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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.

Join us...

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

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President's Foreword



Plate 276. Ian Thomson, Rutland Bird Fair August 2015. © Dave Allan

This is the first piece I have written for *Scottish Birds* since becoming President of The SOC at our recent AGM.

I would like to start by saying that I feel very honoured to take on this role for a Club that I have been a member of for many years. As a fledgling birder in the late 1970s, talks at NE Scotland branch meetings shone a light on a world of possibilities; outings took me into the uplands of Deeside, the Isle of May and beyond; a grant from the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (who shared our old Regent Terrace office!) paid my fare for a trip to Fair Isle as a 17 year-old; and the encouragement of and stories told by fellow members, unbeknown to them, played a crucial part in my career decisions. This Club has given me a lot, not least many friends. I hope that, during my term of office, we continue to develop and inspire and that we can bring into the fold many more of those folk who get pleasure from our country's birds.

The Club has very firm foundations, and it is only right that I pay tribute to my predecessors in ensuring that we are on a very stable footing; to fellow Council members for their commitment, thoughts and advice; and not least to our staff for their continuing dedication, flexibility and incredible hard work. I think that one of the key aspects of the SOC is the feeling of friendship – let's continue to extend the hand of welcome to our increasing numbers of new members.

The SOC is not a conservation organisation. It is a club for birders; for those who want to find, watch and record birds in Scotland. But, increasingly we are learning that those very birds that are the object of our hobby are under considerable pressure – changes in range and abundance of many species are shown clearly in the national and local atlases or surveys to which so many of us contribute. Some of our seabirds have had many successive years of dismal breeding seasons; many of our farmland species continue to decline; our birds of prey continue to be absent from or are illegally killed in areas managed intensively for gamebird shooting.

As a member of Scottish Environment LINK, the SOC can be proud to be one of the many organisations calling for increased protection for our marine environment. We have endorsed campaigns against inappropriate sites for renewable energy developments. In August, we stood alongside the Scottish Raptor Study Group, RSPB and Birders Against Wildlife Crime on Hen Harrier Day and backed their calls to end the persecution of raptors.

Scotland's birds give us all considerable pleasure, whether they are Barnacle Geese on Islay, Peregrines in North-east Scotland, or perhaps a lonely Wilson's Warbler on Lewis! As Scotland's Bird Club, we will sometimes need to voice our support for them...

Ian Thomson, SOC President



Plate 277. Common Gull nesting on disused factory roof (since demolished), Dornoch, Highland, May 2014. © Robin Sellers

Common Gulls nesting in built-up areas in the Highlands

R.M. Sellers

This report describes the principal features of some Common Gull colonies in built-up areas in the Highlands. Colonies varied in size between single isolated nests up to about 150 Apparently Occupied Nests (AON). In most, nests were fairly close to one another, no nest being more than 10 m from its nearest neighbour, but in a minority of colonies, typically those with <30 AON, nests were more widely spaced often being 20–50 m apart. Colonies were either on the ground, usually in fenced areas to which access by man or ground predators was either impossible or difficult, on pitched roofs or, in a few cases, on chimney stacks. Many colonies were next to those of Herring Gulls and three were associated with terns. Breeding in built-up areas provides the birds with protection against ground predators, and breeding success can be high as a result. Conflicts with man have arisen at a number of colonies due to fouling of plant and equipment, and attempts to scare the gulls at some of these with a captive bird of prey (apparently with some success) are described. A number of instances of Oystercatchers nesting in these urban Common Gull colonies are also noted.

Introduction

The numbers of Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* and Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus* breeding in built-up areas in Britain have increased rapidly over the past half a century such that most coastal towns, and even some inland, now have colonies of one or other (or both) of these two species (e.g. Raven & Coulson 1997). Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus* have also taken to urban habitats for breeding though in much smaller numbers with typically a pair or two attaching themselves to well established colonies of Herring or Lesser Black-backed Gulls. More

recently Common Gulls (Mew Gulls) *L. canus* have adopted urban areas for breeding although much less seems to be known about such colonies than for the larger gull species (cf. Kooistra 1985, Stewart 1989, Kubetzki & Garthe 2007). This report describes some of the key features of urban-nesting Common Gull colonies in the Highlands (the area covered by the SOC's Highland and Caithness recording areas - see SOC's website) and how they compare with the adjacent Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull colonies.

Methods

This investigation was based primarily on surveys undertaken in the breeding seasons of 2013 and 2014, but draws also on information collected as part of earlier surveys in Caithness (Clark *et al.* 2007) and East Sutherland (Sellers 2008), together with incidental observations made between 2004 and 2012 inclusive and a number of published sources. The 2013 and 2014 surveys were undertaken mainly between mid-May and early July, and involved checking most towns and many villages throughout the Highlands. This investigation was not intended to be an exhaustive search for colonies, but in practice it is unlikely that many were overlooked. For all colonies identified the following were recorded: location, a rough estimate of the number of nests present (details below), where the nests were placed (roof, chimney stack, ground *etc.*), the spacing of the nests, degree of protection nest sites afforded from ground predators, and the proximity to other gull or tern species or Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* (distance away and stage of development of the latter). For present purposes a 'colony' has been taken to be any nest or group of nests separated by more than 500 m from the next nearest nest or group of nests (a definition which has proved very useful in defining urban colonies of large gulls - see Sellers & Shackleton 2011). Colonies were included if at least one nest was associated with a man-made structure, usually a building, or on the ground next to a man-made structure. The terms 'urban' and 'roof-nesting' are often used to describe such colonies in the case of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls, but neither is entirely satisfactory when applied to Common Gulls, for not all such birds breeding in built-up areas do so on roofs (many are on the ground; details below), and some roof-nesting birds are to be found on buildings in rural settings, but here 'urban' is used as a generic term for any colony associated with a man-made structure. As with other gull species, obtaining accurate estimates of the numbers breeding in any particular colony is far from straightforward. For this reason colonies were assessed as either small (1–9 Apparently Occupied Nests, AON), medium (10–29 AON), large (30–99 AON) or very large (100–299 AON) based on counts of nests and/or individual birds and reasonable extrapolations allowing for nests in blind spots (see also comments in Sellers & Shackleton 2011).

Results

History of nesting in built-up areas in the Highlands

There are records of Common Gulls nesting on man-made structures in Scotland dating back to the 1960s (Thom 1968), but it was not until the 1980s that such behaviour had become anything like well established (Sullivan 1985, Stewart 1989). Its beginnings in the Highlands are not well documented, but the earliest record appears to be that of a pair which nested at Dalcross Airport near Inverness in 1971 (Monaghan & Coulson 1977). There is a record of breeding at Dounreay in 1990, when 16 chicks were ringed (Caithness Bird Report 1990) and by 2000 there was a substantial colony at this site comprising 13 AON on roofs and 73 AON on the ground (Clark *et al.* 2007). More generally in the Highlands, there was a total of 91 AON in seven colonies in 1993–95, according to a review of roof-nesting gulls by Raven & Coulson (1997). By the time of *Seabird 2000*, the national seabird census carried out between 1998 and 2002, the total had become 215 AON in five colonies (Tasker 2004). However, it is almost certain that some urban colonies were missed in these surveys, so such figures are likely to be underestimates (see also comments in Sellers 2008 and Sellers & Shackleton 2011). It is difficult to put a precise figure on the size of the present urban breeding population in the Highlands, but it is likely to be in excess of 500 AON in about 30 colonies (note that some of those identified in this investigation are now defunct).

Characteristics of Common Gull colonies in built-up areas

Table 1 summarises the basic characteristics of the 37 Common Gull colonies identified in the Highlands as part of this study (see also Figure 1). The sites used were of two main types: roofs and the ground. The former were mainly pitched roofs, with a slope of around 30%, though flat roofs were used in a number of instances. Nests were typically in the open on these roofs (rather than behind standpipes, vents *etc.* as Herring Gull nests often are) and there appeared to be a preference for older, weathered roofs with lichen, moss, clumps of grass or patches of stoneweed *Sedum* spp. In one or two instances nests were on chimney stacks, with one actually in a chimney pot. Those colonies on the ground were usually in secure locations to which human access was restricted, or which would be either impossible or difficult for ground predators to enter. These included fenced areas such as commercial premises and industrial sites (ten instances; colonies 1, 2, 3, 6, 18, 19, 23, 28, 32 and 37), building sites or derelict land (two instances; colonies 8 and 28), railways (two instances; colonies 11 and 30), an electricity substation (one instance; colony 4) and a site of historical interest (one instance; colony 33). Even in these ground-nesting colonies, nests were occasionally placed above ground level, for instance on buildings or redundant plant or equipment. Colonies wholly or partially on roofs were somewhat more frequent than those on the ground especially at small and medium-sized colonies where 19 were on roofs, seven on the ground and six used both. In terms of the number of nests, however, there was approximate parity between these two types of nesting habitat.

Colony size and the disposition of nests

As in natural situations, the size of the urban Common Gull colonies found in this investigation varied considerably, from isolated single nests or loose associations of nesting birds to fairly densely packed nests numbering up to c.150 AON. Of the colonies listed in Table 1, five represent single isolated nests (colonies 9, 10, 12, 16 and 34) and a further ten small groups of dispersed nests (colonies 6, 7, 14, 15, 21, 23, 26, 27, 30 and 31). By far the commonest arrangement, however, was for nests to be fairly close together with no nest more than 10 m from its nearest neighbour (colonies 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 11, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 28, 32, 35, 36 and 37). The most important exceptions were a number of medium-sized colonies on roofs in which nests were more widely dispersed, typically with nearest neighbour distances of 20–50 m (colonies 5, 22, 25, 29 and 33).

Association with other species

Of the 37 colonies listed in Table 1, 14 (38%) were in or adjacent to Herring Gull colonies (colonies 1, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 28, 29, 30, 32 and 35) and four (11%) were associated with terns *Sterna* spp. (colonies 5, 6, 18 and 19). There was little obvious pattern in the ratio of Common Gulls to these other species. Where the partner species was the Herring Gull, then it tended to outnumber the Common Gulls, and it appears that such colonies were founded by Herring Gulls, only later being adopted by Common Gulls. The two instances in which Common Gulls outnumbered Herring Gulls were at Dalmore, a very large and long established Common Gull colony with just a single pair of Herring Gulls, and Northwolds where there were only small numbers of each (though difficult to count accurately). The four instances of Common Gulls nesting in association with terns comprised a medium-sized Common Gull colony (24 AON) with three AON Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* within the gull colony (colony 5), a large tern colony with a few pairs of Common Gulls nesting on its periphery (colony 6), a large mixed colony of Common and Arctic Terns *S. paradisaea* by a medium-sized Common Gull colony (colony 18) and a large Common Tern colony by a medium-sized Common Gull colony with Herring Gulls nesting nearby (colony 19).

Interactions with man

Breeding in built-up areas is not without its risks to the birds and a number of instances of conflict with human activities were noted during the course of this study. Fouling of equipment and plant has been an issue at the Janetstown (West) and Thurso (Stainland) colonies, and a contractor was hired to scare the gulls by showing them (but not flying!) a Harris' Hawk *Parabuteo unicinctus*. The

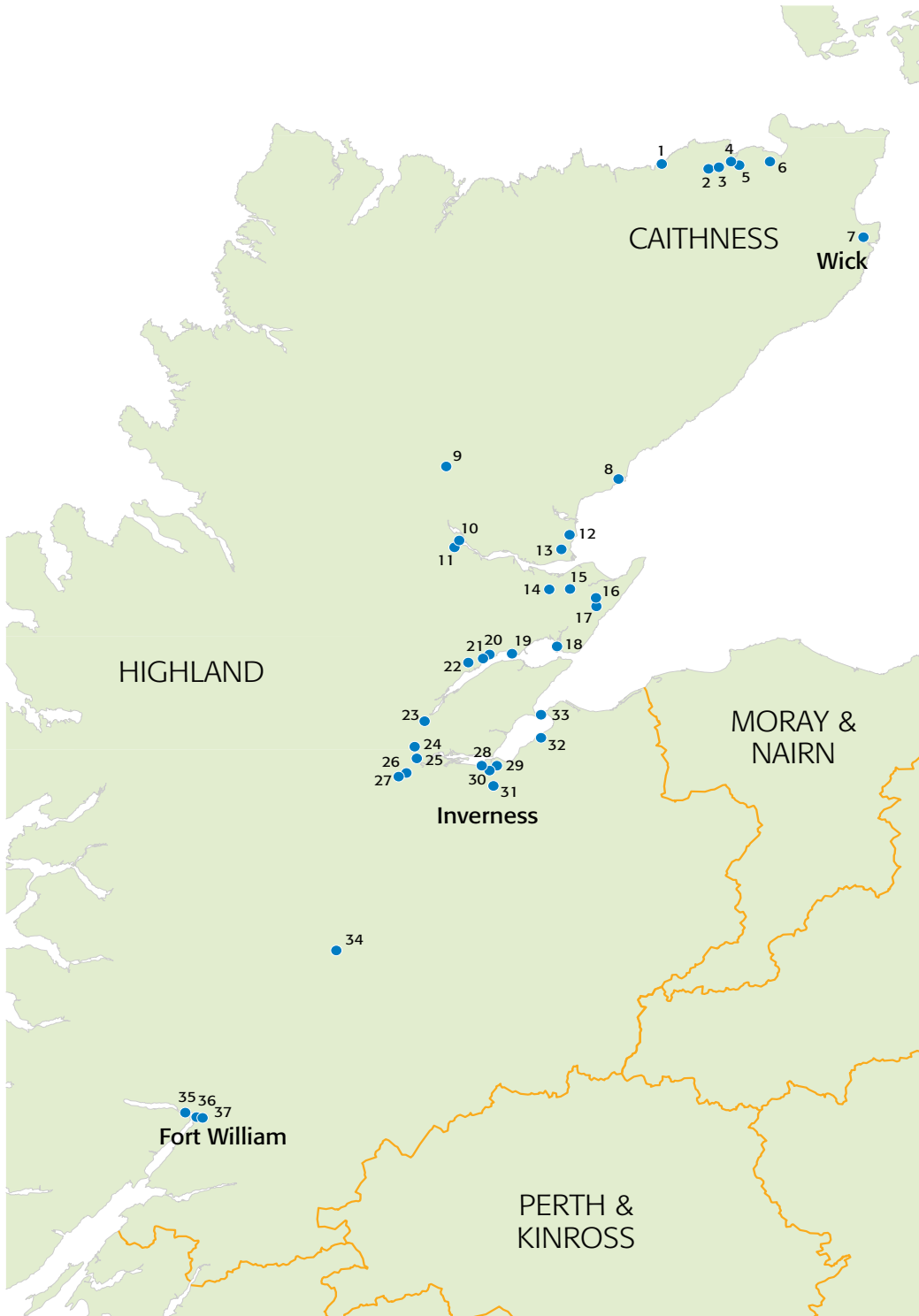


Figure 1. Location of urban Common Gull colonies in the Highlands. See Table 1 for the explanation of the numbers/sites.

Table 1. Characteristics of some urban Common Gull colonies in the Highlands.

No. Location ^a	Colony size ^b	Nature of site	Nesting habitat
(a) Caithness (vc 109)			
1. Dounreay	L	industrial site	ground inside and outside fenced area and on buildings
2. Janetstown (West)	M**	industrial site	ground inside fenced area
3. Janetstown (East)	M	workshop	ground inside walled area
4. Thurso (Stainland)	M	electricity substation	ground inside fenced area and flat roof of building
5. nr Thurso	M	large farm building	pitched roof
6. Castletown	S	redundant industrial site	ground inside fenced area
7. Wick Airport	S	redundant wartime munitions stores	flat roofs
(b) East Sutherland (vc 107)			
8. Brora	M*	former factory site	ground in fenced area
9. Lairg	S	houses	chimney stack
10. Bonar Bridge	S	houses	chimney stack
11. Ardgay	M	houses and former railway goods yard	chimney stacks and ground (not in fenced area)
12. Embo	S**	houses	chimney stack
13. Dornoch	M	industrial estate	roofs and ground (not in fenced area)
(c) East Ross (vc 106)			
14. Tain	S	industrial estate; house	pitched roofs; chimney pot
15. Northwolds	S	large military building	roof
16. Pitkerrie	S	large farm building	pitched roof
17. Balmuchy	S/M	warehouse	pitched roof
18. Nigg Oil Terminal ^c	V	industrial site	ground inside fenced area
19. Invergordon	M	industrial site	ground inside fenced area
20. Dalmore	V	distillery buildings	pitched roofs
21. Alness Point	S	business park	pitched roofs
22. Deephaven	M	industrial estate	pitched roofs
(d) East Inverness-shire (vc 96)			
23. Conon Bridge	S	industrial site	ground and derelict equipment in fenced area
24. Muir of Ord	M	distillery buildings	pitched roofs
25. Windhill	M	industrial estate	pitched roofs
26. Balblair	S	quarry	flat roofs
27. Kilmorack ^d	S**	industrial site	roof
28. Inverness (Carse)	M	industrial estate and building site	pitched and flat roofs, and ground in fenced area
29. Inverness (Longman)	M	industrial estate	flat and pitched roofs
30. Inverness (Station)	S	railway tracks	ground
31. Inverness (Fairways)	S	business park	pitched roofs
32. Dalcross	L	industrial estate and airport buildings	flat and pitched roofs; ground in fenced area
33. Fort George	S/M	historic site next to military camp	ground in secure area
(e) West Inverness-shire (vc 97)			
34. nr Fort Augustus ^e	S**	house	flat roof
35. Corpach	M/L	factory	flat roof
36. Lochyside	M	industrial estate and school	pitched and flat roofs
37. Lochy Bridge	M*	industrial estate	pitched roof and ground in fenced area

^a Listed north to south by Watsonian vice-county (vc).

^b S, small (1–9 AON); M, medium (10–29 AON); L, large (30–99 AON); V, very large (100–299 AON). Colonies that have shown marked recent reductions in numbers but remain active are indicated with an asterisk; defunct colonies are marked with a double asterisk; sizes for these two categories are based on the maximum recorded size; numbers assumed stable in the absence of any other information.

^c Peak of 142 AON here in 2002 falling to 11 AON in 2007 before increasing again to 78 AON in 2013 and 116 AON in 2014 (Highland Bird Report 2002–2007 and anonymous referee; *cf.* Tasker 2004).

^d Information from Seabird Colony Register.

^e Pair nested in a cardboard box on the roof of a house at the south end of Loch Ness (*Highland Bird Report* 2004).



Plate 278. Common Gull colony on roof of Amenity Centre, Dornoch, Highland, May 2014. © Robin Sellers

one instance of this witnessed at Thurso (Stainland) caused the birds to fly up *en masse* whilst the hawk was in view, but they settled back on their nests within a few minutes of the hawk being returned to its transport container (i.e. out of sight). Scaring like this is rarely effective in the larger gull species, but all the birds at Janetstown (West) had gone by the 2014 breeding season (some had almost certainly moved to Janetstown (East), c.500 m away) and the numbers at Thurso (Stainland) had decreased from 41 AON in 2013 to two AON in 2014 (some probably having moved to colony 5). However, this may have been due to construction work at the electricity substation in 2014 and the much increased levels of disturbance. Substantial decreases were evident at the Lochy Bridge colony between 2013 and 2014, and it seems likely that disturbance, probably deliberate, was responsible. There was also a marked reduction in numbers at the Brora colony between 2013 (c.25 AON) and 2014 (3 AON), and, whilst disturbance by man cannot be ruled out as the cause, it may simply have been the result of the site having become very overgrown. The colony at Dounreay has occupied several different places within the complex's perimeter fence, and, on at least one occasion, some waste ground just outside the fence, changes possibly driven by ground predators, but perhaps caused by construction work and other activities on the site.

Oystercatchers breeding in Common Gull colonies in built-up areas

Eight of the colonies listed in Table 1 had Oystercatchers associated with them, typically with single pairs of Oystercatchers breeding within the Common Gull colony and usually within 20 m of the nearest gull's nest. Table 2 summarises the observations recorded on this.

Table 2. Examples of Oystercatchers nesting in association with Common Gulls in urban areas in the Highlands.

