were becoming widespread from Dumfries along the Solway to Drummore, near the Mull of Galloway. It should be borne in mind that this is a large region with few birdwatchers and it has many little coves and estuaries which can go unchecked for months, therefore the numbers reported may well under-represent the true figures.

By 1996 there was no doubt numbers were beginning to escalate: the favoured habitat is estuarine creeks preferably with saltmarsh, very few records have come from inland sites. Currently, the favoured sites are the top end (north end) of Luce Bay where both the Piltalton Burn and the Waters of Luce spill into the Bay; Wigtown Bay with the estuaries of the River Cree and the River Bladnoch (the extensive saltings here provide extensive

foraging and birds can easily be lost from sight in the deep creeks and runnels); Kirkcudbright Bay with extensive mudflats and surrounding reedbeds along the River Dee (the site of the breeding Spoonbill in 2009) and up to 10 egrets have been recorded here in recent years, with regular sightings also in Auchencairn Bay, Rough Firth and at Caerlaverock.

It is not entirely clear how much birds interchange between sites; for the past few winters there have been three to five individuals at Luce Bay and five to six at Wigtown Bay, with no real appreciation if these are the same birds or completely separate. It has also become increasingly clear how difficult these birds are to count - you would image a largish, white bird which when on view is blindingly obvious would pose no problems, but their penchant for feeding in deep creeks means they disappear for long periods of time. This, combined with their nimble flight of foot, means keeping track of numbers is not as easy as first thought. This came to light recently when Angus Murray asked about peak counts in Dumfries & Galloway, which up until 2014 was of 10 at Kirkcudbright (2012) and 12 at Creetown (Wigtown Bay in 2014).

A review of records on Birdtrack in November–December 2014 produced 10 at Wigtown Bay, four at Auchencairn, three at the Browwell/Lantonside area of the inner Solway and six at Piltalton, Luce Bay. With increasing numbers apparent on WeBS counts around Wigtown Bay, I set out in January 2015 to see if I could nail the numbers present in Wigtown Bay. Arriving at the Wigtown hide, six egrets were on view for the first 20 minutes or so, but it became obvious that it was in fact different birds bobbing about and after an hour or so I settled for a total of 12. I decided to wait to see if there would be any roosting activity and sure enough birds headed-off inland in a set direction, with an additional two flying past from the Crook of Baldoon. Shortly after this the roost was located and 14 birds were recorded on a couple of nights. Paul Tarling also now monitors the roost and recorded 14 going in at night, but one morning had 17 leaving, and a nearby resident reported (an unconfirmed) 23 going to roost one evening in late January 2015. At the same time five continued to be seen at Luce Bay, and I now think these birds are a separate group.

A conservative estimate of numbers of Little Egrets along the north side of the Solway in January 2015 would be 30–40 birds.

Plate 154. Little Egret, Wigtown Bay, Dumfries & Galloway, 2014. © *Gavin Chambers*

In the early days, numbers increased with spring overshoots arriving in April–May and additional arrivals in the autumn. By 2009 birds were overwintering and numbers declined during the summer (presumably as birds returned to breeding grounds further south) with virtually no birds being reported during the breeding season.

Have they bred? That's the big question. Two birds were seen playing with sticks on the foreshore at Carsluith, Wigtown Bay in 2013, three birds were near an inland heronry in June 2014 and five birds, considered to be a pair with three young, appeared at Caerlaverock on 8 June 2014. Where had this 'family' come from? They could, for instance, have easily slipped across the Solway from Cumbria. As I write (May 2015), we have birds exhibiting breeding behaviour - playing with sticks - but nothing is confirmed as yet, and we wait with bated breath.

An indication of the regularity of Little Egrets today is that for the most recently published Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report (2013), 229 records were received, 108 of these from the most heavily birded coastal site, Caerlaverock. Little Egrets are now a regular sight and many go unreported. If you are looking for egrets in Dumfries & Galloway, the best time is between August and April at the larger intertidal bays of the Solway Firth: Wigtown Bay, Kircudbright Bay, the very north end of Luce Bay (by Glen Luce golf club) and Caerlaverock, but you might happen upon one on any stretch of sheltered coastline.

The best site on Wigtown Bay is probably from the hide just below Wigtown at the harbour where the River Bladnoch meets the Bay. The hide overlooks a small managed wetland and the extensive merse. Half a dozen egrets can regularly be seen from this location. Birds can usually be seen from the A75 lay-by just to the south of Creetown (you can actually see them while driving along the A75, but I don't recommend this style of birding unless someone else is at the wheel). The Crook of Baldoon RSPB reserve at Wigtown Bay regularly has two to six birds on view. Numbers are likely to continue to increase exponentially along the Solway coast in coming years. The Solway supports some of the most extensive saltmarsh habitats in Scotland, along with many sheltered muddy bays and intertidal creeks making the region a brilliant place not just for Little Egrets but for thousands of wintering geese and it is internationally important for wintering waders.

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Mark Holling, Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, comments: "Up until the 2014 breeding season there had been no breeding by Little Egrets reported in Scotland, and these records are the closest yet to that first, eagerly anticipated, record. The early date (8 June) when the juveniles were seen at Caerlaverock does suggest local breeding, but we can't be sure about exactly where the birds may have nested. However, there has been no reported breeding in north Cumbria close to the Solway to date (May 2015) but egrets were reported associating with herons at a heronry there last year and so it seems likely that breeding will occur there soon, perhaps even this year (Stephen Westerberg, Cumbria county recorder, pers. comm.). Up until 2013, the nearest egret colony on the west side of England has been on the south side of the Lake District, in Cumbria, but breeding only commenced there in 2012 (Holling et al. *2014). On the east coast of England, a further range expansion also occurred in 2014 when a pair bred for the first time in Northumberland (Tim Dean, Northumberland county recorder, pers. comm.). It is reasonable to suppose that breeding in Scotland will be proved very soon, and Dumfries & Galloway is the most likely location, but any area in southern Scotland where there are heronries close to either saltmarshes, tidal pools or large areas of freshwater (including the lower stretches of rivers) could be candidate areas."*

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Holling, M. and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2014. Rare breeding birds in the United Kingdom in 2012. *British Birds* 107: 504–560.

Plate 155. Buff-breasted Sandpiper (juvenile), Ruaig, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, October 2008. © *Ross Ahmed*

Vagrant Nearctic waders on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll

J.M. Bowler

Tiree is the outermost of the Inner Hebrides, lying 4 km SW of Coll and 55 km SE of Barra in the Outer Hebrides. It is approximately 20 km long and 5 km wide, with a surface area of 78.34 km² (Figure 1). The island is rather flat and low-lying, with three isolated hills rising to 141 m. It is a fertile island, with a largely intact cattle- and sheep-based crofting agriculture, which has created a rich mosaic of natural and semi-natural grasslands. Together with abundant wetlands, shallow lochs and seaweed-rich shores, these habitats have long been known to support nationally and internationally important numbers of breeding birds, notably Corncrakes and wet grassland waders (e.g. Stroud 1989, Bowler & Hunter 2007), as well as nationally and internationally important numbers of wintering wildfowl and waders (e.g. Bowler *et al.* 2008) including species such as Turnstone, Purple Sandpiper and Sanderling arriving from Nearctic breeding areas. More recently, the importance of Tiree as a migratory staging point has become better known, particularly in spring for waders breeding in Iceland, Greenland and NE Arctic Canada (e.g. Bowler 2013). With increasing coverage by visiting and resident birders alike, especially at migration times, the Tiree bird list reached 300 species by 2015 and the island has gained an increasing reputation as a hotspot to find scarce and rare migrants, including an annual autumn influx of vagrant Nearctic waders.