Location	Year	Habitat	Evidence for breeding	Distance from nearest Common Gull's nest
4. Thurso (Stainland)	2013	ground	adult on nest	5 m
8. Brora	2013	ground	adult + 1 large chick	c.10 m
13. Dornoch				
Amenity Centre	2012	roof	adult on nest	4 m
Amenity Centre	2014	roof	adult + 3 small chicks	2 m
Retail Park	2014	roof	adult on nest	3 m
20. Dalmore				
building A	2014	roof	adult on nest and later with 2 large chicks	<15 m
building B	2014	roof	adult + 1 large chick	<10 m
22. Deephaven	2014	roof	adult on nest	20 m
23. Conon Bridge	2014	ground	adult + 1 large chick	10 m
28. Inverness (Carse)	2014	ground	adult on nest	5 m (2 nests)
37. Lochy Bridge	2013	ground	2 adults + 2 small chicks	5 m

Discussion

Although Common Gulls only began breeding in built-up areas in the Highlands around 40 years ago, they appear to be well established there in this habitat. However, it remains of comparatively minor importance, being used currently by perhaps 10–20% of the breeding population of the area (c.500 AON in urban areas of an estimated total population of 3,252 AON found in the Highlands as part of *Seabird 2000*, Tasker 2004). The frequency with which birds use such places appears to be increasing, however, a potentially significant consideration given that the Common Gull is classified as a *species of intermediate conservation concern* (amber-listed) because of overall declines in its UK population (Eaton *et al* 2009).

There are some obvious similarities between Common Gull colonies in built-up areas in the Highlands on the one hand and those of Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls on the other. By and large all three species select places where they are likely to be free of disturbance from ground predators, especially Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*, and humans. Such differences as there are between these three species are more subtle. Common Gulls appear to be more likely to nest on the ground than either Lesser Black-backed or Herring Gulls though both the larger species do sometimes nest on the ground. In Caithness and East Sutherland, for instance, virtually all urban Herring Gull nests are on buildings (RMS unpublished data), and this was also true of Herring Gulls in Cumbria according to a survey in 2009 (6.1% on ground) (Sellers & Shackleton 2011). By contrast this same survey found rather more Lesser Black-backed Gulls (23.6%) breeding on the ground (Sellers & Shackleton 2011). As concerns roof-nesting, Common Gulls are again more similar to Lesser Black-backed Gulls than Herring Gulls in that they prefer to nest in the open on roofs, generally nest relatively close together and are much less likely to use chimney stacks. In the Highlands Common Gulls nesting on roofs mainly selected pitched rather than flat roofs, whilst those in Aberdeen chiefly chose flat roofs (Stewart 1989), differences that may simply reflect the nature of the buildings available to the birds in these two areas. One other possible difference between Common Gulls and the larger gull species is that Common Gulls seem more ready to give up tenure of a site following disturbance by man or predators.

In more natural habitats Common Gulls sometimes suffer poor breeding success, in part because of ground predators (e.g. Craik 1999, 2000) and the main driver behind the move to built-up areas appears to be minimisation of this possibility. Some preliminary observations of productivity at the Dalmore colony in 2014 found that 2.04 ± 0.73 chicks were reared per successful breeding attempt ($n = 28$) (based on observations made during the first week of July just as the chicks were fledging). Though based on much smaller sample sizes, similar results were obtained at a number of other colonies. These observations confirm that nesting in built-up areas can give rise to high productivity.



Plate 279. Oystercatcher with chicks and Common Gull on nest on roof of Amenity Centre, Dornoch, Highland, May 2014. © Robin Sellers

The availability of waste human food in urban areas, either from refuse tips, domestic rubbish awaiting collection or discarded take-aways etc., is often cited as the primary cause of the colonisation and rapid growth of roof-nesting in the larger gull species (e.g. Rock 2005). This was undoubtedly true in the past and may remain the case in some places, but, with improved practices at refuse tips, it is less true than it was and more recent studies have emphasised that earthworms can be an important element of the diet (Coulson & Coulson 2008). In the case of Common Gulls, food appears not to be an important issue as regards the shift to urban habitats; a study in Germany, for instance, found that worms, insects and cherries were the most important components of the diet at an urban Common Gull colony there (Kubetzki & Garthe 2007). At none of the colonies investigated as part of this study did Common Gulls appear in the street searching for food in the way that Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls do and, despite breeding in close proximity to man, they appear to avoid direct contact with man. Moving to a closer association with man is not risk-free, however, and a number of instances of conflict between human activities and Common Gulls were noted during the course of this investigation. More detailed studies are needed, but it appears that whole colony movements of Common Gulls are more likely to occur than in either Lesser Black-backed or Herring Gulls. Whether this will prove to be the species' salvation or undoing remains to be seen.

A significant cause of low productivity in Common Gulls is predation of eggs and young by other bird species, notably larger gull species. That so many of the colonies listed in Table 1 are adjacent to Herring Gull colonies is, at first sight, surprising. The explanation is probably that they provide some protection against the attentions of other birds such as corvids and raptors. That the majority of Common Gull colonies, but especially the larger ones, had relatively close-packed nests is also probably in part a defence mechanism against intrusions by aerial predators.

The presence of Oystercatchers in Common Gull colonies also appears, at first sight, maladapted. As with Common Gulls, the breeding productivity of Oystercatchers under natural conditions is affected by both ground and avian predators. Unusually amongst waders, Oystercatchers provide some food for their chicks and this has enabled them to adopt roofs as

a place to breed (e.g. Duncan *et al.* 2001). By choosing to nest in Common Gull colonies the Oystercatchers not only reduce the risk of predation by ground predators but also get some measure of protection from avian predators through the presence of the Common Gulls. This is not a strategy without its own risks, of course, as the Common Gulls themselves may predate the young of Oystercatchers, although the chicks quickly become too large for Common Gulls to deal with, and nesting in Common Gull colonies is probably less risky than in, say, a Herring Gull colony, in which Oystercatchers are rarely if ever successful in raising young to fledging (C.S. Roselaar quoted in Cramp & Simmons 1982).

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The BOURC review of the 1869 specimen of American Goshawk from Perthshire

R.Y. McGowan, on behalf of BOURC

*The Records Committee of the British Ornithologists' Union (BOURC) reconsiders old records of rare birds as part of its ongoing work. Recently reviews were undertaken of the two British records of the American subspecies of Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis atricapillus*: one in Perthshire in 1869, and the other on the Isles of Scilly in 1935. The Perthshire record has had a rather chequered history on the British List, having appeared in various BOU Checklists published between 1883 and 1952, although it was dropped without formal review in the 5th Checklist (BOU 1971). This paper presents for the first time previously unpublished details on the Scottish occurrence and the background to its subsequent rejection (BOU 2013). The review of the Isles of Scilly record is not yet complete (BOU 2015).*

Introduction

The status of a specimen of an American Goshawk held at RMS was reviewed by the BOURC in 2012. Originally owned by Robert Gray, the specimen had passed to Andrew Hogg, of George Street, Edinburgh. In 1885 it was purchased by the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art (a precursor of National Museums Scotland (NMS)) for £5 5s. The register entry NMS.Z 1885.20 reads 'A stuffed specimen of the American Goshawk from Schiehallion.' The bird was thereafter on exhibition in one of the natural history galleries, probably until gallery redevelopment in the late 1960s. The branch on which it was mounted is inscribed '1st British record' in the hand of Ian H.J. Lyster, the museum's curator of birds during 1963–84.

The four lines of enquiry for the BOURC review followed a logical sequence: first, to confirm the identification; second, to determine all relevant details of the bird's provenance; third, to scrutinise the 'establishment literature' for comments on the record that might help to explain its variable status on the British List; fourth, to investigate any vagrancy potential that might support natural occurrence.

Identification

Two subspecies of Goshawk are generally recognised in North America though other races are weakly differentiated on clinal differences (AOU 1957, Squires & Reynolds 1997). *Accipiter gentilis laingi* is restricted to islands off British Columbia and *A. g. atricapillus* occurs elsewhere throughout North America, from the limit of forests south to New Mexico and Tennessee. Northern populations are migratory. It seems reasonable to assume any occurrences in the British Isles pertain to *atricapillus* (as has been assumed historically).

Much finer barring on the ventral plumage of adult *atricapillus* is very obvious, and this emphasises the darker shaft streaks (Plate 283). The ventral appearance is perhaps better described as vermiculation rather than barring. Dorsally, *atricapillus* shows delicate blue-grey tone on mantle and wings (Plate 284). The crown and ear-coverts have a contrastingly dark (almost black) appearance (Plate 282).

The grey-blue tinge to the dorsal surface is still apparent, although faded on the Perthshire specimen (Plate 280). Importantly, the ventral plumage is typical of the fine transverse barring



Plates 280–281. The mounted Perthshire specimen of American Goshawk from 1869 (NMS.Z 1885.20). © NMS



Plate 282. The ear-coverts of American Goshawk *A. g. atricapillus* (two on left) have a black or very dark appearance, generally contrasting more with mantle; in nominate *gentilis* (two on right) this area is concolourous with mantle. © NMS

and dark shaft streaks of *atricapillus*. The ear coverts/cheek show the dark patch mentioned above. Although the plumage exhibited a degree of bleaching due to prolonged exposure to light, the bird's right side was innermost in the display case and is less faded (Plate 281). The black or blackish patch is quite clear and is not the brown tone of nominate *gentilis*.

Variation in biometrics is clinal and a range of wing lengths for adults is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Wing lengths of adult Goshawks. Data from Squires & Reynolds (1997) (*atricapillus*) and Cramp & Simmons (1980) (nominate *gentilis*).

	Wing length ♂ (mm)	Wing length ♀ (mm)
<i>atricapillus</i>	327 (313–335)	357 (340–377)
nominate <i>gentilis</i>	312 (306–323)	353 (336–366)

The wing length of the Perthshire bird was 14 inches (Gray 1871), which is equivalent to 355.6 mm. Although the wings are pinned tightly to the body, measurements taken by the author are within a few mm of the dimension indicated by Gray.

On plumage characters and biometrics, the Perthshire bird was confirmed as an adult female American Goshawk.

Provenance

Robert Gray (1825–87) was a reputable ornithologist, perhaps best known for his work *The Birds of the West of Scotland*, published in 1871. As an inspector of branches for a commercial bank, he travelled around Scotland, and during his trips he gleaned local ornithological knowledge. His contacts included private and public collections, professional taxidermists and amateur ornithologists (McGowan & Clugston in Forrester *et al.* 2007). Gray acquired the bird while on a visit to Brechin in 1869, and exhibited it at a meeting of the Natural History Society of Glasgow on 30 November 1869. The first published details appeared in a letter to *Ibis* dated 4 February 1870 (Gray 1870); these are reproduced in Appendix 1. A more expansive account was written in his book (Gray 1871) as follows:

The American Goshawk *Astur atricapillus*

Knowing the aversion of many ornithologists to admit stragglers into the list of British birds, I have some diffidence in presenting, for the first time, a notice of the occurrence of a species new to this country. It is quite possible, however, that from its general resemblance to the European bird, the American Goshawk may have been hitherto passed over without detection, and may again be found in Scotland. I therefore give it a place in this work, in the expectation that some future observer may be able to note its appearance a second or third time in Britain, and thus place it at least on a level with other species whose occurrence has been recorded at long and uncertain intervals.

In May, 1869, when visiting the town of Brechin, in Forfarshire, I was fortunate in finding a very handsome specimen of this Goshawk in the hands of a bird-stuffer there, who had obtained it a short time previously from a keeper in Perthshire, along with a number of snow-buntings and other birds, shot by him on the flanks of Shechallion [sic], and all recently skinned. The bird was kindly presented to me by its possessor, who looked upon it as a "coarse sort of gled", and hardly worth the trouble of cleaning, as the head had been much stained and the plumage otherwise soiled by the person who skinned it. On proceeding to relax the skin, it was found by the Glasgow stuffer whom I employed to mount the bird, that the brains and eyes had not been removed, nor the flesh from the wing-bones, so that no doubt could be entertained as to its recent occurrence. The total length of the specimen, apparently a female, is 24½ inches; wing, from shoulder to tip of longest quill, 14 inches; tail 10½ inches. The distribution of the markings on the plumage is precisely that detailed by the late Mr Cassin, Prince Bonaparte, and other writers, but the head can scarcely be called black; the hind neck appears, when the feathers are raised, as if spotted with yellowish white, the same semicircular mark appearing on the occiput of a sparrowhawk. The breast and underparts are at first sight grey, but on closer inspection show the faint transverse markings and a thin longitudinal streak in the centre of each feather.



Plate 283. Two nominate *gentilis* Goshawks (left), and two *atricapillus* (right) (skins at NHM, Tring). © NMS



Plate 284. Two nominate *gentilis* Goshawks (left), and two *atricapillus* (right) (skins at NHM, Tring). © NMS

The following concise distinctions are given by Sir William Jardine in the third volume of his *Illustrations of Ornithology*. "The greatest and most perceptible distinction between the two birds is in the markings of the breast and underparts, and it is so distinct as to be at once perceived. In the American species the underparts are of a uniform pale greyish white, having the quill and centre of each feather black, forming a dark streak. This extends to those in the middle of the belly, after which it is hardly visible; every feather in addition is clouded transversely with irregular bars of grey. In the European bird, the markings are in the shape of two decided transverse dark bars upon each feather, with the shaft the same colour, but not exceeding its own breadth, each as a whole, having a different appearance."

Significantly, Gray said the bird was 'kindly presented to me by its possessor who looked upon it as a "coarse sort of gled" [= kite] and hardly worth the trouble of cleaning... Therefore there was no financial benefit to the taxidermist, who had in any case not even correctly identified the species concerned. If there had been a financial transaction, it might be suggested that Gray's ornithological interests and reputation could have made him a target for unscrupulous dealers. In summary, the bird was shot by an un-named gamekeeper around April/May, and (presumably) sold with other birds to the 'bird-stuffer' in Brechin. All published references to the bird over the next 140 odd years were limited to these rather vague details.

Historically, there is no record of a taxidermy business in Brechin (Marshall 2009), but the *Brechin Almanac* (1872–5) advertised the business of Alexander Clift: 'Fishing tackle manufacturer, hairdresser, wig maker, bird-stuffer and cutler; fishing tackle prepared, flies made to pattern [sic]'. Clift's 'bird stuffing' may be interpreted as a logical side-line to his fishing tackle business, as he would have received birds, perhaps including Red Kites *Milvus milvus*, for the manufacture of fishing lures (Orr-Ewing in Forrester *et al.* 2007). Assuming that Clift was Gray's contact, he had in any case mistaken the Goshawk for a species of kite.

I consulted the manuscript collection of J.A. Harvie-Brown, held in the NMS library. Harvie-Brown was a prodigious correspondent who wrote regularly to a range of naturalists across Scotland. A series of letters from Gray (file 23/381), the first written on 2 November 1869, yielded further significant details.

Letter dated 2 November, written from Fettercairn:

"In Brechin today I was fortunate in getting what had been but a month or two ago a magnificent female Goshawk. It was shot in Glen Esk Forfarshire but unfortunately the keeper who shot it tried his rough hand at skinning it and has very much spoiled the feathers. I do not despair however of having it put right. The skin is not torn, only soiled with grease and water. This is the second Forfarshire Goshawk I have seen, and I am keeping my eye on the other one - a splendid male - at present in the hands of a drunken keeper at Glamis Castle. The female now mine is a most powerful looking bird and at least four or five inches longer than your large peregrine which you kindly presented me with. It must have been in splendid plumage when shot, but it lay in Clift's shop in Brechin among some rubbish until he could find leisure to clean it! The fellow did not know what it was, but called it a coorse sort o' gled! [sic]."

The Glen Esk locality mentioned here seems anomalous, but the following corrective postscript appeared in subsequent fuller letter.

Letter dated 16 November, written from Glasgow:

"My Goshawk was shot on one of the flanks of Schihallion [sic] by a keeper named Stewart. Menzies the road surveyor got it from Stewart shortly after he had drawn the skin off and carried it to Brechin. These particulars reached me yesterday. Clift the stuffer made a mistake in saying Glen Esk; it was Glen Lyon he meant. That is part of Stewart's beat as keeper."

Letter dated 26 November (final paragraph):

"My Goshawk is a very fine bird now having been nicely mounted and cased in a glass box."

Letter dated 24 December, page 3:

"You will be glad to know that my goshawk turns out to be a new British bird. I left it at Brechin to be sent on to Glasgow and took it to McCulloch to be stuffed without giving it more than a cursory glance and looking at it carefully. However, on taking its measurements I find it is the *Falco atricapillus* of North America and an undoubted addition to the British fauna. It differs from the European Goshawk in being larger and having the transverse bars at the heart and abdomen much fainter and more irregular. The shaft of each feather is dark brown which makes the under plumage appear streaked. *I noticed these peculiarities at the time* [author's italics] but thought the two species had been reunited by modern authors. Such however is not the case the American bird being considered totally distinct from the European. I have written to Professor Newton about it. When I got the skin from Clift the head was not skinned nor the eyes taken out."

Letter dated 27 December:

"I think I shall have my Goshawk photographed."

From the very first letter (2 November) there is a flow of information to Harvie-Brown concerning the bird; he explicitly states on 2 November that he acquired the bird that day. Of course, Gray's account in his book stated "In May, 1869, when visiting the town of Brechin, in Forfarshire, I was fortunate in finding a very handsome specimen of this Goshawk in the hands of a bird-stuffer..." He simply tells us that he found it ... in the hands of a bird-stuffer. This '*finding*' does not contradict his later *acquisition*. It is reasonable to assume that Gray became aware of a skin of a large raptor in Clift's shop, and that Clift was asked to retain the specimen until Gray returned to Brechin at a later date. Whatever the precise circumstances, from the wording of the letters I

believe it is inconceivable that he had the bird before 2 November. This scenario would also conform with Gray's brief letter in *Ibis* (Appendix 1).

These letters contain previously unrecorded key details: Alexander Clift is confirmed as the 'bird-stuffer'; the gamekeeper who shot the bird was Stewart; the person who took it to Brechin was Menzies, and the collection locality was the flank of Schiehallion, facing Glen Lyon. One might assume that Gray had solicited from Clift all available details of the Goshawk's provenance, and Clift corrected the information that he had initially given Gray. The poor condition of the fleshed-out skin is not a problem; rough fleshing-out and salting would be sufficient to preserve such a specimen for a number of months (J. Fishwick, pers. comm.). Gray's penultimate letter (24 December) contains other pertinent details. First, he said he had noted plumage features that are diagnostic for *atricapillus* "at the time", presumably before it was mounted. He noted these as "transverse bars at the heart and abdomen much fainter and more irregular. The shaft of each feather is dark brown which makes the under plumage appear streaked." Second, he had not realised that *atricapillus* was considered a separate species (as it was then) until some point in December. It seems likely that further investigation of the bird's status was prompted after it had been exhibited at a meeting of the Glasgow Natural History Society on 30 November.

Status of the Perthshire record in accounts of American Goshawk in 'establishment' literature

A comprehensive review of 20 key 'establishment' ornithological sources was carried out to assess the record's status and pedigree over time (Appendix 2). It was important here to consider the record in the context of other specimen records of American Goshawk in Britain and Ireland. In chronological order these were: 1869 Perthshire, 1870 one Galtee, Co. Tipperary, another Parsonstown, Co. Offaly; 1919 Co. Tyrone, 1935 Carnakelly Bog, Co. Galway, another Tresco, Isles of Scilly.

Publication of the Perthshire record by a particular authority without additional comment or qualification was taken as explicit or implied acceptance. Of equal interest were any negative comments, rejection or overt omission.

In the 100 years following Gray (1871), the record was generally accepted. Although Dresser (1871–81) thought it 'not deemed advisable' for inclusion in his *History of the Birds of Europe*, this line was softened in his *Manual of Palaearctic Birds* (Dresser 1902–03) where he listed it. Saunders (1889) mentioned the Perthshire and Tipperary specimens but did not believe that American Goshawk could be a genuine visitor to the British Isles. He expressed his reservations on the former's provenance with the words 'on somewhat slight evidence' but of course he would not have known the collector's name or the details of the birds transfer to Clift, as this information was unpublished. In fact, Saunders's statement is the only overtly negative comment of any made in the entire period since 1869. The wording itself was hardly damning, and no details were presented to damage the record's credibility.

With regards to Saunders's general doubt over genuine vagrancy of the species, it is useful to consider the words of Alexander & Fitter (1955):

"Most authors of comprehensive works on British birds, down to *The Handbook* (1938–41), have held that small land-birds could not possibly cross the Atlantic unaided, and that any records of American Passerines, if correctly identified and authenticated, must therefore relate, either to escaped cage-birds or to birds given some sort of assisted passage. Saunders (1889), indeed, refused even to accept that the two American cuckoos could have crossed the Atlantic "without human assistance". In this he dissented from the B.O.U. Committee, which in its *List* of 1883, produced under the auspices of Newton, had accepted these and other American land-

birds as genuine migrants. This was, of course, not Saunders's only difference of opinion with Newton. Witherby and his colleagues, from their 1912 *Handlist* onwards, reverted to Newton's more liberal view over the cuckoos, but were still unable to accept the genuineness of the migrant status of such birds as the Baltimore Oriole in Shetland in September 1890 or the Slate-colored Junco in Co. Clare in May 1905."

Saunders's ostensibly critical remarks should be seen in that context; with regard to transatlantic vagrancy, his opinion was simply at one extreme on the continuum of contemporary opinion.

In the following years, the record was accepted by Harting (1901), though it appeared in Hartert *et al.* (1912) in square brackets, and in an appendix to the BOU *Checklist* (1915). In both works American Goshawk was lumped with several other species, e.g. Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*, Purple Martin *Progne subis*, Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* and White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*, all considered unlikely vagrants at the time (yet all now in Category A). The reservation over the status of American Goshawk was therefore a reflection of the prevailing view on transatlantic vagrancy, rather than the circumstances of the record itself. After the Tyrone record in 1919, the *species* was accepted by Witherby (1920–24). Thereafter, the Perthshire bird was accepted by another six key authorities, including BOU (1952) which recorded all six British and Irish records of American Goshawk.

The Perthshire bird was then dropped without comment from *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland* (BOU 1971); certainly no formal review had taken place, and the other five records continued to be listed. The raptor section was authored by James Ferguson-Lees, who (*in litt.* 2010) thought he might have been influenced (to omit the record) by a comment in Witherby's species card index which was held in the *British Birds* office at the time. However, he was not sure that any such comment had been added to a card, and the card index is no longer traceable. In any case, this contention appears inconsistent with the comprehensive revisions of vagrant records explicitly alluded to in the *Handbook*; the sections on vagrants had been 'thoroughly revised and brought up to date' (see H.F. Witherby's statement on Distribution in the introductory remarks in volume 1).

In summary, over the last 140 years Saunders alone was equivocal, though his wording is guarded rather than damning. Any doubt expressed by other authorities was implicitly on vagrancy potential in general, rather than on the record itself.

Irruptive patterns and vagrancy potential of *atricapillus*

In the Nearctic, irruptive movements of northern birds to the south occur in approximately 10-year cycles, coinciding with populations of Snowshoe Hare *Lepus americanus* and grouse (Squires & Reynolds 1997). Cycle data from 1850 to 1900 from around Hudson Bay show that 1865 was a peak year with a trough four years later in 1869 (Finerty 1980). As predator numbers lag behind hare cycles and Lynx *Lynx canadensis* numbers peaked 2–3 years later, Goshawks would be expected to start dispersing around 1868–69 as food supplies crashed. This timing ties in well with the Scottish and early Irish records. Of note is a north-easterly tracking hurricane in the western Atlantic from 3 to 7 September 1868 (Unisys Weather <http://weather.unisys.com>).

Although most birds caught in the autumn in invasion years in North America are either juveniles or birds in their second calendar year, there have been invasions of mostly adults (Mueller & Berger 1967, Mueller *et al.* 1977). Of course it is not known how long the Schiehallion bird had been in Scotland; it is possible that it arrived as a juvenile. The specimen was examined by Dr Steve Petty in October 2010 and he confirmed that the bird was adult (three years old, or older) as there was no evidence of retained juvenile feathers; there was no evidence of moult. As adult females commence their annual moult in April at the earliest, the lack of moult is not inconsistent with the reported collection date of 'around May'.

Importation of *atricapillus* from North America to Britain for falconry purposes at that time may be ruled out, as falconry only spread to North America after the Second World War (Squires & Reynolds 1997).

The potential for vagrancy around 1868/69 was thus consistent with the known irruption timing and supported by a prevailing weather system.

Assessment of record

Reviews of Category B records are undertaken by BOURC on a 'without prejudice' basis, as it is accepted that the documentation relating to early records does often not reach post-1950 standards. No doubt Robert Gray would have published fuller details on his Goshawk, had he anticipated the record would be scrutinised in depth 140 years later. For acceptance on the British List, a first record of a taxon should be verifiable when assessed against guidelines. A number of previously unpublished details on the Perthshire specimen were unearthed during the preparation of the review file for BOURC, though by the time the file was finalised, the author had left the Records Committee by rotation. The full information (in bold) is set against the criteria as follows:

- There should ideally be an extant specimen, and/or photograph, and/or adequate description or drawing. **The specimen exists.**
- There should be a reasonably precise date, including at the very least the year of the record. **c. May 1869.**
- There should be a credible account of the circumstances of discovery. **Bird shot by gamekeeper Stewart, passed to Clift at Brechin; details reported in letters to Harvie-Brown in November 1869; bird exhibited at Glasgow Natural History Society in November 1869.**
- There should preferably be endorsement by contemporary authorities. **Record was accepted by Newton & Saunders (1871–85), BOU (1883), Seebohm (1883–85), Harting (1901) and others.**
- There should not be any evidence or strong suspicion of fraud. **Gray was given the specimen, and no money was involved.**
- If the record does not conform with subsequent patterns of occurrence (if any) this should be explained. **Two American Goshawks were shot in Ireland in 1870; the species was irruptive in North America 1868.**

The Records Committee accepted the identification as *atricapillus*. It was felt that the paper trail was convincing and many aspects of the record were satisfactory. However, it was considered that there was doubt over the provenance of the bird and some discrepancy in the report of the date of collection. Although Gray noted distinctive (and diagnostic) plumage features before *atricapillus* was confirmed as the taxon, the Records Committee thought that there was a theoretical possibility of a switch of specimens while the bird was being mounted in Glasgow (although no evidence of a second specimen exists). The record was formally rejected (BOU 2013).

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Appendix 1. Text of Gray's letter to *Ibis* (Gray 1870).

"Having been engaged for some years in the preparation of a work on the *Birds of Scotland*, I have personally made particular inquiries throughout almost every county regarding the occurrence of the rarer species, and have been rewarded by the acquisition of many facts of interest, which I have no doubt will serve a useful purpose when they are published.

Among birds of this class that have lately come into my hands, I find about half a dozen species that are not mentioned in the last edition of Yarrell's 'British Birds'; and as two of these possess an additional interest from the fact that, being nearly allied to birds already known as British, they may have been overlooked and are likely to occur again...

Last May, when at Brechin, in Forfarshire, I was fortunate in procuring a specimen of the American Gos-Hawk (*Astur atricapillus*) which had been killed a few months previously by a keeper in the vicinity of Shechallion [*sic*], in Perthshire. It was sent by him, along with a number of Snow-Buntings and other birds, all recently skinned, to the person from whom I got it; the specimen had been very roughly prepared, as, on afterwards proceeding to relax it, the Glasgow bird-stuffer, whom I employed to mount the skin, found that the brains and eyes had not been removed. This specimen, which is an adult, and apparently a female, is 24.5 in. in length; the wing from flexure measuring 14 inches, and the tail 10.5 in."

Appendix 2. Details of the 1869 Perthshire specimen of American Goshawk in the establishment literature.

No.	Author/year	Status
1	Newton & Saunders (1871–85)	accepted
2	Dresser (1871–81)	not acceptable
3	BOU (1883)	accepted
4	Seebohm (1883–85)	accepted
5	Saunders (1889)	"not likley to be genuine vagrant"
6	Saunders (1899)	as above
7	Harting (1901)	accepted
8	Dresser (1902–03)	"said to have been obtained"
9	Harvie-Brown (1906)	accepted
10	Hartert <i>et al.</i> (1912)	square-bracketed
11	Hartert (1903–22)	accepted
12	BOU (1915)	with other Nearctic species in appendix "not entirely satisfactory"
13	Witherby (1920–24)	accepted
14	Saunders & Clarke (1927)	accepted
15	Witherby <i>et al.</i> (1938–41)	accepted
16	BOU (1952)	accepted (all six British and Irish records)
17	Baxter & Rintoul (1953)	accepted
18	Alexander & Fitter (1955)	accepted (all six)
19	Bannerman (1956)	accepted (all six)
20	BOU (1971)	all except Perthshire bird accepted



Plate 285. Tay Reedbeds panorama. © *Iain Malzer*

Estimating the Bearded Tit population in the Tay Reedbeds, a study based on 2002–14 ringing data

I. Malzer & D. Spinks

Introduction

The Tay Reedbeds on the northern bank of the Tay estuary, between Perth in the west and Invergowrie in the east, are the largest continuous reedbeds in the UK (SNH, SSSI designation 1999). Stands of Common Reed *Phragmites australis* extend almost uninterrupted for 410 ha. Vast stands such as these are rare and have clear importance for species specialised to reed habitats, as such, the Tay Reedbeds present a nationally important site for the Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*. The Bearded Tit is completely dependent on reedbed habitats, often breeding and wintering within a single stand. Despite being a specially protected species in the UK and under 'Amber' conservation status, the population sizes of this passerine on the Tay remain understudied and unclear (Eaton *et al.* 2009). The size of the Tay Reedbeds and the stability of this site relative to other reed stands could mean that populations of Bearded Tits on the Tay have the potential to form an increasingly significant proportion of the total UK population.

Ringing records from Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) studies in the Tay Reedbeds have been collected by members of the Tay Ringing Group (TRG) under permit from the BTO, since 2002 (Hatton 2008). In this paper we present and discuss recent ringing data and use this to consider apparent population trends, and to estimate the breeding population of Bearded Tits in the Tay Reedbeds. The ringing totals were analysed using simple capture-recapture models to provide yearly estimates of breeding adult Bearded Tits on the Tay. These estimates aim to provide more insight into the true numbers of this elusive species in the UK and offer a useful resource as decisions are made on the future management of the Tay Reedbeds.

Methods

Since 2002, four mist net rides along a 7 km stretch of the Tay Reedbeds have been registered as BTO Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) sites for the Bearded Tit (Figure 1) (Hatton 2008). During the RAS study, ringers from the TRG set mist-nets at each site at least once a month from April to August. Ringing also took place on a small number of additional visits to these sites out with this period, all available TRG data is included in the results. Netting effort, the amount of net erected and the time spent catching, is kept constant between visits as far as possible. Hatton (2003) describes the specific protocol. On capture, the birds are ringed with a unique BTO metal A ring and their biometrics recorded before they are released back into reeds. Although the total ringing effort across the years is roughly comparable it is not empirical; any demographic trends observed are only postulated.

The first objective of this paper is to present and analyse the Bearded Tit ringing data produced by the TRG. Specifically to use this data to give an insight into the minimum numbers of birds present, and the approximate demographic trends at the sites monitored over the last nine years. The Results section provides a detailed breakdown of ringing totals over the last nine years, while the Discussion section suggests possible drivers of elucidated population trends.



Figure 1. Tay Estuary Reedbed, RAS ringing sites depicted: 1. Tay Lodge; 2. Seaside Dyke; 3. Powgavie; 4. Kingston.

The second objective of this paper is to provide a closed population estimate of individual adult birds during the breeding season for each year since the beginning of the RAS in 2002. These estimates offer a valuable indication of the importance of this site for breeding Bearded Tits, and longer term trends in breeding numbers. In this analysis we concentrate on adult birds only, captured between the start of April and the end of August which is the main breeding period of this species. Classic capture-recapture methods can be used to estimate abundance using the ratio of the number of marked birds captured in a given sample to those captured unmarked.

We used the closed population methods of Otis *et al.* (1978) to estimate the yearly abundance of breeding adults on the Tay. Closed population estimates are justified as this site is well isolated from other populations of Bearded Tits. In addition, radio-tracking revealed that adult birds remained locally and within the reedbed during the breeding season (Malzer, unpublished data). These data also showed that second nesting attempts were always within the local ringing site. Correspondingly, we saw no evidence of movements between the four ringing sites over the course of the breeding season. While it is difficult to exactly define the sampling area covered by closed population estimates, the tendency for birds to remain locally around the netting sites during the breeding season, suggests large areas of the reedbed were not covered by our sampling protocol and that our estimates will be conservative. We considered each individual adult to have a consistent capture probability over the months and pooled data from all four sites. For each year we tested a suite of traditional closed population models, including those which allowed capture probability to vary with time or with a behavioural response after first capture. The most appropriate models were chosen based on their AIC (Akaike Information Criteria) values. In cases where several models showed reasonable support averages, weighted by the support of the model, were calculated.

Results

General ringing totals

Since 2006, a total of 2,387 Bearded Tits have been ringed in the Tay Reedbeds (Table 1). As this species is multi-brooded, it can be prolific when conditions permit, resulting in the majority of these birds being juveniles, ringed during the summer. Table 1 details the total number of Bearded Tits caught and ringed over the last nine calendar years, and their BTO age codes upon capture. Figure 2 shows the total number of new birds caught in each year from 2006 to 2014. The ringing was conducted by TRG, both during the RAS period and outwith.

Excluding the years 2013 and 2014 (in which ringing effort at the Tay Reedbeds was increased), there was an average of 17 ringing sessions during the RAS period, and an average of three to four further ringing sessions outside of this period, each year. The data shown in Table 1 indicates population trends for the Bearded Tit at the Tay Reedbeds.

Table 1. The total number of Bearded Tits ringed by calendar year in the Tay Reedbeds, 2006–14. The ‘unique adults’ value is the total number of individual adults encountered during the breeding season only (April–August inclusive). This value comprises both new ringed adults and recaptured adults which had been ringed in previous years (retraps). This value is important for the estimation of breeding adult population.

Age codes designated according to the BTO Ringers’ Manual; Age code 4 is an identifiable adult; hatched before current calendar year, exact year unknown. Age code 2 is defined as fully grown bird, year of hatching quite unknown (including current year). As Bearded Tits undergo a complete post-juvenile moult following fledging, many birds caught later in the year are classified as age code 2. This age code therefore includes both adults and juveniles.

Juvenile Bearded Tits hatched in that calendar year, and caught before post-juvenile moult making them impossible to differentiate from adults, were classified as BTO age code 3. * includes pulli ringed in nest (age code 1).

Year	Ring totals		Age code of ringed (new) birds			Unique adults caught during breeding season
	Total caught	Total ringed (i.e. new birds)	Code 3 (juvenile)	Code 4 (adult)	Code 2 (unknown)	
2006	372	320	126	50	144	62
2007	329	241	135	83	23	122
2008	153	127	51	34	42	53
2009	198	163	105	51	7	44
2010	132	110	63	45	2	56
2011	105	92	60	24	8	35
2012	291	243	173	69	1	73
2013	476	331	152*	36	143	55
2014	989	760	480*	68	212	91

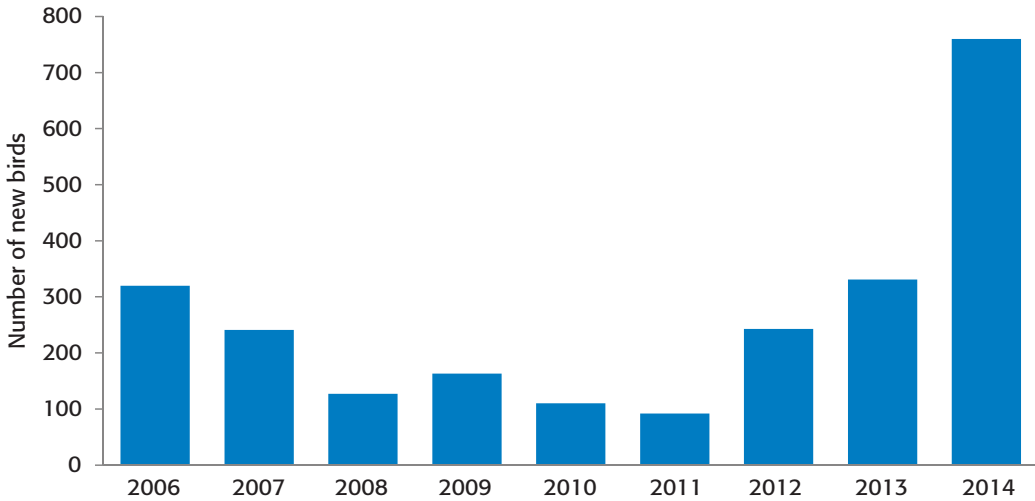


Figure 2. Bearded Tit annual ringing totals at the Tay Reedbed, 2006–14. Includes all new birds ringed (between January and December inclusive).

Estimates of breeding adult populations

On average 73 unique individual adult birds have been caught during each breeding season since 2002 (range 6–122), see Table 1 for 2006–14 data. Figure 3 shows population estimates (N) and associated standard errors estimated by the closed population capture-recapture models. Population estimates were unavailable in 2005 as only six adult individuals were captured during the breeding season of this year, and none were re-captured (Figure 3). Capture-recapture methods (excluding the unavailable estimates in 2005) suggested an average yearly population size of 215 adult birds. The population estimates of individual breeding adults were imprecise due the low numbers of recaptures in each year. In most years many unmarked birds were still being caught during the final capture events.

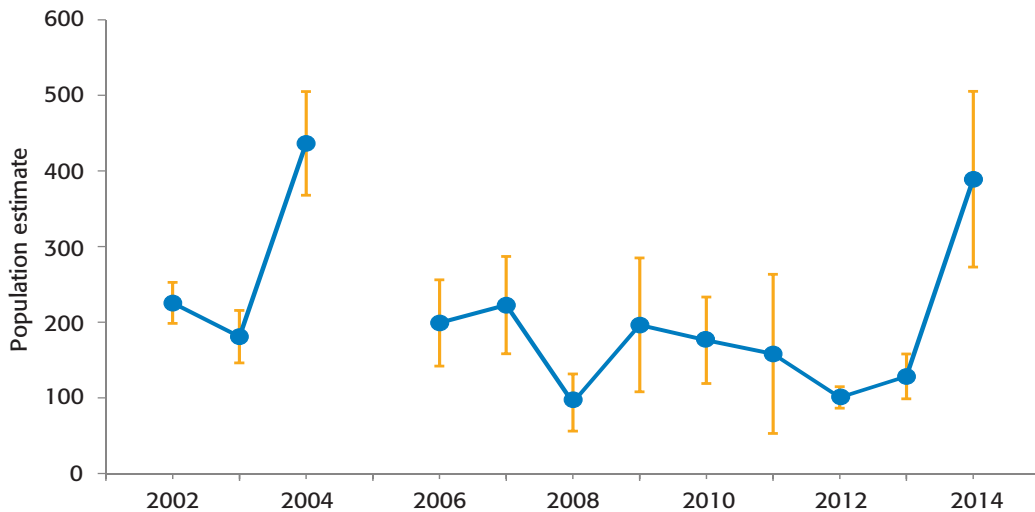


Figure 3. Yearly population estimates of breeding adult Bearded Tits on the Tay Reedbeds from closed population capture-recapture methods. Estimates are missing for 2005 as too few adult birds were captured.

Discussion

The Tay Ringing Group Bearded Tit RAS study, and year-round ringing effort in the Tay Reedbeds, has provided valuable insights into the numbers of birds at this site. Though the total ringing effort is not wholly consistent across years, and not empirical in terms of population, it is relatively comparable and provides an indication of demographic trends over time. These data offer a means to approximate general trends in population numbers and may provide some insight into breeding success.