Methods

A thorough review of all records of vagrant Nearctic waders on Tiree up to the end of 2006, including those as yet unpublished, contributed to *The Birds of Tiree and Coll* (Bowler & Hunter 2007). More-recent records have been catalogued monthly by the author, along with all other bird records from the island and forwarded to the Argyll Bird Club and to the relevant rarities committees (see relevant Argyll Bird Reports). Only records that have been accepted by relevant rarities committees have been included in the totals, although interesting earlier unpublished records are mentioned where appropriate. Arrival dates were taken to be the first date on which an individual bird was seen and individuals within groups were treated

Figure 1. Map of Tiree showing the locations mentioned in the text.

separately because group size sometimes increased during their stay. Individual American Golden Plovers were possible to track around the island based on plumage characteristics, but this was not possible for other species, particularly Pectoral Sandpiper, so in all cases, numbers of individuals concerned each year followed the ruling of the appropriate rarities committee, going with maximum numbers where more than one bird was thought to be present or where a range was given for larger groups.

Results

The first vagrant Nearctic wader to be recorded on Tiree was an unidentified dowitcher found at Loch a' Phuill by Craigie Tait on 6–8 October 1969. There were no further records until Roger Broad found two juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers at An Fhaodhail on 24–25 October 1983 and M. Hutcheson found a juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper at Gott Bay on 9 September 1989. Apart from a record of a wandering adult Wilson's Phalarope in August 1992, which was never formally submitted (Andy Knight pers. comm.), there was only one further record in the 1990s, that of two juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpipers near Hough on 6–13 September 1996 found by Mark Williamson. Steve Votier and Stuart Bearhop found Tiree's, and indeed Argyll's, first American Golden Plover, a juvenile at Greenhill on 4–9 October 2001, but it was not until 2004 that the island's potential for vagrant Nearctic waders was truly realised. In that year, two Buff-breasted Sandpipers, a Pectoral Sandpiper and an American Golden Plover were all recorded, including Tiree's first spring record of Buff-breasted Sandpiper (Bowler 2009a). Coverage of the island has subsequently increased involving regular visits by dedicated birders at migration times, including annual trips by Jim Dickson and Keith Gillon. As a result, numbers of records have increased further (see Table 1) and since 2007 more than seven individuals of four to six species have been recorded annually, with a peak of 17 individuals of five species in 2009.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Pectoral Sandpiper were the most numerous species recorded with respective totals of 45 and 43 individuals to date (Table 1). Buff-breasted Sandpiper occurred more frequently in groups, with a peak flock size of six in September 2007, when a separate group of two birds was also present at the same time (Bowler 2009b) and with six other groups of two birds and two of three birds. Pectoral Sandpipers have usually occurred singly, but there were three records of two birds together

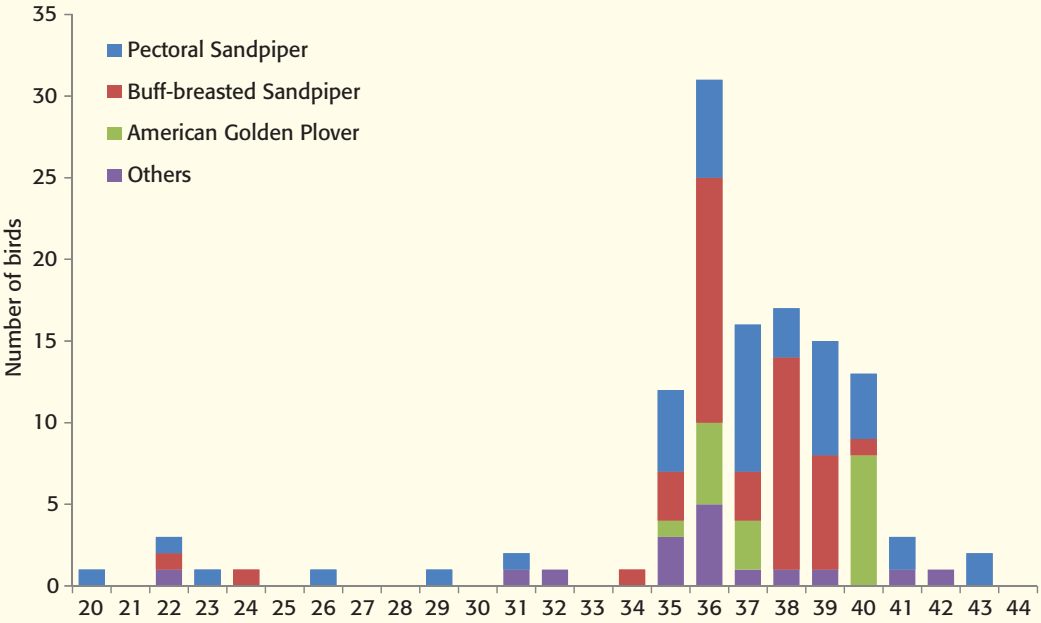

Figure 2. Arrivals of vagrant Nearctic waders recorded on Tiree by week (week 20 = 14-20 May, week 43 = 22-28 October).

and three records of three birds together. American Golden Plover was the third most numerous species recorded (17 birds), whilst there were five individuals or fewer of each of the remaining six species.

Most birds arrived in autumn, as would be expected, starting at the end of August (week 35) with peak arrivals in early to mid-September and numbers dropped off quickly in early October (Figure 2). Peak arrivals occurred in week 36 (3–9 September) accounting for 25.6% of all birds found. The latest arrival date was 24 October for two Pectoral Sandpipers in 1983, although given much lower coverage at the time, these birds could have arrived earlier than this. Indeed, all other autumn arrivals of Pectoral Sandpipers were before 11 October and there were no arrivals of Buff-breasted Sandpipers after 4 October. American Golden Plovers arrived in two distinct periods with nine appearing between 29 August and 14 September followed by a two-week blank gap and then eight appeared in the first week of October. The former group consisted mostly of adults (six) and a second-calendar-year bird plus two juveniles, whilst the latter group consisted of four each of adults and juveniles. The only records of a dowitcher and of Lesser Yellowlegs were in October (on 6 October 1969 and 15 October 2011 respectively), whilst the only Spotted Sandpiper record was on 31 August 2009. There were also records of adult White-rumped Sandpipers in the first week of August

Table 1. Numbers of vagrant Nearctic waders recorded on Tiree to 2014.

Species	<2004	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Tot
American Golden Plover	1	1	0	1	1	3	3	0	1	1	4	1	**17**
Baird's Sandpiper	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	**4**
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	3	2	5	1	9	5	5	7	2	2	2	2	**45**
Pectoral Sandpiper	5	1	0	2	1	2	7	6	5	8	3	3	**43**
Semipalmated Sandpiper	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	**5**
White-rumped Sandpiper	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	**4**
Lesser Yellowlegs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	**1**
Spotted Sandpiper	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Dowitcher sp.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**1**
Total	**12**	**4**	**5**	**4**	**12**	**10**	**17**	**13**	**12**	**13**	**12**	**7**	**121**






2011 and 2012. As these occurred on very similar dates and at the same location (Gott Bay) in consecutive years, they could well refer to a returning individual. In addition, it is conceivable that the adult bird that arrived on 31 August 2014 at Gott Bay was also the same individual.