The total number of new birds ringed for this species has fluctuated from year to year (Table 1). As Bearded Tits usually have multiple broods in one season, the fluctuations in juvenile numbers in any one year can be extremely varied. We suggest that the number of new juveniles ringed each year (age code 3 in Table 1) can offer a useful index for estimating breeding success when given as a ratio of juveniles ringed to unique adults captured.

The ringing data for 2007, 2008 and 2010 show that relatively low numbers of juveniles were ringed during these three years when compared to the total number of unique adults captured, with ratios



Plate 286. Colour-ringed female Bearded Tit, Tay Reedbeds, 2014. © I. Malzer

of 1.1, 0.9 and 1.1 juveniles per adult respectively. This is significantly lower than the nine-year average ratio of 2.3. Even discounting the highly productive year of 2014 from the average gives a ratio of 2.0 juveniles per unique adult, which is still far superior to ratios seen for 2007, 2008 and 2010. As the ringing effort was reasonably comparable across the nine year period, these data may indicate poor breeding success for Bearded Tits during 2007, 2008 and 2010.

In support of this hypothesis, it is evident from Table 1 that, in the years following 2007, 2008 and 2010, lower numbers of adults were encountered during the breeding season. This was most apparent in 2008, when only half the number of adults were encountered when compared with 2007 (53 unique adults captured in 2008 compared to 122 in 2007). All three of the following years (2008, 2009 and 2011) had lower unique adult totals (53, 44 and 35 respectively), when compared to the average value of 66 unique adults captured during a single breeding season. This analysis supports the hypothesis that 2007, 2008 and 2010 may have been relatively poor breeding seasons, leading to a lower population of adults the following season. However, other factors, such as winter mortality and wide-scale movements, are also likely to have a role, influencing the number of adults seen from year to year.

During the study period (2006 to 2014), the 2011 breeding season saw the lowest number of unique adults encountered (only 35 individuals captured), and the lowest annual total of new adults ringed (24). We hypothesise this could be due to a combination of both the apparent low productivity of the preceding (2010) breeding season, and the periods of extreme cold experienced during the winter of 2010–11, which likely resulted in high winter mortality for some resident bird species. It is, therefore, encouraging to note that, even despite the breeding season of 2010 appearing less productive than other years, and the harsh winters of both 2010 and 2011, the population looks to have recovered quickly. Such rapid recovery is likely facilitated by the ability of this species to rear multiple broods. During 2012 over twice as many new birds were ringed than the 2010/11 average: 243 new birds being ringed (compared to the 98/110 for 2010/11 respectively), with over 173 of these being juveniles which fledged in 2012.

The ringing data also show that 2014 was an exceptional year for Bearded Tits on the Tay (Table 1). In this year high numbers of individual adult birds were encountered during the breeding season, suggesting a reasonable breeding population. In addition, the weather during the breeding season of 2014 was ideal for rearing multiple broods. The Tay Reedbeds, and much of Scotland, experienced relatively mild conditions from mid-April, which continued through the long breeding season of this species. This looks to have maximised fledging success, with over 480 of the 760 new birds ringed being juveniles. The ratio of ringed juveniles to unique adults was exceptionally high (5.3) for 2014 when compared to the nine year average of 2.3 juveniles per adult. Highly productive years like this demonstrate the national importance of this site for the Bearded Tit, and demonstrate the use of year round ringing efforts when monitoring this elusive species.

Our closed population estimates of adult birds during the breeding season further emphasised the importance of ringing data when monitoring Bearded Tits. At a minimum our estimates suggest 100 adult individuals inhabiting the sample area, with most years closer to 200. Total UK estimates, provided by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, suggest a population of around 640 pairs during the summer of 2014 (Holling *et al.* 2012). Birds on the Tay could therefore contribute over 15% of the total UK breeding population. Further, the inaccessibility of the reedbeds limits ringing effort to only four sites over this large area, possibly causing our estimates to be considerably lower than the true population size. In 2000, Peach co-ordinated additional ringing effort in attempt to better establish the number of Bearded Tits at this site, and with almost identical analytical methods, estimated a population of 190 (95% CI: 148–271) adults (Peach 2000). Our estimates show similar numbers, while also demonstrating the need for longer term surveying in order to capture the wide population fluctuations of this species.

The drivers of Bearded Tit population fluctuations are unclear. However, they are not a unique feature of the Tay population, being reported in several populations throughout Europe. For example, Wilson & Peach (2006) report a 90% reduction in numbers of these birds in Leighton Moss, Lancashire, after a winter flooding event. Such winter mortality may have similar importance on the Tay Reedbeds, as birds inhabiting this site are at the northern boundary of this species' range and therefore likely to experience difficult wintering conditions. Alternatively, extensive population fluctuations may be the result of wide scale movements. Autumn 2013 provided the first ringing recoveries of Bearded Tits from the Tay, with birds moving to the Ythan (North-east Scotland) and Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross). Large scale eruptions, which potentially result in the permanent movement of a significant proportion of the population, may be reflected in the local monitoring schemes.

We strongly recommend continued ringing efforts at the Tay to further monitor the long term trends of the Bearded Tit at this critical breeding site. However, future work should consider a more uniform and increased ringing effort, perhaps at a smaller number of sites in order to improve the precision in estimates. Further, higher effort at single sites may reduce the need to pool data between sites when estimating population sizes, and allow a more rigorous definition of the sampling area, which was a limitation in our study. Overall, the ringing data collected by the TRG suggest that the Tay Reedbeds are a site of national significance for the Bearded Tit. Indeed, with management conducted by the RSPB looking to even further enhance this site for these birds, and the apparent ability of this species to recover from unfavourable climatic conditions, this site could quickly become the most important stronghold for Bearded Tits in the British Isles.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Les Hatton, Steve Moyes, Derek Robertson, Bruch Lynch, Mike Nicoll and other members of the Tay Ringing Group who contributed to the collection of data and the RAS studies. We would like to thank Glasgow University, Tay Ringing Group, Camperdown Wildlife Centre and the RSPB for their support of this work and for financial support.

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Plate 287. Position of hopper in derelict barn, west Mainland, Orkney, May 2010. © C.J. Booth

An unusual nest site of a Raven

In April 2010, I was informed that a pair of Ravens *Corvus corax* had been seen and heard calling agitatedly in the vicinity of an unoccupied farm in the west Mainland of Orkney. I visited the farm on 30 April 2010. On my approach, a pair of Ravens appeared and began calling loudly around a derelict barn. Stacked against the back wall of this building were a variety of farm implements, wooden

pallets and a hopper that had probably been used as a seed or fertiliser spreader (Plate 287). There were a number of sticks lying on the ground and some bird droppings around the edge of the hopper. On investigation, I found a nest within the hopper containing three nearly full grown young Ravens (Plate 288).

Ravens regularly use buildings as nest sites on Orkney, with between two and six pairs annually on Mainland. The majority of nests are either on the gable ends or within the roof space, but this is the first time I had seen one hidden away in such a situation, well out of sight. On checking this site in the following years an attempt in 2011 failed, but three young were reared in 2012 and two young in both 2013 and 2014.

There are many references in the literature to Ravens nesting in buildings, but I have not found any describing such an enclosed site.

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Plate 288. Nest in hopper with three young Ravens, west Mainland, Orkney, May 2010. © C.J. Booth

Tree-nesting by Black-headed Gulls

On 1 July 2014, I was surveying breeding waterbirds at a small loch at Synton Mossend (NT4820), midway between Hawick and Selkirk in Borders. I was surprised to be mobbed by a small number of Black-headed Gulls *Croicocephalus ridibundus* as there were no signs of any nests on the floating or emergent vegetation. As I approached a small clump of conifers surrounding the old boathouse some of the gulls were visible, perched on the upper limbs of the trees adjacent to what were almost certainly old corvid nests (Plate 289). Moving further away from the loch I settled down to watch. It did not take long for the remaining birds to return to the trees, some clearly settling on the old nests in an incubating posture. There appeared to be four incubating birds. Continuing my walk round the loch provoked further mobbing behaviour suggesting that the gulls were indeed breeding.

Tree nesting is apparently not unknown in Black-headed Gulls, BWP stating that breeding 'in low trees or bushes' was rare (Cramp & Simmons 1982). These specific nests differ in that they were 8–12 m up in Norway Spruce *Picea abies*. Tree nesting has previously been noted where changes to circumstances necessitate quick adaptation for example due to low water levels in Cheshire in 1934 (Boyd 1934)

and late spring floods in eastern England in 1947 (Vine & Sergeant 1948). Baxter & Rintoul (1953) also noted three places in Scotland where they knew that some Black-headed Gulls had nested in trees: Threipmuir (Lothian), where they nested in stunted fir-trees; Dupplin (Perth & Kinross), where they saw one nesting quite high up in a birch tree; and Skibo (Sutherland), where they nested in spruce trees.

Given the date, it seems likely that these nests were replacements for losses elsewhere. Unfortunately, I was unable to return to the loch to witness the outcome.

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Plate 289. Location of Black-headed Gull nests in trees, Synton Mossend, Borders, 1 July 2014. © Ray Murray

Sustained hovering by a Peregrine

On 5 April 2015, Margaret Cowie and Kenny Buchan were at the south end of the Loch of Strathbeg when they saw an adult female Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* fly to Stanakeppie Bay and hover directly over the water where a Teal *Anas crecca* had just dived to avoid it. For half an hour this process was repeated over and over again by duck and raptor. After diving, the Teal would stay submerged before resurfacing further away. The Peregrine either flew to a fence post or sat at the edge of the water until the next attempt. She was hovering extremely close to the surface, possibly getting her feet wet. The hover was controlled, sustained and apparently effortless despite the lack of wind. She made eight or nine forays easily lasting 10 to 12 seconds each time. Tim Marshall arrived in time to witness the final hover. The duck looked perfectly healthy and later flew off strongly with another Teal, passing close to the perched Peregrine. Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* were perched close to the Peregrine and Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* were around Stanakeppie, but it showed no interest in these other potential prey species. KB managed to get a sequence of 12 rapid-fire photos of the Peregrine using a camera held to the eyepiece of his telescope. The observations were over a distance of about 700 m.

On 12 April 2015, MC, Dave Gill and Anne Rigg watched a hovering Peregrine for over an hour from the Strathbeg visitor centre. Visibility was good, conditions were calm and the range was about 1 km. It was not only the repeated and sustained hovering that is of note, but the hunting behaviour of the bird. During the whole time of the observation the bird did not venture out of an area of about 300 m x 100 m. It quartered the ground, hovering every few metres, sometimes landing on a post, sometimes landing on a clump of rushes *Juncus* sp. It hovered at heights of less than a metre up to about 4 m. It covered the same ground many times. During the whole episode, we did not see it catch anything.

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George Smith has commented:

“Though it is not common to observe Peregrines stationary (hovering) in the air, they do at times carry out manoeuvres which hold them stationary for a short period, generally whilst observing prey that has gone to ground. At best these ‘hovering’ manoeuvres are a period of stalling whilst flying into the wind and could not be described as sustained hovering. The Strathbeg observations are the first that I have found that describes a period of sustained hovering by a Peregrine. The fact that the records were on two separate days in the same location suggest that this is one individual which has developed this hovering strategy as part of its hunting technique.

“Peregrines are not particularly built to undertake hovering as a means of hunting, as their wing loading is too high and it will take a lot of energy to sustain a hover. As there was little or no wind, this would have been an energy-sapping exercise for the bird. It is of note that this was a female hovering, as male Peregrines would be slightly better suited to hovering due to their smaller size. Though no kills were observed, I suggest that this technique is one that the bird has found to be of benefit in catching prey. It may be that the prey that it is targeting, and the habitat that it is working over, make this an efficient method for it.

“Observers visiting Loch of Strathbeg should keep an eye out for this hunting technique to see if it is an ongoing trait.”



Plates 290–293. Hovering Peregrine, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, April 2015. © *Kenny Buchan*

Tree-nesting Common Gull in Aberdeenshire



In May 2015, during a visit to Donside to photograph a standing stone, I saw a Common Gull *Larus canus* perched on the top of a coppiced Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. In fact the bird had a nest set amongst chicken wire on top of the coppiced trunk, and the gull could be seen from ground level. Fortunately, the tree was still in bud and the bird, although c. five metres off the ground, was easy to see and photograph (Plates 294–295). No other gulls were in the vicinity.

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Though unusual in this country, BWP notes Common Gulls nesting in bushes and trees up to 10 metres tall in other parts of their range. R.W. Davies recorded a Common Gull breeding in a Rook's nest in Scotland (British Birds 1930: 23: 100–101).

Eds.



Plates 294–295. Common Gull nesting in a tree, North-east Scotland, May 2015. © Anke Addy

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Obituaries

Keith Sommerville Macgregor (1930–2015)

Born in Cardiff, where he spent his earliest birdwatching days, Keith Macgregor's interest in birds started as a small boy; he was given *The Observers Book of British Birds* for his seventh birthday. As was common in those days, he searched for nests with school friends and had a small egg collection. Watching a Blackbird nest building in the garden and finding a Robin's nest in an old kettle led to a more in-depth interest. He saved £1 a week to be able to raise the £23 required for his first serious binoculars: British-made Barr and Stroud 8 x 30.

He moved to Edinburgh in 1942. He was signed up as an SOC member by George Waterston in 1947 at the Poole's Synod Hall in Edinburgh, where the Club then held its meetings. In 1949–50 he attended a course run by Ken Williamson, who wintered in Edinburgh while warden on Fair Isle in the summer.

The Hermitage in Edinburgh, first visited in 1944, was a regular birdwatching site in the days when most birdwatchers relied on public transport. In 1948, he struck up a close and long lasting friendship with Frank Hamilton. They soon started going to Aberlady Bay weekly, counting and recording everything they saw (the records are in SOC archives). Soon cycling for miles became less attractive and they bought an old banger between them which gave them the freedom to reach places previously beyond them, such as St Abb's. Then they started ringing and trapping birds which involved long discussions followed by the building of traps, some quite elaborate. Waders held Keith's fascination and twice with some friends he went to South Uist, to camp and trap waders. In the mid-1950s, Keith and a couple of chums borrowed a Land Rover and went to Ullapool. Driving along a road a walker was offered a lift. He turned out to be the famous James Fisher and the second person picked up further on was Roger Tory Peterson, the author of the world famous bird guides. They were so delighted that they invited the party to join them on a visit to Priest Island the following day - a wonderful experience for Keith and his friends.

In the early 1950s, Keith and a few others pushed hard, via the press, to secure the establishment of Aberlady Local Nature Reserve, thereby saving many waders from being shot. It was at this time that he and Frank found a Wilson's Phalarope at Rosyth in 1954. This was the first for Europe, so did not appear in any European bird book, but Dougal



Plate 296. Keith Macgregor, August 2012. © SOC

Andrew had an American field guide and along with George Waterston the identification was confirmed the next day. Keith also did surveys with friends such as the birds of Moidart, the results being published. He visited most of the Forth islands, counting and ringing nesting terns. This build-up of his bird knowledge plus his excellent hearing and sight made him an excellent birder. Together he and Frank wrote *The Birds of Aberlady Bay Nature Reserve* in 1960. This was also the year of his marriage to Dorothy, who shared his interests in birds and painting, and who he had met through the SOC. Keith and Frank jointly acted as Club librarians in 1995 after Bill Harper's health had forced him to give up, and Keith then stayed on part-time to help John Law settle in. He continued to do this with later librarians right up to this year.

Keith's role as educator in all things bird-related began in the 1950s when he took up a part-time post (his day job was with an insurance company) with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in Edinburgh giving birdwatching evening classes. This became so oversubscribed that the WEA asked one of the current editors of *Scottish Birds* to run a second course. When the course was discontinued, Keith's students encouraged him to start his own course as they wanted to continue their outings. 'Macgregor's Bird Group' was formed, with Keith dedicating weekends and annual leave to leading walks and excursions at home and abroad, including trips to Holland, Spain and Portugal. He was also a member of a long running SOC birdwatching foursome with Tom Delaney, Arthur Smith and Jimmy Stewart.

Back in the Lothians Keith was heavily involved in branch activities. He was on the local SOC branch committee for many years and helped lead some of the outings. He was local recorder for East Lothian (and for a time Berwickshire) from the start of the system in 1968 to 1981. He received one of the Club's first Branch Awards, presented (via the annual conference) to Keith in recognition of his outstanding contribution.

He accepted early retirement from his job as Scottish sales rep with Worcester Heating Systems in 1994, which freed up more time for his main passion. He continued with his bird group until 2005. This coincided with the move of the SOC to its new headquarters in Aberlady in October 2005. Keith became a regular volunteer at the Centre turning up every Thursday. He was on the Library Committee, the Management Committee, he helped Dave Allan lead the guided walks for beginners, he and Dorothy organized the catering at art exhibition preview evenings, he drove the SOC shop and staff to the annual conference each year, he gave talks about the Club and earlier this year he was filmed by STV at Waterston House for a wildlife feature on the channel's Fountainbridge Show. His sales background showed as he took SOC membership leaflets and contact cards to plant in guest houses, bird hides or handed them to birdwatchers when out and about. When he and Dorothy made their trip of a lifetime to Trinidad & Tobago a few years ago, Keith managed to convince the owner of their guest house to take out an advert in the Club's journal.

Keith was a master 'meeter and greeter' at Waterston House. He enjoyed welcoming visitors to the Centre, showing them around and chatting with them about birds or art or the Club's activities. But he was always a great listener, so it never felt like a lecture and you could tell visitors warmed to him right away. For staff, Keith was the go-to person for any tricky identification queries, advice on where and when to see birds anywhere in Scotland or anything to do with Club history. 'Super Mac' is the title the staff coined for Keith on his 80th birthday in 2010.

His service to the Club was appropriately recognized in 2011 with the title of Honorary President. He is survived by Dorothy, his sister Sheila, son Neil, daughter Anne and grandchildren Connor and Morgaine. He will be remembered with affection and gratitude by all who knew him.

Compiled by his many friends in the SOC



Plate 297. Atholl Palace Hotel. © Jimmy Maxwell

It was glorious autumn colours all the way to this impressive, lofty hotel overlooking the beautiful woodlands around Pitlochry. The excellent venue offered spacious accommodation with comfortable public areas for delegates to meet and relax. In the superb modern Conference Chamber downstairs, President Chris McInerney welcomed everyone and introduced the first speaker.

The birds of Scotland's uplands: their changing status in a dynamic environment - John Calladine

John began by defining uplands as land above 350–400 m, but if defined by habitat, then more than three-quarters of Scotland is 'upland', ranging from arctic-alpine mountains to peat bog at low altitudes. From his own and others' case studies, John then discussed three associated habitat types - moorland, scrub woodland and coniferous forest.

The moorland study monitored the effect of mining and showed that such a development could possibly be mitigated by improving nearby moorland. This involves predation control, grazing and muirburn restrictions, and blocking drains.

This may benefit prey species, although poor weather always has a deleterious effect and raptor species may remain at a low level. Species such as Curlew, Red Grouse and Meadow Pipit were found to prefer heather while Skylark and crows favoured grassland. Reductions in active shepherding, the abandonment of farms and planting trees all change the vegetation structure. Controlling breeding predators such as crows may actually increase predation by allowing more non-territorial birds to move in. Overall, though, management in this study was relatively unsuccessful, possibly because the mitigation area was too small.

Changes in regenerating scrub woodland influence some species more than others but again in different ways. Five-yearly surveys show that, as birch scrub develops, species richness increases then stabilises, while moorland species decrease. Other factors, such as climate change, may also play a part. Complex relationships with habitat make management problematical with species stuck in ecological traps e.g. Whinchats favour taller vegetation at moorland edge where grazing is minimal, yet need low patches for foraging.



Plate 298. John Calladine. © Jimmy Maxwell

Afforestation is a major land use change, converting moorland to coniferous forest. Moorland species disappear but specialist birds such as Crossbills and Siskins increase. Even on adjacent moorland, the proximity to forests may affect the predation situation. Managing forests means that neither clearfell rotation nor selective felling in continuous cover allows trees to become aged so that the associated wildlife benefits of old wood rarely occur.