There was a total of seven (5.8%) spring records involving four Pectoral Sandpipers, two Buff-breasted Sandpipers and a Baird's Sandpiper between 14 May and 29 June and an unusual mid-summer record of an apparently juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper on 17 July 1997.

Vagrant Nearctic waders were found all over the island, but there were obvious hot-spots including Loch a' Phuill, Tiree's largest freshwater body, and adjacent grazed machairs in the south-west of the island, which accounted for almost half of the Buff-breasted Sandpipers and 30% of the Pectoral Sandpipers. The west coast machair at Sandaig to Greenhill, with its Golden Plover flocks, accounted for 75% of the American Golden Plovers, whilst the 5 km-long expanse of sand at Gott Bay accounted for all but one each of the Semipalmated Sandpipers and White-rumped Sandpipers.

Discussion

The high number of Buff-breasted Sandpipers recorded on Tiree is notable in a Scottish context, with only the Outer Hebrides having more records over the same period in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007, www.western-isles-wildlife.com). However, Tiree has less than 3% the surface area of those islands and is smaller than Benbecula alone. The concentration of Buff-breasted Sandpiper records on Tiree is therefore all the more remarkable and currently makes the island the best single location in Scotland to find this species. The peak arrival of Buff-breasted Sandpipers in September on Tiree neatly fits the typical arrival pattern in Scotland, as do the two spring records, with some 11% of Scottish records to 2004 occurring in May–June (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The sharp increase in records in 2004–14 was also mirrored on the Outer Hebrides where 4–14 birds were recorded annually (www.western-isles-wildlife.com), compared to just 35 records previously, suggesting that the migration pattern of this species may have changed (Forrester *et al.* 2007). There was, however, also a large increase in numbers in Britain over the same period with a record total of 97 in 2011 including high numbers in Cornwall and on Scilly (White & Kehoe 2015).

Pectoral Sandpiper remains by far the most frequently recorded vagrant Nearctic wader in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007) and there is a recent suggestion that some of these birds may be coming from Siberia, rather than North America. This may be the case on Tiree as well, although evidence for Nearctic vagrancy is backed up by the arrival of birds associating with Buff-breasted Sandpipers in both September 2004 and September 2009 during periods of strong westerly winds off the Atlantic. Numbers of records increased in Britain in 1990–2012 with record numbers in 2011 and 2012 including a bumper total of 60 in the Outer Hebrides in 2011 (White & Kehoe 2015). The records of five birds on Tiree in May to July, accounted for 11.4% of records, and presumably related to birds heading north in spring having passed through Western Europe in the previous autumn. These records mirror a recent increase in the number of spring records of this species throughout Scotland, with spring and midsummer records accounting for almost 35% of records in 2000–04 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). None of the spring or summer birds were in adult breeding plumage and it would seem likely that they were all second calendar year birds, even though one was attracted to displaying Dunlin and Redshank. The record of an apparent juvenile at The Reef on 17 July 1987 is more surprising and seems very early for a returning juvenile bird. It could perhaps refer to a second calendar year bird instead, as these can still retain the conspicuous pale mantle lines of juvenile birds. However, a similar early record of a juvenile bird recorded at

Plate 156–161. (top left) Pectoral Sandpiper (juvenile), Sandaig, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2011. © *Jim Dickson* **(top right)** White-rumped Sandpiper (adult), Gott Bay, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, August 2012. © *Keith Gillon* **(middle left)** American Golden Plover (juvenile), Sandaig, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, October 2012. © *Jim Dickson* **(middle right)** Baird's Sandpiper (juvenile), Sandaig, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2011. © *Jim Dickson* **(bottom left)** Spotted Sandpiper (juvenile), Heylipol, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, August 2009. © *Keith Gillon* **(bottom right)** Semipalmated Sandpiper (juvenile), Vaul Bay, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, September 2012. © *Keith Gillon*

Cley, Norfolk on 13 July 2012 resulted in speculation that it had not travelled far from its natal site (White & Kehoe 2015).

The 17 records of American Golden Plover are impressive in a Scottish context, especially given that the first record from Argyll was not until 2001 and there had only been 71 Scottish records up to 2004 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, records have become more frequent generally in Scotland in recent years, with 49 individuals recorded in 2005–08 alone, accounting for more than two-thirds of the previous all-time total (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010). 2011 and 2012 saw record totals of this species in Britain, with Scotland accounting for 48% of records in the two years (White & Kehoe 2015). This recent increase in Scotland may partly be a result of improved observer awareness (Forrester *et al.* 2007), but may also relate to changing patterns of Atlantic weather systems resulting in a general northward shift of vagrant Nearctic waders within Britain (Fraser *et al*. 2007). As a result of this rapid increase in sightings, the species was quickly dropped from British rarity to Scottish rarity status in 2005 and then to Scottish regional rarity status in 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012). The preponderance of adult and first-summer birds (65%) recorded on Tiree seems high, compared to just four adults (17%) out of 24 birds recorded on the Outer Hebrides in 1990–2007 (www.western-isles-wildlife.com) and 40% out of 58 birds seen in Britain in 2011/12 (White & Kehoe 2015), although the comparative age breakdown for all Scottish records is not given by Forrester *et al.* (2007). It seems possible that some records of adult birds on Tiree could involve returning individuals, for example between 2004 and 2009, which would bias the overall age structure of the records, although it should be noted that three different adults were recorded in the latter year. The predominance of adult birds in the August and early September arrivals broadly accords with the pattern elsewhere in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007), although some juveniles arrived on Tiree as early as 9 September and some adults arrived as late as 7 October.

The three regularly occurring North American peeps have occurred much less frequently on Tiree with four to five records each. Semipalmated Sandpiper has occurred five times, albeit with two birds present in both 1999 and 2013. This compares favourably with the four records each of Baird's Sandpiper and White-rumped Sandpiper, since Semipalmated Sandpiper was much rarer nationally in Scotland to 2004 (15 records of 20 birds) than either Baird's Sandpiper (38 records) or White-rumped Sandpiper (68 records, Forrester *et al.* 2007). The equal numbers of records of the latter two species on Tiree might suggest that the nationally more numerous White-rumped Sandpiper has been overlooked on the island. This is possible since its favoured habitat of rocky seaweed-strewn beaches is both more extensive and harder to cover than the hard upper reaches of sandy beaches often favoured by Baird's Sandpiper. However, the recent increase in White-rumped Sandpiper records on Tiree mirrors an overall increase in Britain in 1990–2012 (White & Kehoe 2015), with 2011 and 2012 being two of the four best years on record. The record of a Baird's Sandpiper at Loch a' Phuill on 30–31 May 2007 was exceptional in Scotland, as there had only been one other spring record of this species (out of 38 records) to 2004, an adult on Islay in June 1979 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The Spotted Sandpiper record is remarkable in a Scottish context in that it was only the second record in a total of just five autumn juvenile / first-winter birds to have occurred to 2008 and remains by far the earliest on record (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Scottish Bird Report online). It was equally remarkable that it was found at all. The bird spent just a couple of hours feeding along an unremarkable stretch of road at Heylipol in the middle of the island before disappearing and was found by Keith Gillon, who was cycling around the island during a prolonged spell of heavy rain. The absence of any further Long-billed Dowitcher records following the dowitcher in 1969 is perhaps surprising, but this is a rare bird on the Scottish west coast. For example, only four birds had been recorded on the Outer Hebrides by 2006 (Outer Hebrides Bird Report 2005/06) and there are only three confirmed records plus two further older records of unidentified dowitchers from Argyll (Argyll Bird Report 2012, www.argyllbirdclub.org). Within Scotland most records have come from the Northern Isles and NE Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007) suggesting that many may arrive from Siberian breeding areas rather than from North America.