The overall message was that active management can create suitable habitat for certain species and that there is potential for successful management on a very large scale in our uplands. However, this would be against a background of land use involving wind farms, afforestation and grouse shooting interests, with piecemeal management potentially worsening the situation. John's presentation illustrated a multi-faceted story and was very thought-provoking.

Norman Elkins

Saturday morning offered us a series of outings. For the super-keen, an early morning trip up to Moulin Moor, part of the Forest of Clunie, to watch Blackcock lekking, led by Claire Smith. As the moorland light gradually grew stronger, up to 15 birds could be viewed as they strutted around displaying their white tail plumes. Apparently in such high density sites the birds also often display at this time of year. Well worth the early rise!

Later Wendy Mattingley and Ben Darvill led a group firstly down to the Tummel to view the evidence of the thriving Beaver colony in that area - several riverside trees were well gnawed through. Then to Faskally Loch where Ben



Plate 299. Beavers make their mark on the trees by the Tummel. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 300. Group at The Cuilc, Pitlochry.
© Jimmy Maxwell

outlined the importance, and the joys, of Birdtrack recording, while the group picked off various species through the misty drizzle. Conditions were better at The Cuilc, a pond on the north-west outskirts of Pitlochry, where the group stopped to view the scattering of waterbirds. Plate 300 shows the moment before a shout from Kathy Evans informed us that the male 'Tufted Duck' we were watching was in fact a Ring-necked Duck - a rare American vagrant. This is believed to be the rarest bird ever found on an SOC conference walk!

Dave Merrie was in charge of a group heading to Loch Moraig, Blair Atholl. Firstly up to Gilbert's Bridge in Glen Tilt and then Glen Fender for views of Beinn a'Ghlo, and finally the loch to cover the waterfowl there. Dave Jarrett lead the group which headed for Black Spout Wood to view the 60 m Black Spout waterfall and spot the rich wildlife in that area including Red Squirrel.

Many thanks are due to all these leaders for an interesting morning of birdwatching activities.



Plate 301. Ring-necked Duck, The Cuilc, Pitlochry, Perth & Kinross, November 2015. © Samuel Hood



Plate 302. This year's Isle of May Young Birders (left to right): Sam Hood, Ptolemy McKinnon, Glen Wilson, Emily Robertson, Julia Young and Eleanor Grover. © *Stuart Rivers*

In the afternoon the lectures continued.

Isle of May Young Birders

(students' feed back on their experiences of the training sponsored by the SOC and Isle of May Bird Observatory).

You might have imagined that to include a similar talk to that of last year's conference on the SOC/Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust (IoMBOT) sponsored training course for six young birders in July 2015 might seem a risky tactic in terms of conference programming. Don't you believe it! The Class of 2015 (Sam Hood, Ptolemy McKinnon, Glen Wilson, Julia Young, along with Eleanor Grover and Emily Robertson) was every bit as successful as its predecessor and the conference 'slot' provided this year's team with an opportunity to hone their presentation skills.

Four of them provided a slick medley which included background details of the Isle of May, for those who did not know it, along with details of their activities. For some the visit to such an island was a novel experience which helped

them get to grips with a group of birds of which they had little or no experience.

Activities during the week included a good grounding for those wishing to go on to study seabirds, with full day observations, diet studies (of Puffins and Kittiwakes) and the catching and ringing of a wide range of both adult and pulli seabirds. For the trainee ringers included in the group, the week included an opportunity to handle new species, use different ring sizes and try out new catching techniques, including use of the island's Heligoland traps. In addition to seabirds, a respectable range of other species was ringed, including pulli Swallow and Dunnock (unusual for the Isle of May). It also included a session catching Starlings, which provided an opportunity to experience the strength of their feet (and all that brings when extracting them from a mist-net) and also their aroma.

Other positive conservation work was also undertaken through the construction of new tern nest shelters, which it is hoped will help attract Roseate Terns back to the island through the provision of better nesting conditions.

Thanks in particular are due to Stuart Rivers, Mark Oksien, Eilidh McNab and Jane Cleaver, along with assistance from SNH and CEH, for all their hard work in making this year's course such a success. IoMBOT and SOC should be justly proud of this initiative; long may it continue.

David Jardine

Development and operation of upland windfarms: obligations and opportunities

- Peter Robson

Like them or like them not, windfarms have been a feature of the Scottish landscape for some time. Peter Robson took us through the various environmental aspects considered by Scottish Power Renewables in the siting and development of upland windfarms and how the sites are monitored once operational.

Clearly the question of disruption to breeding habitat is an important factor particularly in the construction period and the displacement of species due to the presence and operation of the turbines. Two species were contrasted and it was interesting that Black Grouse abandoned a site completely, while Curlew only moved a safe distance away. Once the windfarms are operational various measures are put in place to restore sites such as peatland and to mitigate any damage done in the construction period.

One of the major concerns regarding windfarms is the question of birds colliding with the

turbines. Peter sought to reassure that there were sufficient safeguards in place in the siting of turbines, but he did go on to say that if or when certain turbines caused more bird collisions they could be repositioned in the future. His information showed that the largest percentage of collisions were with Buzzards and Kestrels. He did not quantify the number of bird collisions - it is important that this information becomes available in future for all windfarms.

James Main



Plate 304. Pat Thompson. © Jimmy Maxwell

Grumbling about Grouse - Pat Thompson

What makes a good lecture? That it should be clearly heard, well illustrated with images which the non-expert can understand and that the passion and conviction of the speaker should be supported by well-attested facts. If it can be delivered with humour, all the better. Pat Thompson, the senior policy officer on uplands for the RSPB, achieved this splendidly.

Pat presented a picture of legitimate upland usage which is necessarily controversial as some aspects are in direct conflict. The active management of a grouse moor entails selective burning to provide young growth as food for the grouse while retaining mature vegetation for cover. But this is not without cost. A 'muirburn code' recognises the birds' needs as well as protection of the underlying peat. Predator control is clearly beneficial to ground nesting birds, both grouse and waders. This is at the same time much more controversial as there is a traditional view that birds of prey are vermin and are treated as such.



Plate 303. Peter Robson. © Jimmy Maxwell

He spoke about the costs of maintaining a successful shoot and the understandable pressure to increase its productivity. Grouse numbers were currently at an all-time high, accounted for by management policies and the use of medication which remains a disputable innovation. Environmental costs had to be recognised. Some, such as the loss of carbon storage potential were not immediately obvious: the balance of predators and prey remained factious.

Pat presented a straightforward account of the current status of the uplands and of grouse moor management. He acknowledged that there were strong feelings on both sides of the argument which sometimes led to feelings of moral indignation.

Ivan T. Draper

The 79th SOC AGM

In his opening remarks, Chris McInerney included a special mention of Keith Macgregor who passed away recently. He described their friendship together and Keith's valued contribution to the Club, in recognition of which he was elected as an Honorary Club President in 2011.

In his Annual Report, Chris noted a wide range of Club activities, including recording and the work of local committees. A question from the floor commented on the rise in Lothian membership, probably due to the location of Waterston House, and we were assured that branch developments in the west and elsewhere were receiving equal interest and attention.

In Annual Accounts, Alan Fox thanked Jean Torrance for her hard work, also Sandy Scotland for useful advice and Elizabeth Robertson of Morton Fraser for help in the recent organisational change. He remarked that the Club was at the moment financially secure due to large legacies and also the varied activities at SOC HQ. A question from the floor regarding land ownership and lease at Waterston House was answered stating the current position there.

In election of office bearers, the proposal by Chris of Ian Thomson as the new SOC President was accepted and he was delighted

to hand over charge of the proceedings. Ian paid tribute to Chris as an impressive President and a good friend and thanked him on behalf of the Club. James Main was then proposed as Vice President and was duly accepted. Alan Fox (Club Treasurer), David Heeley (Honorary Secretary) and Sandy Scotland (our financial examiner) all agreed to continue in post and were thanked for all their ongoing hard work for the Club. Richard Lesley was formally elected on to Council, having been co-opted following the last AGM.

Under 'any other business', a question was raised about the current size of the Lothian SOC branch and the idea of possible splitting. It was agreed that the matter would be raised at Council in due course.

Annual Conference Dinner and Dance

Dinner was served in the splendid conference chamber. The process of opting for certain courses beforehand worked very well and obviously greatly helped the staff, who were extremely efficient and courteous. The food was of a very high standard and well-received by all.

Speech time fell to the newly elected Ian Thomson. After a light-hearted but fruitless effort to follow a 10-point after-dinner speech model, Ian settled rather for an account of the many influences in his own life which had shaped his development in conservation. He acknowledged that the Club had figured largely in this and he intended as President to promote its aims, especially as regards the protection of our endangered wildlife.

The ceilidh was presented by the terrific local Perthshire group Alba Ceilidh Band whose banjo player, Jake, directed several new country dances - bossy, but humorous and very effective. Numbers actually dancing surpassed previous years because of this and it was a lively and enjoyable evening. The prize of an Italian meal for two was offered for dancing prowess and won by Keith Brockie and partner. It turned out to be a tin of ravioli! Nice touch.

Sunday got off to a brisk start with the next lectures...



Plate 305. Kenny Kortland. © Jimmy Maxwell

Upland plantations - full of biodiversity or just "full of vermin" - Kenny Kortland

I have heard this quote of "full o' vermin" from a gamekeeper, so I was interested to hear this talk. Kenny is from Aberdeen originally and was in the Aberdeen YOC with Logan (Steele). Kenny is now an ecologist with Forest Enterprise and based in Inverness.

He started by describing how upland planted forests, i.e. non-native mainly spruce woodlands, are usually perceived rather negatively as species poor and a home for vermin such as foxes. It was pointed out that these plantations hold about 30 species of birds with another 30 or so in the surrounding open ground. They also harbour more different species of mammals, such as bats and red squirrels, than open ground. Red Squirrels apparently out-compete the Greys in these spruce woodlands. There is also a large range of invertebrates, fungi and lichens with a large diversity under the soil. Forest Research assessments show that although there are certainly more species in Scots Pine, there are still a lot in spruce plantations.

These woodlands are managed for timber and are thinned out by machine resulting in 'rack' areas between the trees. A researcher surveyed these areas once a week during the month of May. He found that the thinning increased sunlight allowing ground flora such as Blaeberry to flourish, but it was found to be less nutritious and high in tannins and phenolics produced by the plants to ward off insects. However, the larger numbers of insects are good for species such as Capercaillie - a plus for the management.

In sum, it appears that the forestry authorities realise that the blanket, single-species planting of the past has resulted in less species in these, but they are now pursuing a policy of a greater diversity in range of planting and management of their forests. Kenny ended however with a warning note - climate change is coming!

This was a very informative talk, with good clear delivery presented in a manner easily comprehended by the non-specialist (a direct quote from a non-specialist next to me!)

Alastair Duncan

Game management and birds in UK uplands - Kathy Fletcher

Kathy began by stating that management on grouse moors aims to improve food quality, reduce predation and parasite pressure, but explained that techniques used to fulfil these aims are not beneficial to all bird species. The grouse bag in Scotland is lower now than in the 1960s and 1970s, but it is still a widespread land use in the uplands.

Habitat management suppresses natural succession to woodland, and grazing regimes can change plant communities, but 75% of world heather habitat is in UK and grouse management helps maintain heather cover. It also provides the open habitat favoured by Black Grouse.



Plate 306. Kathy Fletcher. © Jimmy Maxwell

Managed burning can reduce risk of wildfires, but should be carefully planned to minimise potential negative impacts. Drain blocking may increase soil moisture and crane fly abundance and could mitigate possible negative climate effects.

Predator management reduces the local abundance of predators such as foxes and crows, but contributes to waders (Lapwing, Golden Plover and Curlew) being found at higher densities on grouse moors than on other moors. However, some passerines (Meadow Pipit and Skylark) and predators (Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Hen Harrier and Raven) are less abundant on driven grouse moors.

Tick control often involves exclusion /control of Red Deer and Mountain Hares; the latter benefit from predator control and habitat management and are important prey for Golden Eagle. Work continues to improve survey techniques for Mountain Hares. Kathy explained that medicated grit reduces strongyle worms, leading to higher densities of Red Grouse, but emphasised that more research is needed to determine if there are impacts of using medicated grit on moorland.

David Palmar

Now tea and coffee and a final chance to visit the various stands in the exhibition area. Our own artists and photographers with displays of their work were Keith Brockie, Eric McCabe and David Palmar. Second Nature featured the usual second-hand wildlife books and Viking Optical Ltd had viewing from a selection of optics. Other bodies represented were BTO Scotland, Grant Arms Hotel Birdwatching/Wildlife Club, John Muir Trust, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Raptor Study Group and Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Then the last lecture started...

The value of raptor monitoring in Highland Perthshire - Logan Steele

Logan began by stating that, along with the majority of raptor workers, he was not a scientist but a volunteer who was passionate about raptors. He went on to explain the role of the Raptor Study Groups and the value of the breeding data produced annually by the 270 or



Plate 307. Logan Steele. © Jimmy Maxwell

so members. This provides an accurate baseline for evaluating the status of Scottish birds of prey populations and assists in their conservation in the face of continued illegal persecution. Moving on he focussed on his own study in west Perthshire and the three species which he monitors - Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier and Merlin. The essence of the presentation was to shed some light on what this fieldwork entails and illustrate, through consistent annual monitoring, the breeding outcome of his sample pairs and how patterns emerge. He explained the timings of the fieldwork for each species, the range of habitats supporting the birds, and analysed breeding results. This highlighted the regular disappearance of breeding Hen Harriers and Golden Eagles which depressed breeding success. The most striking example used was the loss of stability in the breeding success in one territory over a period of time. Adult pairs bred regularly there, then in a five-year period, sub-adults were present in three of the years and a single male in another. This coincided with a new factoring regime on the estate and a negative attitude towards raptors. On a more positive note, he gave an example of how the detailed site history on a Golden Eagle eyrie carried a lot of weight in preventing an inappropriate wind farm development.

What came through in the presentation was the reality of raptor fieldwork, the sheer effort put in each year, the frustrations of natural factors being outweighed by illegal persecution but also Logan's determination and commitment. The excellent illustrations and clear tables/graphs added immensely to the narrative.



Plate 308. The Discussion Panel (left to right): Logan Steele, Pat Thompson, Adam Smith, John Calladine and Kenny Kortland. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

Logan finished what was an excellent presentation by re-emphasising the immense value of recording, local knowledge and a need for more work to be carried on under-recorded species like Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Raven.

Gordon Riddle

Panel Discussion

This year the audience enjoyed the thoughts of an interactive panel containing the previous speakers, joined by Dr Adam Smith (Director Scotland, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust), with the topic obviously 'upland management.' This was ably chaired by Ian Thomson and was, as to be expected, vigorous and often heated between conflicting interests. Questions from the audience were discussed at length and all-in-all it was a very healthy exchange which ended with serious hopes of tackling in the near future the whole frustrating raptor predation subject. Everyone enjoyed this discussion - perhaps a feature to consider repeating in future years?

Raffle and 200 Club

Wendy Hicks, tireless as ever, officiated at the raffle which raised £580 for Club funds. The much-sought-after Grant Arms Voucher was won by David Rackham (Chair of Ayrshire branch). The 200 Club winners were read out by Vicky McLellan with many thanks yet again to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe for all her work.

Branch Awards

There were five Club members to receive Branch Awards. The three that are photographed



Plate 309. SOC Branch Award winners. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

here (Plate 309) are from the left - Gordon Riddle (Ayrshire), Arthur Bastable (Tayside) and Jean Stewart (Fife). The other two, not at the conference, are William Prest (Lothian) and Sandy Anderson (North-East Scotland). Many congratulations to all!

Ian Thomson, President, then wrapped up the conference by thanking all the speakers, the hotel staff and all the host of conference organisers and helpers. A special thanks was also due to Swarovski for their very generous sponsorship of the event. Ian wished everyone a pleasant journey homewards through the lovely Perthshire scenery, now in full sunshine.

Jimmy Maxwell

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Ayrshire: Mr N. Lindsay, Mr A. Robinson,
Borders: Mrs M. Gribben, Mrs R. Shields,
Caithness: Mrs V.L. Kirkwood, **Central Scotland:**
 Ms C. Collingwood, Ms F. Mackay, Dr J. Minderman, Mr M.A. Robinson, **Dumfries:** Mr A. Riches, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr B.H. Birley, Mr R. Crump, Mr B. Edwards, Dr A. Forbes, Mr & Mrs S. Goddard, Mrs S. Harrison, Mr I. Iles, Mr & Mrs W. Mitchell, Mrs S. Murfitt, Mr P. Redford, Dr D. Whittle, Mr A. Williams, **Fire:** Prof D. Evans, Ms J. Hendry & Mr A. Ford, Miss C. Maindron, Dr A. Sinclair, **Highland:** Mr J. Farquhar, Miss F. Harvey, Mr R. Lockett, Miss T. Rhodes, Mrs W. Whelton, **Lothian:** Mr H. Andrews, Mr G. Burrows, Ms J. Crook, Mr A. Dickson, Mr & Mrs A.D. Falconer, Mr A. Forsyth, Mr & Mrs D. Fowler, Mr C. S. Herrington, Ms K. Holmes, Miss B. Holsgrove, Mr O. Holsgrove, Dr K. Isaac & Ms L. Matheson, Mr R. Lowndes & Ms S. Graham, Mr & Mrs C. MacInnes, Ms L. Matheson, Ms B. Mortimer, Mr D. Oates, Mr J. Spence, Mrs F. Stanton, Mr D. Urquhart, Miss P.J. Whyte, **Moray:** Ms P.J. Douglass, Mr D. Slater, Ms B. Storm, **North-East Scotland:** Ms M. Malcolm, **Orkney:** Mr B. Bierley, **Overseas:** Mr M. Carter, Mr N. Pitti, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr I. Brooke, Mr B. Davison, Mr D. Wood, **Tayside:** Mr & Mrs I. Watson, **West Galloway:** Miss E. Grover

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **August: 1st** £30 T. Davenport, **2nd** £20 I.P. Craig, **3rd** £10 R.C. Welland. **September: 1st** £30 Mrs J. Strachan, **2nd** £20 M. Holling, **3rd** £10 R.M. Thomson. **October: 1st** £30 M.B. Ross, **2nd** £20 Mrs A. White, **3rd** £10 Miss P. Moncur. Details on how to join can be obtained by writing to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

Branch Updates

Branch Award: Sandy Anderson A small group of North-East Branch members trooped out to Newburgh on 17 November for Jenny Weston, Branch Chair, to present the 2015 Branch Recognition Award to Sandy Anderson who had been unable to attend the annual conference. Sandy was in at the earliest days of the founding of the Aberdeen Branch, 68 years ago in 1947, and has served with distinction as a member of the branch committee, and as its secretary and chairman. He was closely involved in most of the main developments in ornithology in the North-East throughout the second half of the 20th century and is warmly welcomed when he is still able to attend branch meetings.

Plate 310. Jenny Weston presents Sandy Anderson with his SOC Branch Award, November 2015. © Nick Picozzi



Upper Forth assistant recorder: Neil Bielby, n.bielby@sky.com, 01786 823830. Council is grateful to Neil for assuming this role to assist current recorder, Chris Pendlebury.

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

A date for your diary

The 2016 'Scotland's Big Nature Festival' will take place at Musselburgh Lagoons, East Lothian on Saturday 21 and Sunday 22 May 2016. Further details will be included in a future issue.

Conferences

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Saturday 19 March 2016, Eastgate Theatre, Peebles. See programme and booking form enclosed

Waterston House

Christmas/New Year closing: Waterston House will be closed during the festive period, from 25 December 2015 to 1 January 2016 inclusive.

Art exhibitions

- Darren Woodhead, Saturday 7 November to Wednesday 13 January 2016



Plate 311. Long-eared Owl. © Darren Woodhead



Plate 312. Honeysuckle Panel. © Jan Reid

- Kalamkari textile artists with guest artist Sheila Mortlock, Saturday 16 January to Wednesday 17 February 2016. See Plate 312.
- Jane Smith, Saturday 20 February to Wednesday 6 April 2016
- John Threlfall & Greg Poole, Saturday 9 April to Wednesday 25 May

Optics Demo Day

Sunday 15 May 2016, 10 am–4 pm: A wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free friendly advice! If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know and we will do our best to order these in for the event.

Dave Pullan - a new member of SBRC

SBRC welcomes Dave Pullan as new member of SBRC, replacing Hywel Maggs for the north-east mainland region. Dave brings much experience to the committee, being a long time birder in Moray, with the experience of finding and seeing many rarities in the area, and in Scotland as a whole.

SBRC would like to acknowledge its gratitude to Hywel for his work over the period of his tenure. Hywel has contributed a great deal to SBRC, including his time as Chairman, and we wish him well. Mark Wilkinson will replace Hywel as Chairman of SBRC.

Chris McNerny, on behalf of SBRC.

Young Birders' Training Course, Isle of May, 4–11 July 2015

E. GROVER, S. HOOD, P. MCKINNON, E. ROBERTSON,
G. WILSON & J. YOUNG



Plate 313. The 2015 Young Birders' Training Course participants and leaders (left–right): Emily Robertson, Stuart Rivers (IoMBOT), Eleanor Grover, Mark Oksien (IoMBOT), Julia Young, Ptolemy McKinnon, Glen Wilson, Eilidh McNab (SOC) & Samuel Hood. © Stuart Rivers

This July, for the second year running, six young birdwatchers travelled from different corners of the country to take part in the second ever 'Young Birders' Training Course', a collaborative project between the SOC and the Isle of May Bird Observatory (IoMBO).

This year's chosen six had been selected from a pool of around 30 young ornithologists aged between 16 and 25 years, ranging from those still at school to students aspiring to careers as biologists/zoologists and/or in conservation roles.

This is the only course of its kind in Scotland, and likely the wider UK, and the training week presents a unique opportunity in both its setting and the learning opportunities this affords. The participants have the chance to benefit from a thorough introduction to the daily recording of birds and other taxa, species monitoring, bird ringing and activities such as visible migration watches and co-ordinated seawatching counts. Being based at the Isle of May Bird Observatory,

the students have the opportunity to experience observatory and island life under the supervision of IoMBO Trust members and to work alongside staff and volunteers from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH).

SOC asked the participants to keep a daily diary of their island activities and an account of their days spent on the May follows.

Saturday 4 July

Once on the island, the first day included settling in at the Low Light, the home of the Observatory, and some bird watching - seeing the first of many species we would see in the following week. Sam started his Shag colouring recording, with a few of us helping over the course of the week. In the evening, the SNH and CEH team led an introduction session to the island and the work carried out there, and we even got the chance to find out people's favourite bird, the most exotic being the Temminck's Tragopan. The activities for the

week were also covered and an introduction was given to the records we would be keeping during our time on the island.

Ptolemy McKinnon

Sunday 5 July

At 09:00 we went down to Fluke Street (the CEH/SNH base on the island) to see what they had caught in their moth trap. Not being a moth expert I couldn't identify any but everybody was willing to help me out. Next we went to do some Kittiwake ringing. Following an explanation of the studies being conducted, Carrie Gunn of CEH expertly caught the adult Kittiwakes on their nests with a noose on a long pole. We took their wing and weight measurements and, if they obliged, took vomit samples! Some individuals also had to have blood samples taken. When the adults were off the nests, Carrie carefully climbed up and passed down the chicks for ringing and everybody had a chance to have a go at this. They were so fluffy! After lunch (hotdogs!) we went to the Kittiwake hide at Cornerstone Cove and Carrie told us what we would be doing on our 2-hour Kittiwake watches the next day - part of a continuous dawn to dusk observation on a set of nests in a long-term study plot. Finally, Mike Harris gave a talk about Puffins, which was both very informative and amusing.

Eleanor Grover



Plate 315. Kittiwake chick ringing - Mark explains it all!
© Stuart Rivers



Plate 316. Kittiwatch - Carrie explains it all!
© Stuart Rivers



Plate 314. The sun sets on our first full day on the May. © Ptolemy McKinnon

Monday 6 July

Today we all took turns sitting in the hide to watch the ledges of Kittiwake nests chosen for CEH's study on nesting pairs. It was surreal, perched on a cliff edge feeling like you're in the middle of nowhere, while Radio 1 pop music from the in-hut radio competed with the cries of the Kittiwakes. Later most of us had the exciting opportunity to help catch Arctic Tern chicks for ringing. Never have I felt so tall (in all my 5-foot 2-inch frame) than I did carefully lumbering after a tiny fluffball trying to hide in the undergrowth. How can you fit rings on such short, stubby legs? With care and experience! In the evening, Stuart gave us an informative lecture on bird identification and the importance of writing things down.

Emily Robertson



Plate 317. Kittiwake chick. © *Glen Wilson*



Plate 319. Tern chick awaiting its 'bling'. © *Stuart Rivers*

Tuesday 7 July

On the Tuesday we ventured out to do a spot of gardening around the Heligoland Traps, trimming the surrounding vegetation to allow easy access into the traps. Doing so we located a few pufflings and with ringing of these fledged youngsters completed we took the birds to the Altarstones landing where we proceeded to release the birds into the water for their first taste of the sea. Tuesday was the night of the famous pub quiz where the small number of island inhabitants gathered in Fluke Street. Subjects ranged from African amphibians to Dulux paint colours, but in the end the Quizzing Quetzals (compromising of Stuart, Sam and I) were victorious! After a great night we walked back in the darkness with talk of local ghost stories and with Ghost Moths fluttering around us.

Glen Wilson



Plate 318. Kittiwake watch. © *Samuel Hood*



Plate 320. Puffin netting. © Stuart Rivers

Wednesday 8 July

We were walking to Fluke Street when word arrived that a Minke Whale had been spotted beyond the harbour at Kirkhaven, but unfortunately we were too late to witness it for ourselves.



Plate 321. Nest boxes R us! © Stuart Rivers

We began to cut wood and construct nest boxes in order to help build up the tern colonies and hopefully attract Roseate Terns back to breed on the island in the future. After dinner we teamed up with SNH and erected mist-nets in the billowing wind in order to catch Puffins and specifically to retrieve any fish that fell from their beaks. Various sizes of sandeels, sprats and Rockling were collected for scientific analysis, and the Puffins were ringed before release. At night we gathered in the warm sitting room of the Observatory, intent on catching Storm Petrels in the mist-net erected on the terrace outside the entrance nearest the kitchen. A marvellous game of bird bingo was played to keep us awake.

Julia Young

Thursday 9 July

After a very late Wednesday, staying up in the hope of Storm Petrel (with no success unfortunately), we started Puffin netting again at 05:30, quickly getting more Puffins and fish. Once finished we joined the SNH team at the north end of the island helping to catch Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull chicks to check for rings and help to ring those lacking

their ID bracelet if required. A free afternoon gave us the chance to do our own thing, so many of us spent some time exploring and bird watching at various spots round the island. In the evening, while some of the group took part in ringing Starlings, a few of us sea-watched with David Steel, which provided the chance to see a flock of eight Common Scoters in flight towards the Fife coast.

Ptolemy McKinnon

Friday 10 July

The group's last full day on the May was to be arguably the birding highlight of the week. Poor weather conditions in the morning led to myself, Glen and Ptolemy seawatching from the new terrace on the north side of the Low Light. With visibility deteriorating and rain coming off the sea, it was the best seawatching conditions we were to have whilst on the island. Other than a movement of Kittiwakes offshore, it was generally 'quiet', but a raucous burst of calling from the seabirds on the rocks below alerted us to the presence of something overhead. Lifting our eyes from the scopes we found ourselves looking at a single Great Skua a mere 60 feet

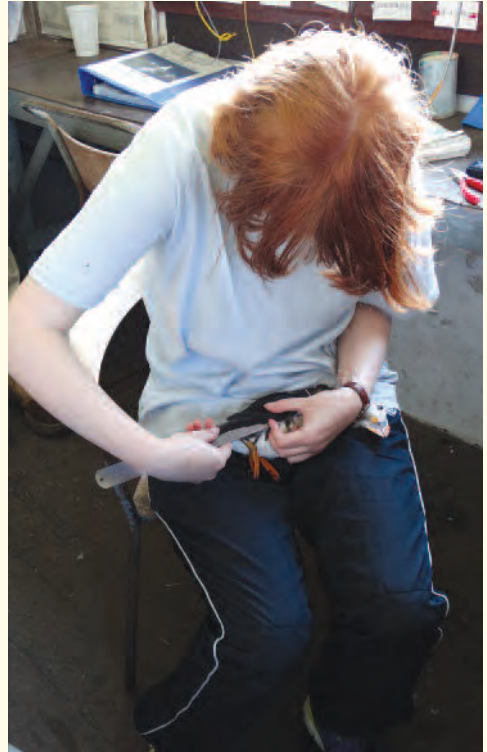


Plate 323. Puffin ringing. © Stuart Rivers



Plate 322. Puffin. © Samuel Hood



Plate 324. Sam hands over his Shag-ring readings. © Stuart Rivers

from us alongside the Observatory, giving a fantastic view of the bird and the conspicuous white wing flashes as it cruised over the now very agitated gulls and Shags below.

Later in the day, after returning from a walk around the island taking in the bustling seabird colonies, we found ourselves watching a stunning summer-plumage Black Guillemot. A less than annual visitor to the island, it had been found by Mark in amongst a mixed raft of auks, once again just offshore from the Low Light. It was a very welcome addition to the week's bird list and one that proved to be a 'lifer' for several people amongst the group, and an Isle of May tick for "Steely", in his first year as SNH warden.

Samuel Hood

Saturday 11 July

Despite it being our last morning, we got another chance to help catch the Arctic chicks again, a repeat of Monday's activity but hoping to find any missed previously and newly hatched birds. Just before this, Bex Outram (SNH Assitant Warden) had shown us a Garden Tiger moth, attracted to their overnight moth trapping session, a species which has had a decline in

number in the UK. Sam also handed over the list of over 100 Shag colour-ring and letter combinations gathered over the week to a grateful Mark Newell (CEH seabird research supervisor). Afterwards, there was time for one last walk, and cleaning of the Low Light for the next incoming party, before ending a fantastic week by heading away on the RIB 'Osprey'. As we were leaving the island, we had great views of it, with the sight of seabirds all round, a lovely way to finish.

Ptolemy McKinnon

A number of people and organisations ensured the success of the YBTC project in its second year. Thanks are given to course organisers and leaders - Jane Cleaver and Eilidh McNab (SOC), Mark Oksien and Stuart Rivers (IoMBOT) and to all the Fluke Street team on the island: Carrie Gunn & Mark Newell (CEH) and David Steel [Warden], Bex Outram [Assistant Warden] (SNH) and James Crymble, Holly Pickett & Heather Shaw, SNH volunteers.

Funding of the course was made possible thanks to generous support received from Club members and supporters through legacy donations.



Plate 325. Ready for business, the SOC stand at the British Birdwatching Fair, August 2015 © Dave Allan

British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland Water Nature Reserve, 21–23 August 2015

J. CLEAVER

Chris Packham, Nick Baker and Iolo Williams all within one field of view, a tower of empty latte cups, packed lunches, a laptop bag swelling with brochures of far-off climes and exotic species... there's only one place we could be, the British Birdwatching Fair!

With the experience and success of last year's Rutland Birdfair under our belts (*Scottish Birds* 34(4): 322–323) Dave Allan (SOC staff member), Ian Thomson (Vice-President) and I, were delighted to once again represent the Club at 2015's event.

A honey pot for anyone interested in birds or bird-related topics, the Birdfair attracts an incredible number of nature lovers year-upon-year, thanks to the high calibre talks and activities on offer and a varying and wide-ranging selection of exhibitors and bird-related products all under one roof (or eight marquees!)

With all of the major UK conservation organisations present and remembering our warm reception there last year, Council felt that as Scotland's Bird Club, SOC should continue to be represented at this year's event, particularly with the hope of building on the previous year's success. Fortunately, because of your support, it's now much more manageable for the Club to take a stand at these large-scale, high-profile events, having the necessary staff, framework and resources in place.

The SOC stand attracted in a steady flow of visitors keen to find out what the Club did and what it could potentially offer them. Our suite of promotional materials provided an insight into the various strands of the organisation, including our role recording Scotland's birds, our network of local branches, our renowned journal, the Club's legendary publication *The Birds of Scotland* and our recent work on projects such

as the Young Birders' Training Course. A free prize draw for a beautiful Black-throated Diver print (kindly donated by wildlife artist Chris Rose) encouraged art lovers into the stand and gave us an opportunity to promote our year-round programme of exhibitions and events at Waterston House, as well as allowing us to gain subscribers to our e-newsletter.

Keen to showcase the Club to as wide an audience as possible, SOC had applied for a number of slots in the weekend's lecture programme. As expected, submissions for content heavily outnumbered slots available and so we were delighted to hear that Ian's application to talk about Scotland's raptors was successful. As Head of Investigations for RSPB Scotland, Ian gave his audience a first-hand insight into how Scotland's raptors are faring. Dave and I very much appreciated Ian's invaluable support on the stand again this year!

At close on Sunday, we'd made 13 new memberships for the Club and several hundred pounds worth of pin badge and bird feeder sales! Once again, we received an incredibly warm

welcome at the fair from visitors, organisers and exhibitors alike. We found that the vast majority of people we spoke to had never heard of the SOC, which was somewhat expected, but really helped to underline our presence at the fair. It's difficult to put a figure on how many people we engaged with over the weekend, however we're all agreed that the Club benefitted greatly from having the opportunity to engage with a slice of the 25,000 odd visitors the event pulls in each year. It was great to bump into many of the folk we'd met last year including our friends on the Speyside Wildlife and Islay stands, alongside many others. Our thanks to all the new members who joined over the weekend - welcome to the Club!

I am also indebted to Dave, my right-hand man, for his effort, support and his enthusiasm from start to finish. Our thanks in turn go to the team of staff and volunteers at Headquarters who support the preparation. It certainly is a team effort.

The 2016 British Birdwatching Fair will take place on 19–21 August 2016 - see www.birdfair.org.uk

Jane Cleaver, Development Officer



Plate 326. Henry the Hen Harrier pays a visit to the SOC stand at the 2015 British Birdwatching Fair, August 2015. Photographed here with SOC President, Ian Thomson © *Dave Allan*



Plate 327. Lapwing. © Jane Smith

ARTIST PROFILE: Jane Smith

"Mind your head" shouts Mike as we lurch across the uneven machair fields in the Land Rover. It is dawn, and we are on the Hebridean island of Oronsay to count breeding Lapwings and Redshanks. We park on high ground and look down across the marshy coastal fields. The sun has just risen and all the hummocks are rimmed with lime-bright green against the purple shadows. A male Lapwing stands guard on one of these tussocks. His iridescent plumage glows with viridian, magenta and burnt orange, and his long black crest flutters in the breeze. He tilts his head and one large dark eye examines the sky. Then, with a reedy call he takes flight. A Hooded Crow is over-flying the marsh. The crow is quickly surrounded by a squadron of Lapwings, escorting him out of their territory. Finding themselves airborne together, the Lapwings indulge in some aeronautical

acrobatics, showing off to their neighbours with a noisy fly-past and filling the huge sky with rollercoaster loop-the-loops.

The male returns to his hummock. It provides the perfect lookout point. Generations of Lapwings have stood here to guard their territory, fertilising the grass in this one spot with their droppings, and causing it to grow more vigorously. Asking around, I discover that these hummocks have a name. They are known as 'tumps', a combination maybe of bump and tumulus.

It's not surprising that I didn't know the word, as farming machinery and fertilizers have improved most modern fields and removed these complex and elegant interactions of wildlife and landscape. However, here on Oronsay, the RSPB farms the land for the benefit of wildlife.

I first came to this 'wild island' 15 years ago to film waders. My work for the BBC Natural History Unit had taken me to some of the wildest and most beautiful places on earth, and this island was as rich in wildlife as any of them. I'd just had my first child, which precipitated a change of career. I started to teach myself painting and printmaking and threw myself into documenting this good news conservation story. It wasn't difficult, as I was surrounded by exciting wildlife to paint and draw. Corncrakes called from the flower meadows, Choughs swooped in the sea breeze and seabirds nested on the cliffs.

All my pictures start from a field sketch, and try to convey the excitement of an encounter with a wild animal or bird. I find that as I sit outside, drawing quietly, the life of the field or shoreline just carries on around me.

When I get home to my studio I work up my field sketches into finished pictures. These might be paintings or hand made prints.



Plate 329. Choughs feeding on the beach.
© Jane Smith



Plate 328. Fulmar on Colonsay cliffs. © Jane Smith

Inspired by the richness of this island landscape, I decided to write about what made it so unique. I visited in every month of the year to get a complete picture of island life, both for the human and the wild inhabitants. The resulting book, *Wild Island*, is full of wildlife artwork and stories gleaned over several years.

The pictures will be on show at the Club's gallery at Aberlady from 20 February 2016.

BOOK REVIEWS

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

Urban Peregrines. Ed Drewitt, 2014. Pelagic Publishing, Exeter, ISBN 978-1-907807-81-7, hardback, 208 pages, £24.99.



This detailed account of urban Peregrines, focusing especially on city-dwelling birds in south-west England, is timely in view of the species' continuing inclination to nest in built-up areas. The book also provides a much wider overview of the Peregrine's biology as a whole. The author is well qualified to do just that, having studied zoology at Bristol University.

Urban Peregrines contains a great deal of information, in easily readable form, on the Peregrine's way of life in our towns and cities, with much attention given to its prey selection and hunting and feeding there. The author touches on the recent decline in the British uplands, due to killing on grouse moors but apparently also to decline in avian prey species elsewhere in the hill country. Thus he flags up the growing importance of the lowland segment of the species' population, nesting on man-made structures and clearly very much at home there.

The book is well-endowed with an excellent selection of photographs, in most cases usefully placed on the same pages as the relevant text and in themselves telling us much about the Peregrine's place in the natural world. If there were

to be a second edition of this work, it would be useful to have a table setting out succinctly the known population levels of urban Peregrines in different parts of our planet. My only question mark on the book's content is the assertion that Peregrines in Scotland may start to show some signs of concern due to people disturbance from a few miles away.

Urban Peregrines is to be highly recommended, not least for its relevance to the ebb and flow of the bird's fortunes in the first part of the 21st century.

Patrick Stirling-Aird

Nature's Conscience: the life and legacy of Derek Ratcliffe. Edited by Des Thompson, Hilary Birks and John Birks, 2015. Langford Press, Kings Lynn, 572 pages, hardback, ISBN 978-1-904078-60-9, £30.00; paperback, ISBN 978-1-904078-59-3, £23.00.

In the 20th century, probably no-one contributed more to the conservation of Britain's uplands and to knowledge of their ecology than Derek Ratcliffe (1929–2005). Although trained as a botanist, he was an outstanding all-round field naturalist whose interests ranged from mountain flora and peatland vegetation to birds and invertebrates. SOC members will no doubt associate his name with his definitive books on the Peregrine and the Raven, and his vital role in identifying the link between pesticides and the decline in certain raptor populations in the 1950s.

This lengthy tribute to Derek consists of 25 chapters written by naturalists, conservationists, academics and friends. In such a multi-author book there will inevitably be some repetition and overlap and this is no exception. And as Derek barely gets a mention in a few chapters I cannot help wondering if all were really necessary. Nevertheless, I have no hesitation in recommending it, both because of what it tells you about Derek the man and his methods and because it is an important historical account of his vital roles in classifying plant communities (with Donald McVean), the pesticide/eggshell thinning story, and challenging commercial afforestation in sensitive areas.

The book is organised into five parts dealing with different aspects of his life and legacy: young naturalist in pursuit of nature; botanist understanding vegetation in mountain landscapes and discovering rarities in remote areas; ornithologist searching for and saving birds in wild places; conservationist protecting nature; and communicator through writing and photography. This division works well, especially as each part ends with an appropriate published article by Derek himself. The book is well illustrated throughout and it is nice to see a chapter at the end dedicated to his excellent photographs of landscapes and habitats in Lapland, which he and his wife visited annually in his



retirement. A final bibliography lists his roughly 180 publications.