Plate 162. American Golden Plover (adult), Sandaig, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, October 2009. © *Jim Dickson*

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to all observers who have recorded and submitted their bird records from Tiree, in particular Jim Dickson and Keith Gillon who found many of these birds, and to the work of BBRC, SBRC and ABRC. Thanks also to helpful comments on an earlier draft from Jim Dickson, Keith Gillon, Andy Robinson and Jeremy Wilson.

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Plate 163. Harlequin Duck, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, February 2015. © *Barry Farquharson*

Harlequin Ducks in Scotland 2015

R. Leslie & D. MacAskill

Seaton Park, Aberdeen, January–April 2015 - the first record for North-east Scotland

Saturday 3 January 2015 was a lovely day, and after a morning in town, I returned home with the options of decorating the kitchen or going for a walk to try and burn off calories consumed over the festive period. I was also keen to keep up with my eldest son, David, on our annual Scottish bird list. For the last two years we've had a friendly competition, not that we are fiercely competitive or anything, but at 1–1 this is the deciding year - unless he wins in which case it will be the best of five.

I carry out a monthly WeBS count on the lower section of the River Don, from the mouth to the Brig o' Balgownie, but I also often walk from my house to the next section of the Don which forms a boundary to Seaton Park.

As I walked along the south bank I got good views of Goldeneye, Moorhen and Goosander, and noted a pair of Dippers displaying and calling. It was about 15:00 and the light, although good in open areas, was beginning to fade. Just after seeing the Dippers, a duck flew downstream ahead of me, just 2 m above the water. My first thought was of a female Goldeneye, but there was something strange as I was not aware of any white on its wings. It flew towards a bend in the river where the terrain changes, the river bank on both sides is steep, so the light was even more restricted. Along this section the riverside path rises up and follows the course of the river but about 10 m above it. From here I noticed the duck below, preening on a rock just below a rapid-flowing section of water.

I should say at this point though I have been bird watching for many years I do not consider myself to be an expert in any shape or form. As I watched the duck, I realised it was something unusual, but like most amateurs erred on the

Plate 164. Harlequin Duck, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, January 2015. © *Gordon Grieve.* Gordon Grieve and Andy Coventry independently found and photographed the Harlequin on Sunday 4 January. They posted this image on a FaceBook group which instantly alerted local birders to the bird's presence.

side of caution and thought it must just be a common species with atypical plumage. I didn't have a camera with me, but did note what I saw on the duck before heading home. It had bright white circles behind the ear coverts, white extending from the base of the bill to below the eye, a steel grey bill, dark legs and what I thought was a light area on the shoulder of the wing.

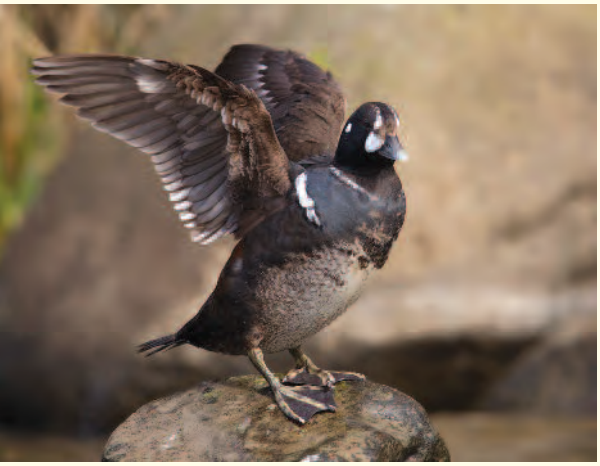
On arriving home, I described the bird to my wife and referred to various bird books - Velvet Scoter and Scaup were both possibilities but the image of a female Harlequin Duck in Lars Jonsson's *Birds of Europe* was the bird I had seen. I'd seen pictures of Harlequin Ducks before, but never seen one in the flesh, so I had not even contemplated it as a contender.

At this point I phoned my good friend and bird watching mentor, Mark Sullivan. I described what I'd seen and although he did not dismiss my theory of a Harlequin Duck, he knew better than I did how much of a rarity this was. We arranged that I would return next morning to see if it was still there. Ignorance is bliss so they say, had I known just how rare it was at that point - there have only been about nine UK sightings since I was born - I wouldn't have got any sleep that night!

I went back to Seaton Park at 08:00 (sunrise was 08:47), this time armed with binoculars, telescope, tripod and a digital camera. I retraced my steps and worked my way past where I had first seen the bird to the area near the small canoe course, but there was no sign of what had become 'my duck'. I doubled back to where I had seen the duck preening the previous afternoon. Scrambling along the roots and rocks which were covered with frost I tried not to fall in the river, then just as the terrain was getting particularly difficult, a duck flew passed me heading upstream. It was dark brown but I saw the white markings on the head and realised this was my duck. Unfortunately, there is a bend in the river at this point and it continued upstream and out of view.

On one hand I was pleased it was still around, but on the other I was frustrated that I had no idea how far it had flown. I gave chase but failed to relocate it. I made my way back to the picnic area beside the Dippers and sat on a bench to contemplate my plan of action - not taking my mother out for her birthday lunch was not an option! While working out how much longer I could afford to spend looking for the duck, I was vaguely aware of being watched. Across the river, slightly downstream of me, was my duck. Panic set in, I hurriedly unpacked my telescope,

Plate 165. Harlequin Duck, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, February 2015. © *Harry Scott*



Plates 166–167. Harlequin Duck, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, March 2015. © (top) *Dennis Morrison* (bottom) *Neil Hughes*. **Plate 168 (below).** Harlequin Duck with drake Goosander, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, February 2015. © *Mark Leitch*

tripod and camera. Have you ever tried to hand hold a compact camera to a telescope when your hands are shaking, and trying to get a photograph of a duck which will insist on diving? It's not easy. You can only imagine my frustration, for every photograph I manged of the bird the next was of water as it dived. Frustrated at my pathetic digi-scoping efforts, I made a mental note to splash out on an adapter for the scope' to help keep my blood pressure in a safe zone in future. Adding to my woes, the camera battery ran out and the duck flew downstream and out of sight.

At this point I headed home to download my poor quality photographs and email one to Mark, who in turn forwarded it to a couple of local birders. Later that day they confirmed that it was indeed a Harlequin Duck! I was now hoping that it would remain long enough for others to see it the following day. Despite the competition with my son, I picked him up at lunch time on Monday and we went down to Seaton Park where we joined some local birders happily watching the Harlequin. Having seen the duck in fading light on Saturday, and in a blind panic on Sunday, I had identified it as a female - I hadn't registered a small white stripe in front of the wing. It was not until others got clear views in good light that it was identified as a first-winter male.

I could not help but have a grin on my face as I regaled my work colleagues at the University of my discovery. To add to my elation I was also interviewed by BBC Scotland and the newspapers at the river bank, so now even my non-birding friends, relations and my students have been sending their congratulations.

So, what have I learned from this: firstly always keep your wits about you; secondly don't talk yourself out of the possibilities - most birds we see will be common birds in different light, or with peculiar plumage, but one day you might be lucky to find yourself at the right place at the right time; finally do not deny yourself the bit of kit which could make life easier.

Plate 170. Harlequin Duck, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, March 2015. © *Samuel Langlois*

Plate 169. Harlequin Duck, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, April 2015. © *Gary Thoburn*

Plate 171. Harlequin Duck, Seaton Park, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, January 2015. © *Harry Scott*

To conclude, I thank my wife, Irene, for allowing me to indulge my love of birding and not trying to convince me to decorate the kitchen that Saturday, and Mark Sullivan, who since we met in the late 1980s whilst taking our children to the local YOC group, has patiently helped to improve my birding knowledge.

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Plate 172. Harlequin Duck, Brora, Highland, March 2015. *© Dean MacAskill*

Brora, February–April 2015 - the third Highland record

After a thaw in the weather, on 17 February 2015, I decided to take a trip to Strath Brora, via Rogart. I'd been told of a Two-barred Crossbill frequenting a patch of larch by the river Brora at Dalrevoch. I searched the area, but couldn't find it, so I headed on down the Strath towards Brora. Birds were thin on the ground, although three Dippers on the river and several Black Grouse were highlights.

On reaching the Brora beach car park, the tide was high. A few duck were visible, and as I looked through the nearest group of half a dozen Long-tailed Duck and Common Scoter with my binoculars, I picked out what I initially thought was a female Velvet Scoter. The bird did have a white spot on the ear coverts, but seemed far smaller compared to the Common Scoters present offshore.

Despite a large swell on the sea I soon got the bird in my scope. It flew about 100m south and landed in a patch of bright sunlit water. This made it harder to see but interestingly it had shown no white in the wings in flight. I got my scope and headed rapidly south along the beach in order to get the light behind me. I managed one briefer look at the bird before it was flushed by an Otter and flew north for about 600m.

From what I had seen I was now convinced it was a Harlequin Duck. The only thing was that I had not seen the pale greyish patches above and below the eyes due to the light conditions. I texted one of the nearest birders, Bob Swann, hoping he could come down, but he was actually on the Isle of Lewis, so once home I put the news out of what I'd seen. I went back the next day and checked the area to the north of the river mouth, but did not see it again.

I returned on 22nd, together with my friend Lorna. The weather was poor, stormy with sleet and snow, and consequently I had only opened the car window sufficiently to be able to see out. After about 20 minutes I was ready to give up, but then I had a very brief view of a small duck with a dark head and white spot on its ear coverts. I couldn't believe it - the bird was still here! Soon after it flew south, and I asked Lorna if she could see the bird - by now just a black dot flying away - she said she could, but this was unfortunately all we saw that day.

On 25 February I was back again. Having read up a bit on Harlequin Duck, I'd discovered they prefer rocky shorelines, so this time I walked south along the shore and eventually found the Harlequin feeding in a bay (roughly half a mile from the beach car park) where it was associating with a group of Goldeneye.

On 27th, I walked south from the beach car park again, but could not find the bird in the bay. I continued as far as Sputie Burn, where I scanned the shore in both directions, but still could not relocate the bird. Another check of the sea produced all the seaduck seen previously, plus a few Slavonian Grebes, and a couple of first-winter Little Gulls, but still no Harlequin Duck.

Then, just as I was preparing to pack-up and leave, I found it close inshore working its way along the edge of the rocks right in front of me! I took out my point-and-shoot camera, and with my excitement level rising, I knew this was my opportunity to get a decent record shot of the bird. By the time I got to the edge of the rocks and started to take some shots my hands were shaking so much that I doubted I would get a usable shot! Fortunately, when I stopped to review my pictures I had a couple of reasonable, and most importantly, diagnostic images. This was just as well, as the bird was not seen again until 10 March, but has been present since to the time of writing in late April.

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Plate 173. Harlequin Duck, Brora, Highland, April 2015. © *Micky Maher*

The status of Harlequin Duck in Scotland

This species has a fragmented Holarctic breeding range with populations from Central Siberia eastwards to the Bering Sea, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, through Alaska and NW USA south through the Rockies to Wyoming, and coastal NE Canada, W & SW Greenland and Iceland. The Icelandic birds appear to be sedentary, and records in Britain and Northern Europe are believed to originate from the Canadian/Greenland or Siberian populations.

There were nine records (11 birds) in Scotland to the end of 2004 (Forrester et al. *2007), with three additional records in Britain (five birds) - remarkably all from north-east England prior to the run of Scottish occurrences from the first in 1931. Since 2004 there have been two further records in Scotland/Britain: an adult male at St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 18 June 2007, and a first-winter male at Balranald, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 18 February to 1 June 2013 (Rabbitts 2013).*

The 2015 Aberdeen bird was found a week earlier than the previously established find-date windows of mid- to late October and 11 January to 18 February, while the Brora bird was at the extreme end of the main period, with the 2007 St Kilda adult the only 'summer' find. Several records have involved long-staying individuals, with the 1991 female at Wick (Caith) present for 101 days to 17 May, the 2013 Balranald bird for 104 days to 1 June, and the 2004 female at Coll, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) for about 130 days to 20 May. The Brora female was last seen on 30 April, notching up a notable 73 days, while the Aberdeen male lingered to 21 May to set a new record as the longest stayer ever at 139 days.

The Aberdeen bird reflects aspects of the 1954 Borders record, an immature male shot on the River Teviot at Denholm on 16 January - the only individual to be found away from the coast. The 2015 birds are all the more interesting given their east mainland locations and overlapping stays, and it seems possible that they were displaced by the same weather system.

Reference

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Rabbitts, B. 2013. Harlequin Duck on North Uist, Outer Hebrides, February–April 2013. *Scottish Birds* 33(2): 181–183.


Plate 174–177. Red Grouse coming in to land on the Isle of May, April 2015. © *Gill Howie*

Red Grouse, Isle of May, April 2015 - first record for the island

G. Howie

Our attempt to go to the Isle of May last year was sadly curtailed due to a shattered gearbox on board the 'May Princess'; we never got ashore and limped back to port! I vowed that I would give it another try, but things got in the way and time marched on, so we never made it back in 2014.

Fast forward to Easter Sunday, 5 April 2015. The sun was shining brightly and we thought we would give the boat trip another try, so off we went to Anstruther for our second attempt to land on the Isle of May! Worryingly, glorious sunshine soon turned to haar and we wondered if we had made the right decision - maybe we won't make the island for a second time? Slowly the haar cleared, so off we set. While being well looked after by the boys on board, we casually chatted to a nice couple from Norway since there were very few birds on the crossing. This got us thinking we had done the wrong thing, but our concerns were soon put to the side as we approached the island - Puffins and Gannets were flying about, then some Shags, Guillemots and Razorbills.

Greeted on our arrival by David Steel, the Isle of May SNH Manager, we were given guidance of where to go and what not to do before we set off to explore the island. We went eagerly anticipating the sight of Puffins and after a quick tour around the Island we were lucky enough to encounter seals too! Along with the blues of the sky and sea was a multitude of beautiful colours; I was more excited now, there were a lot of birds around and I was relieved it had been a good decision after all - what a magical place! Once we got away from the hoards of loud tourists and noisy kids, the birds happily settled quite close to us - so very beautiful. We clicked away with our cameras, wandering about enjoying the peace and the sights of birds, butterflies and bonny scenery.

Unfortunately, my wandering was curtailed when my weak ankle played up. We headed back to the Visitor Centre where I sat out front for the rest of the day.