Derek was Chief Scientist of the Nature Conservancy Council from 1974 to 1989 and received national and international awards for his many achievements. He grew up in Carlisle, but his love of Scotland was there from his earliest days working alone in the Border Hills, to his studies of moorland waders in the Highlands (greenshanking with the Nethersole-Thompson family in Sutherland evocatively described by Des Thompson), his leadership in the White-tailed Eagle release programme, and his eventual success in promoting nature conservation at the highest level (with its political consequences) in the prolonged struggle with the Forestry Commission to protect Flow Country peatland in Caithness and Sutherland. We owe him a lot and this book tells it all.

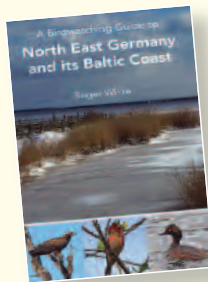
John Savory

A Birdwatching Guide to North East Germany and its Baltic Coast. Roger White, 2015. Privately published. ISBN 978-0-9571695-1-7. Paperback, 148 pages, many colour photographs and maps. £17.95.

This site guide follows a similar guide to birdwatching in Brandenburg and Berlin by the same author (reviewed in September 2012 (*Scottish Birds* 32: 251)) and follows the same format. This attractive book is an

essential purchase for anyone considering visiting the Baltic coast in Germany.

Germany is not generally the first choice destination for birdwatchers tempted by countries further south and east. However, this part of eastern Germany has many excellent sites with a range of species to tempt the Scottish birder. It is the variety and exceptional numbers which are the main draw. The coast and the profusion of wetlands host flocks of thousands of wildfowl including Bean Goose, Smew and Scaup. Breeding raptors include Honey-buzzard, White-tailed Eagle, Black Kite and Lesser Spotted Eagle. Passerines that may be seen include Bluethroat, Ortolan and River Warbler. Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes, Cranes and all three species of marsh tern breed.



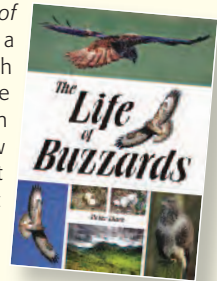
Over 70 sites are detailed with maps and lists of the species of most interest to British birders. The text and

directions are clear and show that the author knows this area well. There are helpful translations of German bird names and other words you may come across when birding there. I have often thought about going to this part of Germany and this book has convinced me I should go, and I will take a copy with me.

Mark Holling

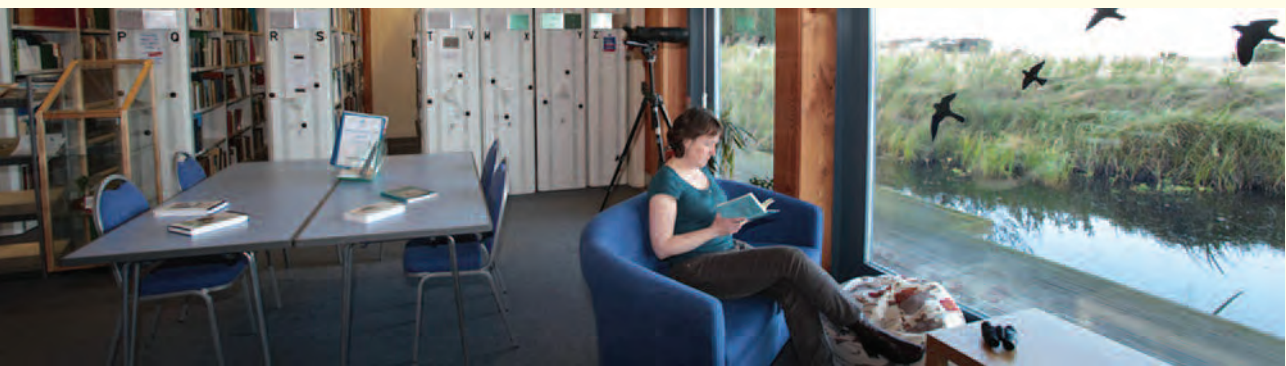
The Life of Buzzards. Peter Dare, 2015. Whittles Publishing, Dunbeath, Caithness, ISBN 978-184995-130-2, paperback, 292 pages, £22.99.

The *Life of Buzzards* is a monograph on the Common Buzzard, now our most abundant bird of prey. It is a readable



and informative account of the Buzzard's year with extensive sections on food, demography and population. After two chapters introducing the species and the author's study area and background, seven chapters take the reader through the year of a Buzzard. The food and feeding habits at each time of year are detailed. Further chapters cover territories, energy requirements, the relationship between food and breeding success, demography and population dynamics. Finally, there is a review of the decline and subsequent recovery of the Buzzard population over the last 200 years. There are many detailed appendices (totalling 37 pages).

Anyone who enjoys species monographs, especially those with an interest in birds of prey, will enjoy this book and as someone who has studied the expansion of Buzzards in south-east Scotland in the last 25 years I found it a fascinating read. But it is a book that has taken a long



time to write, indeed much of it is based on the author's fieldwork in Devon which took place mainly in the 1950s and 1960s. A lot of detail refers to habits of Buzzards in what we used to think of their typical habitat of upland woods and valleys of the west of Britain.

In a new book, I had hoped for some insight into the species and its habits in the lowlands which have been recolonised more recently. Instead, this book, and the illustrations, have a rather outdated feel - one that was written some time ago, but which has received a few updates since to include some more recent work. It's good to see that the new *Bird Atlas 2007-11* is referred to, but it seems there was only a limited review of more recent literature.

From the Scottish perspective, the most recent regularly referenced work is that of Weir & Picozzi which was published in 1983! There is no reference to the SOC's *The Birds of Scotland*, other more recent Scottish studies or the annual Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme reports.

It is a little disappointing that an opportunity has been missed to provide a more contemporary update on this most interesting species.

Mark Holling

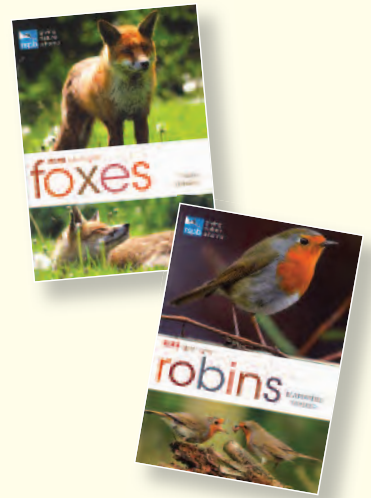
Robins. Marianne Taylor, 2015. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-1211-4, paperback, 128 pages, £9.99.

Foxes. Mike Unwin, 2015. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-1209-1, paperback, 128 pages, £9.99.

Who doesn't love a Robin? Britain's National Bird is easily our most recognisable and this new account in the *RSPB Spotlight Series*, will certainly prove popular with all who wish to find out more about "our" cheeky garden friends.

The book is packed full of informative and easy to digest facts. From meeting the Robin and its relatives to short and concise chapters on behaviour and Robins in poetry, all aspects of the Robin's life history are covered.

As well as the well-flowing text, the book is beautifully supplemented with numerous stunning photographs showing Robins in all their splendour. Much of the information within this book will be familiar to many birders, but for beginners, and those with a general interest in natural history, this is a lovely little book to add to your collection. It certainly benefits from being written by an author with the knowledge and expertise to disseminate all the



facts in a clear and concise way. This can be said for all books currently available in this series.

Foxes is again an entertaining and informative account. Unlike the popularity of Robins, *Foxes* fall very much into the 'Love them, Hate them' category. Again jam-packed with stunning photos, who couldn't be won over by Fantastic Mr Fox. To end, the *RSPB Spotlight Series* is promising to be a bright and welcoming addition to all wildlife enthusiasts' bookcases. Make sure you add them to yours.

Hayley Anne Douglas

SEE SOMETHING
YOU FANCY
READING?

These latest titles
are available to members
to borrow from the library
at Waterston House.
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availability and
terms and conditions,
see website.

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.



Plate 330. Observatory paths being built. © Mark Oksien

Isle of May Bird Observatory

Developments: With the internal work on the Observatory virtually complete, efforts were mostly concentrated on the immediate area around the new extension. The patio outside the back (north) door has been extended towards the steps at the quad-bike turning circle and wood store, with the necessary rock removal - no small task - facilitated by the use of a pneumatic drill. Connecting with this a concrete path has been created on top of a raised plinth of rocks around the new build. This not only allows more convenient access to the gas-bottle storage area, but provides an ideal platform for seawatching and is sufficiently wide to take seats and wooden benches!

We were pleased to host the second Young Birders' Training Course (YBTC), in conjunction with SOC, in early July (see article on pages 337–342) and are extremely grateful to the various members of CEH and SNH on the island who contributed to this and helped make it another resounding success, not least the social activities enjoyed by all.

Following on from the creation of a new logo to take us into the future, we have also got a new T-shirt design. As with the logo we are



Plate 331. Hard at work. © Stuart Rivers

particularly indebted to Harry Scott (Pica Design) for creating the bright, modern image which has already proved very popular. Not only did it feature prominently at the recent SOC Conference at Pitlochry, but YBTC participant, Emily Robertson, was proudly wearing her T-shirt at the Rutland Bird Fair! The T-shirts are available to anyone, not just Trust members, and cost £14.00 each (inc p&p) from S.L. Rivers, Flat 8, 10 Waverley Park, Edinburgh EH8 8EU. Please state size (S to XL) and make cheques payable to 'Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust'.

Sightings: The most notable aspect of the spring was the sheer variety of species heard in song from the regular occasional singers such as Chiffchaff to the literally unheard of island songsters such as Cuckoo. Obviously most species moved on, but it was still a remarkable

spring for breeding species in addition to the usual two passerines of Pied Wagtail and Rock Pipit. For the first time Woodpigeon bred on the isle with two pairs each rearing two chicks with adults seen to head to the mainland to feed. In addition the first pair of Blackbirds to breed since 1954 raised two broods, as did a pair of Wrens - the first since 1997, while a pair of Dunnocks bred for the first time since 1961 - some of the YBTC participants got to ring the chicks! Nine pairs of Swallows was also an island record, with 20 chicks raised.

In terms of migration through the spring numbers weren't large but there was a fair variety. Following on from the isle's first Red Grouse in April another first occurred on 3 May with a Great White Egret flying north that evening which was presumably the same seen at Loch of Strathbeg (North-east Scotland) the following day. A Wryneck was seen on 4 May, while the 5th saw probably the biggest fall of the spring including a large number of common migrants, with Tree Pipit the most impressive with at least 50 present while three Cuckoos were in song. A Wood Warbler was seen on 6th after which the rest of the month ticked along with common migrants, but nothing exceptional happened until the group of seven Killer Whales which passed the island on 28 May. When news of these was phoned round the island panic ensued as many ran from far corners to (successfully) see the pod.

June brought a few surprises with a Common Rosefinch on 5 June, and a second on 13th found while searching for a Common Nightingale around the Top Trap area. A Black Guillemot on 20 June was an unusual date and was subsequently seen on several dates over the following month with a second individual present on 13 July. A count of 193 Common Scoter heading past the island on 24 June was an island record. An adult Pomarine Skua on 13 July was an early autumn sighting, while 16 July brought a juvenile Black Redstart which had definitely not bred on the isle. A Short-eared Owl on 18 July was also on an unusual date, while an adult male Red-backed Shrike on 28–29 July was even more unexpected.

August brought single Wryneck on 1st & 23rd, two Ruff on 3rd with the islands sixth Kingfisher on 8th. Red Kites present on 8th and 15th were only the fourth and fifth island records. A juvenile Red-backed Shrike appeared on 21st, while there were a number of Icterine Warblers with the first on 18th increasing to four on 23rd, and a Barred Warbler was found on 19th with two on 23rd. The 24th brought a Blue-headed Wagtail and 15 Reed Warblers, another record count for the May. Highlight of the month was probably the Humpback Whale seen breaching off the north end on 22nd before heading north-east.

September began quietly with the first scarce migrant being a Common Rosefinch on 8th increasing to three on 11th, when yet another Wryneck was also present. The first Yellow-browed Warblers were two on 10th with three on 17th and further birds to the month end. With only seven previous records sightings of Honey-buzzard on 12th & 17th were particularly welcome as was a juvenile Red-footed Falcon from 14–19th, the isle's third record. The month ended with a record passage of 2,541 Pink-footed Geese on 25th, a Basking Shark on 28th and two juvenile Sabine's Gulls lingering on 30 September.

Mark Newell, Stuart Rivers & David Steel
www.isleofmaybirdobs.org



Plate 332. Killer Whales, Isle of May, May 2015. © Stuart Rivers

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

There were three species added to the Fair Isle list in 2014 and a few people thought that one of these (the Bridled Tern) might return for another visit this year, but nobody predicted that both of the other species would be the ones to reappear in 2015. A male Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler at the Obs in May was identified in the field (and confirmed by call, biometrics and DNA) and was one of the highlights of the spring. Whilst the other species added to make a rapid reappearance was Glossy Ibis, when a remarkable flock of five was discovered on 2 October (more than doubling the previous total for Shetland).

Highlights in the spring included Great White Egret (the first egret ever seen on Fair Isle), Tawny Pipit, Rustic Bunting, 'Western Subalpine Warbler', Blyth's Reed Warbler, two Greenish Warblers, Nightingale, Rough-legged Buzzard, two Cranes and a Golden Oriole (along with scarcities including at least two Short-toed Larks, three Hobbies, six Red-backed Shrikes, three Bluethroats, three Common Rosefinch, five Icterine Warblers, two Wrynecks, seven Marsh Warblers, five Hawfinches, four Dotterel, Marsh Harrier and an Osprey). Not bad for a 'quiet' spring in the end, although the regular westerlies meant it was hard birding at times.

Despite generally poor conditions for spring migration, an impressive showing of Tree Sparrows meant that we broke the ringing record for that species, whilst three Turtle Doves (along with another in the autumn) were a welcome return after their total absence from Fair Isle in 2014. The westerly winds did at least provide Fair Isle with its best ever seawatch, when 40 Long-tailed and 13 Pomarine Skuas passed South Light on 13 May!

Autumn migration was generally slow to get going, although highlights in August and September included the first Aquatic Warbler since 2006, Lanceolated Warbler, Pallid Harrier, Booted Warbler, Thrush Nightingale, Arctic Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler and two Citrine Wagtails. Early October produced a brief sighting of Siberian Thrush, as well as a more cooperative Paddyfield Warbler than things started to really pick up in late October. Some impressive birding in this period saw good numbers of common and scarce migrants and highlights including Siberian Rubythroat, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Lanceolated Warbler, Red-flanked Bluetail, Radde's Warbler, Dusky Warbler, several Olive-backed and Richards Pipits, Firecrest and Ortolan.



Plate 333. Great White Egret being mobbed by Lapwing, Fair Isle, May 2015. © David Parnaby



Plate 334. Yellow-browed Warbler, a record breaking year, Fair Isle, October 2015. © David Parnaby

Perhaps the most notable feature of the autumn though was the influx of Yellow-browed Warblers. Every record for the species tumbled: earliest record (9 September), highest day count (76), most individuals in a year (c207 at a conservative estimate) and highest annual ringing total (81). To put the last figure into context, the previous best year for ringing saw 16 individuals trapped, whilst this year's figure is higher than the annual ringing totals for Chiffchaff in every year at FIBO from 1948 to 2013. It's strange to think that in the very near future, Yellow-browed Warbler will be thought of as a common passage migrant rather than the highlight of an autumn day's birding.

Seabirds had an average season, with some species (notably Arctic Tern and Kittiwake) having a poor year, whilst others fared rather better, Bonxies in particular had a productive season (although numbers were much lower than 2014), whilst Guillemot, Razorbill and Shag all did quite well.

Amongst the non-avian records, a Migratory Locust was one of the more unexpected highlights, whilst Killer Whales again appeared on several occasions and Risso's Dolphins were present regularly throughout the autumn.

It has been another busy year for visitors, and 2016 is already starting to fill up, so don't delay if you're planning on visiting Fair Isle next year. Amongst our visitors, we also take a number of volunteers to help with the running of the Obs. As well as volunteers who join in with the wardening team, we also take domestic and bar volunteers, so there's something for everyone - keep an eye on the website for details of vacancies.

We're also very pleased to announce that this year has seen the setting up of the Simon Aspinall Bursary Fund (SABF). This fund has been established by Jack and Sylvia Aspinall to honour the memory of their son Simon, who served as an assistant warden at FIBO in 1987 and revisited the island in subsequent years with his brother Richard to undertake research on the Fair Isle Wren, but who died in 2011 aged 53 from motor neurone disease. The SABF and the well-established John Harrison Memorial Fund both provide funds that cover travel expenses for wardening team volunteers under the age of 25 and provide a discount to stay at the Obs.

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North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory

So... it's early October and prime time for migration, so forgive me if this round up may seem a bit brief. There's an east wind blowing, an eighth for Britain has just flown past the window for the second time (more on that in a future *Scottish Birds* article), so I really should be outside! Nevertheless, as a Bird Observatory we have a duty to provide information and publicise our work, so here's a taster of the last six months at NRBO.

So... after a tough spring for migrants with westerly winds dominating, numbers of commoner migrants were well down and consequently ringing totals during the first half of the year also suffered. But, there's always an up-side and with such winds we had the best year on record for skua passage with these fantastic seabirds seen on all four attempts from the point at Westness during May. Despite the lack of migrants several rarities still forced their way through with the two best birds of May originating from across the pond - an educational Todd's Canada Goose and the very, very smart Veery. The highlights reel from the period also includes the first spring records of White-rumped Sandpiper and Olive-backed Pipit for the island, together with Rough-legged Buzzard, several sightings of Bee-eater and a male Western Subalpine Warbler.

So... into the summer and it was another busy breeding season leading to more success with subsequent ringing efforts. It was especially pleasing to see the nesting colonies of Black Guillemots or Tysties going from strength to strength. After two years of near total failure, the last three seasons have seen the nesting population grow rapidly and the number of accessible nests found has now more than doubled from the 45 in 2013 to 100 this year and with clear signs of new pairs expanding the population, the future is bright for 'our very own Puffins' as we like to call them! A wet and late spring (silage was still being fed to cattle in June!) resulted in widespread failure of many early breeding wader species, but the resilient ground nesting Lapwings, Curlews, Redshanks and Oystercatchers persevered and were rewarded with success at the second or third attempts. Fulmar productivity was slightly down on last year with about 130 youngsters now out riding the waves in the Atlantic Ocean and just under 100 Arctic Tern chicks fledged this time around. This may sound like a poor return, but after an even longer period of despair than that of the Tysties with less than 100 fledging North Ronaldsay in the 13 years since the new millennium - the 300 which fledged in 2014 and the 100 this year are considered by the optimistic (and that's exactly what we are) as steps in the right direction.



Plate 335. Black Guillemot, a successful breeding season on North Ronaldsay during 2015. © Stephen Rutt



Plate 336. Molly and Stephen with Curlew chicks, North Ronaldsay, June 2015. © George Gay

So... onto the main event - the autumn! With our reputation for rarities boosted by a good run of form at this time of year recently comes an observatory full with expectant guests, and volunteers! There have been plenty of highlights so far (full details at www.nrbo.co.uk) such as Booted Warbler, three Greenish Warblers and a Blyth's Reed Warbler, two Citrine Wagtails etc and hopefully October will deliver just like last year did for our hard working census team. Opening NRBO to the modern media over the last few years has also certainly brought a more up-to-date image and rarely a day goes by without us tweeting! We also utilise Facebook, and while our 600 or so friends and 1,300 Twitter followers may not mean much to some, these days it's the most useful tool to communicate sightings but has also helped us to 'man' the observatory. With the founding of the NGB (Next Generation Birders), we've found a new source for volunteers, all keen to further their own ornithological careers which is certainly something we're as keen to promote and get behind at NRBO. In 2015, from a number of applicants eight volunteers have come, gone or are still here at various stages and all have

contributed greatly to the year making it one of the best of my five years at NRBO. I'd like to thank Stephen, Sara, Molly, George, Peter, Sam, Jonathan and Espen for all showed great enthusiasm for anything we threw at them and have proved essential in the daily running of the Observatory and guest house. I for one will miss them when I'm walking North Ronaldsay again on my lonesome counting the wintering ducks, geese and gulls during the winter months and getting on with all those maintenance and bird report jobs I've neglected all autumn.