At around 16:00, as I sat there enjoying the wildlife spectacle around me, I noticed there were strings of Gannets offshore, so I stood up and watched. I happily photograph all sorts of birds, but I particularly like Puffins and grouse, so when I saw the wee bundle of 'broon feathers' zipping past me it was a natural thing for me to 'shoot him' with the camera. I had absolutely no idea of the significance such a run of shots of a Red Grouse would have and it was only later when I posted my photos on Facebook did I learn through a message from Barry Faquharson how important these images were. It was the first record for the Isle of May despite 80 years of observations.

Messages of congratulations and well done popped in to my inbox on Facebook and I honestly was quite amused by it all - after all, it was only a grouse! I had absolutely no idea of the significance of this record, but I was delighted to have created such excitement in the birding world. Barry and I know each other from a long time back as aircraft enthusiasts, so when he likened it to something like an Indian Tu-95 Bear aircraft landing at Leuchars and me being the only one seeing it - only then did I realise the importance of it all. According to the (isleofmaynnr.wordpress.com) SNH blog, the bird was still present on 11 April.

So, our wee Sunday jaunt saw me rapidly become a bit of a celebrity in the birding world, but I'm no expert, just someone who loves taking photos of birds - both the heavy metal type and the feathered type - and am just happy I was able to tell you about it. I can't wait to go back to the Isle of May - a truly magical place of peace, tranquility and people with a passion for birds.

Gillian Howie, Arbroath
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STOP PRESS: *The editors have just been informed this bird was first seen by SNH Assistant Warden, Bex Outram, who saw it fly SE from the South Plateau near Pilgrims' Haven on 3rd. Despite alerting other residents it could not be relocated. The extreme unlikelihood of a grouse turning up on the isle meant local 'expert' opinion, and her boyfriend, Ciaran, on Fair Isle seriously questioned the initial ID. Thankfully Gill's photos soon confirmed the incredible truth!*

Editor's comments

The origin of this bird can only be guessed at - the nearest areas of 'typical' grouse habitat are the Lammermuir Hills in East Lothian (south of Pressmennan), at least 30 km away, or the Lomond/Benarty Hills in Fife - 40 km at closest.

Though this record is totally unexpected and most unlikely to have been on any list of predicted new birds for the May, there have been other examples of Red Grouse found on the coast many miles from the nearest piece of heather moorland. Although a few Red Grouse are known to leave the moors for lower elevations and other habitats in prolonged freezing conditions with extensive snow cover, as in 2009/10 and to a lesser extent 2010/11, outwith such conditions, records are exceptional. One was at Aberlady Bay, Lothian on 3 August 1971, two were seen at Largo Bay, Fife on 14 April 1976, and one at Boarhills, Fife on 4 March 1978. More recently one was seen calling/displaying at Girdleness, Aberdeen on 29 March 2004, and one was at Flamborough Head, East Yorkshire on 7 March 2014.

The Isle of May individual must have crossed at least 7 km of sea, making it even more unusual, though vagrancy to islands has been recorded previously on Bardsey (one c.1898), about 3 km off the Lleyn Peninsula, Caernarfonshire, and on Ramsey Island, which is about 1 km off the Pembrokeshire coast.

Why individuals from an otherwise sedentary species (in Britain at least) should travel so far from their usual range/habitat is unclear, though the spring birds' vagrancy could be fuelled by an excess of hormones.

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 January to 31 March 2015

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 - Ayrs; 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.

Generally cold, wet and windy with heavy snow in many areas, though milder and drier in some eastern parts. Wildfowl and gulls provided most of the news, with several rarities lingering from 2014.

Bewick's Swan: one was at Caerlaverock WWT reserve (D&G) on 30 January, then nearby at Ruthwell/Brow Well on 2–3 February. **Taiga Bean Goose:** the Slammanan flock numbered about 215 birds in early January; other sightings included two at Burravoe, Yell (Shet) on 25–31 January and singles at Ladybank (Fife) on 19–24 March, near Conon Bridge (High) on 21 March and at Martnaham Loch (Ayrs) on 24 March. **Tundra Bean Goose:** on Shetland up to 17 in January, with a maximum of seven at Burravoe, Yell (Shet) on 17–22nd, nine in February and singles still at Burravoe to 22 March and at Cullivoe, Yell to 14 March. Three were still on Fair Isle to 16 January, and on Orkney there were three at Holm, Mainland on 13 January, with one still on 14th, then one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19 January with two there on 24–25 January and one still from 26 January to end March. One was near Wick (Caith) on 17 February; in Highland there were two at Ardmair, near Ullapool on 4–22 February and singles at Tain on 16th, Golspie on 23 February and at Insh Marshes RSPB reserve on 15 March. In NE Scotland there were three on the Ythan Estuary on 2 January, with one still on 4th, two at St Fergus on 29th, one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB reserve (NES) on 12 February and two at Peterculter on 28 March. Two were at Rossie Bog (Fife) on 26 January; one at Powfoulis (UF) on 26 February, and in Lothian up to three were in the Ballencreiff area on 1–13 January, with five at Dunbar on 5th and eight at Torness on 15 January and one again at East Fortune on 8 February. In Borders two were at Dunglass on 24 January and singles near Duns on 30 January and Dowlaw on 14 February. One was at West Freuch Airfield, near Stranraer (D&G) on 4 March. **Snow Goose:** a white-morph was at Deerness (Ork) from at least 12 January to 9 March. **Ross's Goose:** one was at Tullibody (UF) on 11–24 March. **Richardson's Cackling Goose** [form *hutchinsii*] on Islay (Arg) one was at Loch Indaal, Bridgend still on 6 January to 20 February, with two on 18 February, and singles at Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve on 25 February and 13 March, near Storakaig on 3 March and at Esknish on 4 March. Elsewhere there was one at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) from 2014 to 24 January, at Grenitote, North Uist on 5 February, and at Sollas, North Uist on 8–9 February. **Ridgway's Cackling Goose** [form *minima*]: one was near Castle Kennedy (D&G) from 28 January to 25 March. A Cackling Goose not assigned to race was at West Freugh Airfield, just south of Castle Kennedy (D&G) on 17 January. **Red-breasted Goose:** one was on Stronsay (Ork) on 25 January.

Plate 178. Ross's Goose, Blackgrange, Upper Forth, March 2015. © *John Nadin*

Plate 179. American Wigeon, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, February 2015. © *Harry Scott*

American Wigeon: single drakes were at Meikle Loch (NES) from 2014 to 25 January and 14–17 February; at Aileodair, North Uist (OH) from 2014 to 3 January and 9–19 February; at Mill Dam, Shapinsay (Ork) from 2014 to 11 January, 11 February and 1 March; at Loch of Collaster, Sandness, Mainland (Shet) on 10 January; at Baleshare, North Uist again on 24 January; at Dornoch (High) on 25 January; at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 29 January to 12 February; at Melby, Mainland (Shet) on 8–23 February, and at Hunterston Lagoon (Ayrs) on 17 February to 15 March, with a pair at Papil Water, Mainland (Shet) on 21 March. A drake and possible female were at Loch nam Feithean, North Uist on 28 March. **Green-winged Teal:** a drake was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve from 2014 to 29 March, with two on 13 January, and one at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 2014 to 10 January and 29 January into April, and Loch nam Feithean, North Uist on 14–19 January. Single drakes were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15 January to 25 March; at the Lossie Estuary (M&N) on 15 January to 14 February; at Mersehead RSPB reserve (D&G) on 17 January to 17 March; at Loch of Bosquoy, Mainland (Ork) on 17th and 25 January and intermittently at Loch of Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 19 January to 24 March; two drakes at Orwick Water, Muckle Roe, Mainland (Shet) on 17–19 January and one still on 1 February; one near Balivanich, Benbecula (OH) on 7 February; a drake at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 7–22 February; at Duddingston Loch (Loth) on 12–14 February and one at Port Charlotte, Islay (Arg) on 28 March.

Ring-necked Duck: a female was at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 2014 to 5 February and again on 20 February to 8 March and at Loch Scaray, Balranald, North Uist on 25 March into April; two females were on Carlingwark Loch (D&G) from 2014 to 18 March; a first-winter drake was at Loch a'Phuill, Tiree (Arg) from 2014 to 14 January and at Loch an Eilein, Tiree on 7 February; a female at St John's Loch (Caith) on 21 January; a drake at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 7 February to 13 March; a drake at Loch of Skene (NES) on 20 March, at Policy Loch, Dunecht (NES) on 22–25th and Loch Skene again on 28 March into April and a drake at Kyle of Durness (High) on 29 March. **Lesser Scaup:** a first-winter drake was at Martnaham Loch (Ayrs) from 2014 to 2 February, then nearby at Broadwood Flash/ Trabboch Loch (Ayrs) on 10–11 February and again at Martnaham Loch from 14 February into April. **King Eider:** the female remained off Ruddon's Point, Largo Bay (Fife) from 2014 to 22 January, and was there again from 22 February into April; a drake was at St Combs (NES) on 28–31 January, and a female in Bluemull Sound, off Unst (Shet) on 29 January. **Surf Scoter:** a drake was off Musselburgh/Joppa (Loth) from 2014 into April; a first-winter drake was off Skaw, Unst on 17–25 January; a drake was off Ruddons Point (Fife) on 20 January to 16 March; a drake off Rerwick Head, Mainland (Ork) on 3 March and a drake was at

Easting, Unst (Shet) on 20–21 March. **Harlequin Duck:** a first-winter drake was on the River Don, Aberdeen (NES) from 4 January into May and a female was at Brora (High) from 17 February into April.

White-billed Diver: an adult was off St Margaret's Hope or at Water Sound, South Ronaldsay (Ork) from 2014 to 20 January; one was again off Kirkabister, Mainland (Shet) from late January to 30 March; one in Bluemull Sound near Linga (Shet) on 11–29 January and 13–19 March; two were in Loch Ewe, at Naast (High) on 11 February; an adult flew past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 13 March; one off Portsoy (NES) on 13 March, with three there on 18–19th, six on 21–27th and two still on 29 March, and one off Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 14 March. **Bittern:** one remained at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 2014 to 8 March at least, with two there on 17–21 February, and one was at The Loons RSPB reserve, Mainland (Ork) on 13 March. **Little Egret:** poorly reported, but a count of 17 leaving a roost site in D&G in mid-January constitutes a new Scottish record site count, while an unconfirmed report of 23 later in the month indicates further record totals may be imminent. Otherwise noted in ones and twos throughout the period from Lothian to NE Scotland where two overwintered at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES). **Spoonbill:** one was at Caerlaverock WWT reserve (D&G) on 17 March.

Rough-legged Buzzard: an immature was at Mennock Pass, near Wanlockhead (D&G) from 2014 to 5 March; an immature near Watten (Caith) on 22 January, with it, or another, nearby at Rumster Forest/Lybster on 26 February, and an immature at Lochindorb (High) on 29–31 March. **Osprey:** early returning birds were noted at Yetholm Loch (Bord) on 4 March, Coupar Angus (P&K) on 11th, Guardbridge (Fife) on 12th, Loch Gelly (Fife) on 13th, and Camilla Loch (Fife) on 15 March. **Gyrfalcon:** a possible grey-morph bird was seen on Orkney at Loch of Harray, Mainland on 24–25 January and 11 March. **American Coot:** one was at Loch nam Feithean/Balranald, North Uist (OH) throughout from 2014 to the end of March. **Crane:** two were seen near Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 23 March. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one remained at Inverallochy (NES) from 2014 to 19 January. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was at West Links beach, North Berwick (Loth) on 1–4 January. **Grey Phalarope:** one was close inshore at Inverallochy (NES) on 5 January; one at Skelwick Bay, Westray (Ork) on 11–13 January, and one flew west at Ruddons Point (Fife) on 1 March.

Plate 180. Lesser Yellowlegs, North Berwick, Lothian, January 2015. *© Peter M. Macdonald*

Ivory Gull: the first-winter was still at Uig Harbour, Isle of Skye (High) from December to 4 January, then at Ardmair, near Ullapool (High) on 13th, 17th and 19–21 January and Ullapool Harbour on 18 January. **Bonaparte's Gull:** the adult was again at Lochgilphead (Arg) on 4 February, and at Loch Caolisport (Arg) on 26–31 March; an adult was at Thurso (Caith) on 3 March, and a first-winter at Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 24 March. **Mediterranean Gull:** noted in fairly small numbers, with peak counts of five at Soleburn, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 19 January, seven at Lochgilphead (Arg) on 26 January and seven near Bishopburn, Loch Ryan on 10 February. Away from the usual Firth of Forth, Ayrshire and D&G 'hotspots' there was an adult at Dornoch (High) on 14 January, an adult at the Ythan Estuary and one at Sandhaven (both NES) on 30 January, a second-summer on 12 March, a first-winter at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 15 March and a second-winter at Loch of Skene (NES) on 20 March. **Ring-billed Gull:** long-staying adults were still at Dingwall (High) from 2014 to the end of March and at Strathclyde CP (Clyde) from 2014 to 10 January and again on 25 January to 7 February. A first-winter was at Loch na Reivil, Hougharry, North Uist (OH) on 10–14 January and then at Tigharry, North Uist on 15–30 January, with it or another at Balranald RSPB reserve, North Uist from 11 February to the end of March; a second-winter was at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB reserve (UF) on 6 February; an adult at Townhill Loch, Dunfermline (Fife) on 8 February to 18 March and at Dalgety Bay (Fife) on 11th and 13 March and a first-winter at Loch Beg, Mull (Arg) on 18–21 March. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult was at Barassie (Ayrs) on 2 January with it, or another, nearby at Shewalton Sandpit (Ayrs) on 29 January to 15 February and 27 March into April; a near-adult was

Plate 181. Iceland Gull, Girvan Harbour, Ayrshire, March 2015. © *Angus Hogg*

at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) on 10–14 January and 15 February and 21 February. **Caspian Gull:** a first-winter was at Lochgilphead (Arg) on 17–19 January, 13–18 February and 8–27 March; and a first-winter was seen from a boat about 125 miles east of Whalsay (Shet) on 6 February. **American Herring Gull:** a first-winter was at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 29 January to 2 February.

Iceland Gull: on Shetland there were about 30 in January including up to eight at Lerwick Harbour and 40 in February with up to nine at Lerwick and 12+ at Westing, Unst on 19th. On the Outer Hebrides there were at least 17 on South Uist and four at Balranald, North Uist on 24 February, 16 at Stornoway Harbour, Lewis on 26th, three at Borve Point, Benbecula (OH) on 27th, six at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis on 28 February. Elsewhere scatterd records south to D&G and Lothian, mostly ones and twos but four juveniles were at Macduff (NES) on 27 February; up to four at Loch Caolisport (Arg) in February, three at Balloch, Loch Lomond (Clyde) on 27–28 February. In March higher counts were: six at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis and six at Smerclate, South Uist on 1st; six at Loch Caolisport (Arg) on 2nd, with five still on 27th; 16 at Butt of Lewis, Lewis on 3rd, with 12 still on 5th, 22 on 7th, 20 on 10–14th; nine still on 18th; six at Stornoway on 4th, with 15 there on 8th, 23 on 13th and 13 on 25th; eight at Peninerine, South Uist on 5–8th; a remarkable 72 between Butt of Lewis and Port Nis (less than two miles to SE) on 8th, with 21 in the same area on 22nd; four at Kirk Loch, Yell (Shet) on 18th; six at Stoneybridge, South Uist on 23rd; four at Campbeltown (Arg) on 25th and four on Fair Isle on 28th. **Kumlien's Gull:** a second-winter was still around Shetland Catch fish factory, Lerwick (Shet) to 31 January; a juvenile at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) from 2014 to 4 January; a second-winter on Fair Isle from 2014 to 11 January at least, and a juvenile at Loch Caolisport, Ormsary (Arg) from 2014 to 26 March. A juvenile was at several sites on the west side of South Uist (OH) from 18 January to 21 February at least, with two at West Gerinish on 31 January and a third-winter at Smerclate, South Uist from 14 March into April. A first-winter was at Rubh' Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 2–5 February, joined by a second-winter on 5th, and a juvenile was at Balranald, North Uist on 16 February. A juvenile was at Scrabster (Caith) on 16 February and a juvenile at Fort William (High) on 23–24 March.

Glaucous Gull: on Shetland there were about 25 in January and 15 in February including up to five at Lerwick Harbour, with fewer in March, though up to four still at Lerwick. Up to 24 were on Orkney in January, with seven off Point of Buckquoy, Mainland on 11th, and three on North Ronaldsay on 24th. Similar numbers in February with highest count of three off Lamb Holm on 13th. Fewer in March with highest count of three on North Ronaldsay on 7–15th. On the Outer Hebrides there were at least 20 each month, mostly ones and twos but with six near Rubh' Arnal, South Uist on 29 January and 7 February, with five still on 25 February; four on Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis on 1 March; four at Peninerine, South Uist on 8 March, and four at Butt of Lewis, Lewis on 17 March, with three still on 22nd. Elsewhere found south to D&G and Lothian but generally less numerous than Iceland Gull, except for 11 on Tiree (Arg) in January, 12 there in February and at least five in March. Higher counts included nine on Fair Isle on 9 January, with seven still on 10th; two at Peterhead (NES) on 25 January to 15 February, with four there on 8 February; two at Ullapool (High) on 10–11 February; two at Achiltibuie (High) on 15 February; two at Helmsdale (High) on 16–25 February; two on Fair Isle on 26 February and two at Dunnet (Caith) on 27 February. **Little Auk:** only small numbers seen with higher counts of 12 off Sumburgh Head (Shet) seen from the 'Good Shepherd IV' on 10 February, one off South Light, Fair Isle on 20 January, eight off Lamb Holm (Ork) on 9 January, 55 past Nairn Bar (M&N) on 4 January, five at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 1 January, 40 from a boat in St Andrews Bay (Fife) on 15 January, three off the Isle of May on 10 March, about 20 from a boat just east of Edinburgh (Loth) on 19 January, 18 past Eyemouth (Bord) on 1 February, six past Aird, Tiree (Arg) on 26 March, one off Troon (Ayrs) on 18 January, and a remarkable single on Loch Shiel, near Acharacle (High) on 17 January.

Great Grey Shrike: one was near Brabster (Caith) on 3–28 March; one was at Loch Mahaick, near Doune (UF) on 10–17 March, one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 18–21 March and one at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 19 March and nearby at Levenwick, Mainland on 20–25 March. **Firecrest:** an unusual wintering record involved one at the Memorial Garden at Grenitote, North Uist (OH) from 2014 to 25 February at least. **Waxwing:** very low numbers reported, with the only double-figure counts all from Aberdeen (NES) with maxima of 10 in January, 26 in February and 31 in March. Otherwise ones and twos in east coast recording areas from Shetland to Lothian, plus one at Dunblane (UF) on 2 January, two at Longforgan (P&K) on 29 January, eight in Elgin (M&N) on 30 January, and six in Forfar (A&D) on 1–2 March. **Black-bellied Dipper:** birds of the nominate (N European) form *C.c. cinclus* were seen at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 24 February to 18 March and at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 2–13 March.

Water Pipit: singles were at Piltanton Burn, near Stranraer (D&G) on 22 January; at Dornoch Point (High) on 28 January to 6 February; at Whitesands Bay, near Dunbar (Loth) again on 1–7 February, nearby at Barns Ness (Loth) on 26 February to 16 March and Skateraw on 2 March; at Dunglass (Bord/Loth) on 14th, and at Blindwells Pool, near Tranent (Loth) on 15 March. **Snow Bunting:** largest counts were from Highland, with 300+ near Culbokie, Black Isle on 13 January, and 245–250 at Dornoch on 19th and 29 January. Elsewhere peak counts were 30 at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 2 February; 115 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 January with 70 there on 25 February; 60 at Sollas, North Uist (OH) on 8 February and 50 at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 18 January. There were 88 at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 6 February, 50 at Braemar (NES) on 18 February; 30 at Glenshee ski-lift car park (NES/A&D) on 3 February, with about 15 at Newton of Kirkbuddo, near Forfar (A&D) on 16 January; 60 at Tentsmuir Point (Fife) on 23 February; 18 near Pool of Muckhart (UF) on 1 February; four at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 29 January, and one at Newcastleton (Bord) on 2 January. Thirty were at Ettrick Bay, Isle of Bute (Arg) on 20 January and 31 at Glen Fruin (Arg) on 3 February; 50 near Antermony Loch (Clyde) on 3 February, and three at Portencross (Ayrs) on 23 January. **Lapland Bunting:** three were at Udale Bay RSPB reserve (High) on 14 January and one at Torness (Loth) on 10–19 March.

Plate 183. Snow Buntings, Moray & Nairn, January 2015. © *Robert Ince*

Plate 182. Black-bellied Dipper, Skaw, Unst, Shetland, February 2015. © *Robbie Brookes*

Advice to contributors

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

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

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

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

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

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

Text, image and graphics formats

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

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

Maps and other graphics should preferably be provided in eps (Encapsulated PostScript) format, or as a high resolution jpg/tiff file, good quality computer print-out or drawn in black ink. Other formats can be accepted; please liaise with the Office Manager. Photographs should be supplied as high resolution jpg/tiff files with minimal or no cropping or enhancement.

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

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 184. On what was a cold and rather cloudy February day I visited the 'scrapes' at Musselburgh. There were the usual Curlews, Redshanks and a few Teal but they were all very still and quiet.

After a while the sun came out, providing a very nice light and this pair of Redshank decided to put on quite a display. At times it looked as if they were bouncing off the water, and each other, and all happening almost in slow motion.

I came away very happy having got some good shots of these Redshank rather than the usual static ones with their beaks in the water.

Equipment used: Nikon D7100 with Tamron SP150-600 lens, ISO 1000, shutter 1/1250th, aperture f8.

Alan Chapman, Edinburgh
Email: alanchapman1@mac.com

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