So... to anyone reading this - "Do you fancy any of the above in 2016?" I won't kid you - the days are tough and long but it's an awfully rewarding and fantastic experience. Interested, then see www.nrbo.co.uk and keep an eye on our Twitter and Facebook pages for details and announcements.

Right, that's your lot - update done, I'll be outside...

Mark Warren

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Mediterranean Gulls in Ayrshire 2015 - new Scottish record totals

B.D. Kerr



Plate 337. Mediterranean Gulls, Troon, Ayrshire, 2015. © Angus Hogg

Go back to 1987 and I arrived at Doonfoot in calm, sunny conditions on 25 January. On the beach, a sole figure looking through his telescope was Angus Hogg. "Hi Angus," I said as I strolled up, "anything interesting?" "No," he initially replied with a grin, and without drawing breath continued, "yes, there is - a Ring-billed Gull - and a Mediterranean Gull next to it!"

That was my first Mediterranean Gull in Ayrshire, back in the days when they were a Scottish rarity and a report had to be written for acceptance. It wasn't till 1995 that I saw my next one. On 9 September, I was with a fellow birder and telling him about that experience as we walked along the newly created path at Barassie, behind where the recycling plant now is. I looked up, as did he, incredulous that an adult Mediterranean Gull was flying low over us. From then on single birds were seen annually at Barassie Beach, nearly all at the south end of the beach. I had to wait until 2002 before I had my first multiple sighting there, with two birds on 14 December. The next particularly interesting sighting was of three birds at the Pow Burn mouth on 16 September 2005 including a very scaly, young bird. Where had it come from?

It was not until November 2011–January 2012 that two or three birds were present here all winter. By then Barassie had become established as the best place in Ayrshire, if not Scotland, to see Mediterranean Gulls. Other sites in Ayrshire have turned up decent numbers (such as Doonfoot, Nossdale Water mouth at Largs, or the beach at Ardrossan), but not as consistently as the Troon area. Nowadays, Mediterranean Gulls are seen in the Troon area from the first week in July through to the first week of the following April.

Things took a sudden and dramatic upturn on 23 July 2014 when I got a totally unexpected count of 11 birds, which increased to a maximum of 14 on 29 July (nine adults, four in second-summer plumage and a juvenile) - surpassing the previous Scottish record site count of 12 birds (Nadin 2012). As usual the birds were all concentrated in a small group at the south end of Barassie Beach and viewable easily from the car park there. Numbers dwindled quickly and by 3 August the total was down to four birds, with more normal sightings of single birds being seen most of the winter.

If 2014 was remarkable, then 2015 was almost unbelievable. David Given reported 14 birds (two adults and 12 first-summers) from the South Beach and Meikle Craigs area of Troon on 1 July. On 16 July this was rapidly overtaken with 21 birds being recorded by Jason McManus. Not to be outdone, David Given snatched the record back when he had 31 birds there on 21 July - mostly in first-summer plumage. Angus Hogg then broke the record again with 33 birds on 3 August, which included two juveniles, between the South Beach and Meikle Craigs. On 5 August I then got the maximum count for the autumn, and set a new record count with 38+ birds, mostly in second-winter plumage, with only four or so first-winters and not one of them a juvenile. Luckily, most of the flock were pretty much stationary and well-spaced, otherwise counting would have been a nightmare. All were on Meikle Craigs or on the beach within 200 feet of the rocks. Unfortunately, two of the three times I was there it was blowing a strong westerly which meant I had difficulty controlling the telescope, so counting was difficult enough

without trying to age them all, and my digiscoped photos were just shaken blurs. On the third occasion, I got one or two half-decent shots, but numbers had gone down rapidly to 18 birds on 6 August. By 7 September numbers had dwindled further to 12 birds. Interestingly, during this whole period there were relatively few birds at Barassie with a maximum of four on 13 August, by when numbers had reduced somewhat at the south end of the beach. Historically late afternoon has been the best time to see winter Mediterranean Gulls at Barassie as they arrive with the pre-roost gathering. Occasionally birds have been present throughout the day. These autumn gatherings seem to be best seen as high tide approaches, but not at high tide itself for maximum numbers, though birds can be seen at all times of day. The three times I saw the birds in early August 2015 nearly all were in a roost not terribly far from the tideline on the rocks at Meikle Craigs, and on the north side of the rocks, best viewed from the sand and a telescope was absolutely necessary to avoid disturbance.



Plate 338. Mediterranean Gull, Troon, Ayrshire, 2015. © Bruce Kerr



Plates 339–340. Mediterranean Gulls, Troon, Ayrshire, 2015. © Angus Hogg



It is difficult to assess how many individual birds were involved in the sightings in July and August 2015 as it was obvious from the reported ages that not everyone was seeing the same birds. Approximating with two juveniles, 12 first-summer, 20 second-summer and 20 adults there could have been up to 54 different birds involved and certainly 40 (the 38 I saw plus the two juveniles). Their origin is mostly unknown, but the ringed individuals observed in Ayrshire over the years that are traceable have come from the Netherlands, Belgium and north-west France (I thank Angus Hogg for this information).

Interestingly number increases in Ayrshire seem to be coinciding with similar events at Newbiggin in Northumberland where they've had peak counts of 18 on 9 September 2009, 28 on 2 August 2010, 59 on 20 August 2011

and 48 on 13 July 2013 (I don't have the 2014/15 figures for there). These peaks closely match the increase of birds documented in Dumfries & Galloway in the same period (Henderson 2014). The previous Scottish record total of 12 birds at Buckhaven, Fife, occurred after a rapid rise in numbers at the site following the first record there in 2009 (Nadin 2012). With a few pairs of Mediterranean Gulls now successfully breeding on Coquet Island in Northumberland, which is on the same latitude as Maidens in Ayrshire, it is not inconceivable that they are already breeding in Ayrshire or Dumfries & Galloway, or perhaps somewhere in south-east Scotland. The number of possible coastal sites which could be chosen to breed at is fairly large, never mind inland sites - particularly among Black-headed Gull colonies.

Here's looking to the autumn of 2016.

Bruce Dickson Kerr, Troon, Ayrshire.
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Plate 341. Black Stork, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, August 2015. © David Main

Black Stork at the RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, 6–22 August 2015 - second North-east Scotland record

K. HAMPER

When the phone went at 09:00 on 6 August and I heard reserve manager Richard Humpidge's voice, I was half-expecting something like "Can you pick up some milk for the coffee on your way in?" Instead, he said "There's a Black Stork outside the Visitor Centre!" It had appeared as he'd been doing morning checks, right in front of the Centre. It didn't take me long to grab binoculars and jacket and head off down the road, only to be greeted with "It was here five minutes ago, feeding well. We think it went into the far left corner of the field." So I, and a growing group of hopefuls, settled down to wait.

Over an hour later, someone thought he saw movement in the mass of rushes and iris leaves. Some ten minutes passed, and eventually we made out the back of the neck of something dark, lurking in the undergrowth. Finally, the bird strolled out into the open, and it was, indeed, a juvenile Black Stork. After poking about in the water for a while, it took off, giving us a good view of huge wings and a white belly. It circled

around, landing on a recently-cut area of rushes, and slowly made its way back across the field through the various ditches to its original spot, where the feeder burn comes into Starnafin field and where there are plenty of small fish, frogs and invertebrates; this seemed to be the best feeding ground, as it remained a favourite spot for much of the time the bird remained on site. It ignored the Konik ponies, had a few altercations with herons, which seemed to take exception to its presence, and was regularly dive-bombed by the tern colony. Occasionally, the stork took off and flew a few circuits, which provided a good spectacle for the steady stream of visitors, and quite often it tucked itself away in the corner of the field, demanding a degree of patience from its audience. This proved to be the pattern for the rest of the bird's stay at Strathbeg; feeding sometimes took it over onto the Savoch Low Ground and it would lift off and climb to quite a height (causing watchers to think it was leaving) before being relocated some time later hunkered down amongst the

rushes. For such a big and obvious bird, about a metre tall with a 1.5 m wingspan, it was remarkable adept at hiding.

2015 was quite a year for Black Stork sightings in the UK. Birds were reported as early as May in Norfolk and Wales, and there seems to have been a small influx of Black Storks into Britain at the beginning of August.

A white Darvic ring on the left leg, 'F05P' in black, proved that the Strathbeg bird was ringed on 3 June 2015 in the Bossus-les-Rumigny Forest, in the Ardennes region of France, along with two nest mates. One of these, 'F05R', turned out to be the bird that was seen all month around Spurn Point and the Humber, and which lingered there well into September. There were no reports of the third nest mate, 'F05Q' (I did find myself wondering if the whole brood was navigationally-challenged), although other birds were reported in Dorset, Norfolk and Lincolnshire, with more sightings over Kent and Cleveland; how many individuals there actually were remains to be confirmed, but a quick look at the reports on-line I would think at least five.

Our bird remained until around the third week of the month - the last report I have from our hide log-sheets is on 22 August (if anyone has a later record, I'd be pleased to get it!). Birds were still being reported along the south coast in early September, so one could have been ours, heading (finally) for warmer wintering grounds in Africa.

The last Black Stork recorded in Scotland was in 2010, when a bird ringed in 2007 in Hungary went on a sightseeing tour; first spotted over the Findhorn Valley, it went on to visit the Outer Hebrides and Unst. The last one seen locally in North-east Scotland was recorded on the Ythan in mid-July 1998, and this year's bird is the first record for RSPB Loch of Strathbeg reserve.

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Plate 342. Black Stork, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, August 2015. © Michele Emslie

Aquatic Warbler, Fair Isle, 15–16 August 2015

L. GREGORY



Plate 343. Aquatic Warbler, Fair Isle, August 2015. © Lee Gregory

As Assistant Warden at Fair Isle Bird Observatory during spring and autumn migration, part of my duties is to count all migrant bird species in certain sections of the island each day. The island is divided into three sections (North, South East and South West), split between the three wardens and done on a clockwise rotational rota.

Whilst covering South West census on 15 August the weather was fairly poor, raining quite heavily at times, I picked up a few common migrants en route i.e. several Willow, Reed and Garden Warblers, Chiffchaff plus two Barred Warblers found the previous evening. In a particularly heavy shower mid-morning, I was approaching the fenced-off reed box at Meadow Burn when I stopped 10 m short and made a pishing noise to attract any birds present. Straight away a Reed Warbler jumped out onto the fence, then jumped back in; then another bird immediately hopped onto the fence in the same spot. Binoculars up, “nice” a Sedge Warbler, but hang on it’s yellow and black; and as it lifts its head up it’s got a huge central crown stripe - “ITS AN AQUATIC WARBLER!” This memory will stay with me for the rest of my life having looked at thousands of Sedge Warblers looking for an Aquatic over the past 30 years! I then fumbled with my

phone and despite the touch screen being wet eventually managed to call or text all observatory staff and birders on the island, who quickly met on site and had reasonable views. Later that day, after the rain had stopped, the bird showed very well, much to the relief of several birders arriving on the Fair Isle ferry, the Good Shepherd, including Senior Assistant Warden Ciaran Hatsell, fresh back from his holidays, and ex-FIBO Warden Deryk Shaw.

Description

A highly distinctive, heavily streaked *Acrocephalus* warbler being yellowy/orange and black.

Plumage: head pattern black lateral crown stripes with very obvious broad yellowy/orange central crown stripe and supercilium with a touch of apricot colour at the base of the bill, smudgy dark eyestripe and short moustachial stripe. **Upperparts:** broad black patch running down centre of the back bordered by pale broad mantle braces then more streaks on the sides of the mantle. Rump and tail slightly richer rufous than upperparts with the rump covered in random black streaks; the tail was dark centred with tips very pointed, outer tail feathers slightly paler when seen in flight. The most obvious feature on the folded wing was the black-

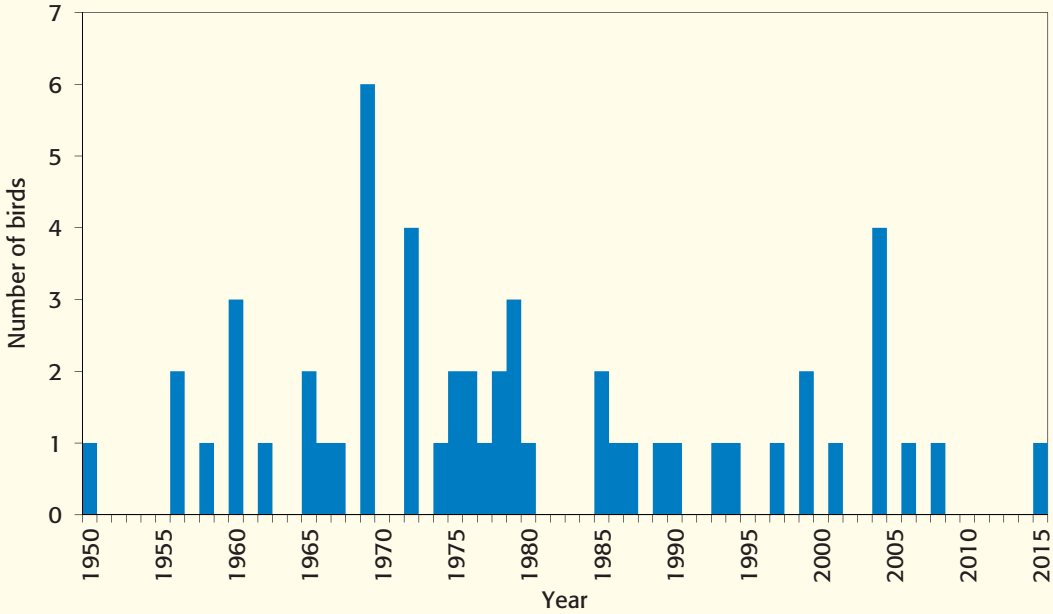


Figure 1. Annual occurrence of Aquatic Warbler in Scotland, 1950–2015.



Plate 344. Aquatic Warbler, Fair Isle, August 2015. © Lee Gregory

When in tall reeds it could be quite skulking but would then hop up and look around with legs spread like a Bearded Tit or creep out of the reed box and hop along the fence then make its way along the ditch either hopping between stems or flying low then swooping up to perch in full view.

The bird was quite easy to follow moving through the reeds when it called a quite loud ‘tack’ repeated several times.

The Aquatic Warbler was still present the following day, 16 August, and still showing well in sunny conditions, but was not seen on subsequent days.

centred tertials with pale edges the same colour as upperparts background and all other coverts dark centred too with pale edges, primaries slightly duller brown compared to the tertials with projection equal to the tertial length.

Underparts: creamy below, paler throat with darker wash on flanks and upper breast the same colour as mantle and a series of random fine streaks along the flank. **Legs:** quite thick and pale pink with claws same colour. **Bill:** dark blackish upper mandible, pink lower mandible with dark smudge near the tip.

This constitutes the 38th record for Fair Isle with the last record being in 2006 of this increasingly rare passage migrant, so much so that this year Aquatic Warbler was put back on the list of species considered by the British Birds Rarities Committee.

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Plate 345. Arctic Warbler, Sands of Forvie NNR, North-east Scotland, August 2015. © Harry Scott

Arctic Warblers on mainland Scotland during autumn 2015

P. SHEPHERD & G. HINCHON

Arctic Warbler, Sands of Forvie NNR, 19–20 August 2015 - the third record for North-east Scotland

The morning of the 19 August looked good for a few early migrants on the north-east coast but after a quick drive from home it proved to be a rather poor morning with fog-lights a necessity. I had a few pressing matters at home so decided to leave it until the afternoon when the weather was due to clear. No point getting soaked and having any birds hiding in the poor weather.

Early afternoon had me heading out again and walking over the southern end of Forvie Sands NNR, an area I try to cover on a regular basis during migration. The first set of bushes produced nothing and by the time I had arrived at the second set I had just a few Willow Warbler and Whinchat for my efforts.

After three circuits of the bushes I had seen nothing until a Robin appeared with something else moving behind it. As the second bird would not co-operate, I gave a quick '*pissh*' as

the bird moved straight over my head and away from me. It landed for a matter of seconds before moving on but, with the very briefest of views, I did see the wing and was fairly certain there were two wing-bars. Up to now this was the only thing I had seen on the bird and was expecting this to be a Greenish Warbler considering the weather and time of year, although on the briefest of views it just did not seem right.

Moving back around the bush to where I believed the bird went, I stood back out in the open and tried again to get the bird out. This did not result in a view but there was an immediate response with a short 'tzick' call - this had to be an Arctic Warbler. The bird called a few more times and eventually came out to my coaxing, confirming the bird calling back was indeed an Arctic Warbler; after this point I did not hear the bird again.

I then spent some time trying to get all the main identification features of the bird, which required some head scratching to remember as I had last seen Arctic Warbler in Tibet in 2012, where it took backstage to the other warblers and

everything else for that matter. It took a while to clinch all the features while the bird continued to move rapidly around the bushes only showing for a few seconds every 20 minutes or so. Eventually, the main features were seen: the long supercillium not extending over bill, dark eye-stripe, mottled ear-coverts, pale legs etc. The darker diffuse tip to the lower mandible was difficult to observe unless the bird came out into the open. The bird continuously worked a circuit, appearing chunkier, but only slightly bigger than the two Willow Warblers it was with.

News was put out shortly after the bird was heard calling and a few observers started to arrive that evening. I was a little concerned with the clear weather the bird might move out. Fortunately, the bird stuck around for the 20th and while it generally remained very elusive, it would eventually present itself briefly at times allowing many people to catch up on this bird for the first time in North-east Scotland, a long overdue re-occurrence since the last one back in 1979.

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Plate 346. Arctic Warbler, Sands of Forvie NNR, North-east Scotland, August 2015. © Harry Scott

Arctic Warbler, Skateraw, 11–16 September 2015 - the third record for Lothian

I went to Skateraw in the morning of 11 September 2015 to look for a Yellow-browed Warbler that had been found there earlier that day. After 20 minutes I had still not seen it, but then the Yellow-browed suddenly began to call and I looked around more intently. About five minutes later I noticed a movement in one of the elder bushes. I was astonished to see that this was not the Yellow-browed, but a larger, more stocky, *Phylloscopus* warbler, with a strikingly long whitish supercilium that turned upwards behind the eye. Although not a wide supercilium it was distinct, as it was emphasised by a dark eye-stripe immediately below. To me this could only be an Arctic Warbler; there was nothing to suggest that it was the smaller Greenish Warbler. I scribbled a few notes in my book as it moved slowly, but half obscured, in a bush. There were no whitish marks on the tertials and there was a single whitish wing-bar on the greater coverts. Rather than a wing-bar it looked more like a series of dots. The median covert bar was very slight and I did not notice it until my return visit on 13 September. This bird had a larger bill than a Chiffchaff, orangey below and dark above. The feet too looked large; they too were orangey, but the legs were browner. The upperparts were olive-green and the flight-feathers were edged with bright green. The belly was white and the flanks and breast were light grey.

Although now happy that it was an Arctic Warbler, I was a little bothered by its sluggishness as it moved in the bushes, and by the fact that it was always low down. In fact its movements recalled Barred Warbler, so I thought I needed to eliminate the slow-moving Eastern Crowned Warbler. This only took a moment, so I then phoned the news out, but I was still cautious in case I had made a dreadful mistake. The first observers were there about 30 minutes later, but it was a while before it showed itself and then to only one person at a time. It called a few times, an un-*Phylloscopus*-like 'zit', sometimes repeated. During my views



Plates 347–348. Arctic Warbler, Skateraw, Lothian, September 2015. © Béatrice Henricot

on 13 September it again called several times, particularly when it chased a Chiffchaff. By now it was feeding higher in the trees and moved around quite quickly - which made me wonder if it was freshly-arrived when I first discovered it. Although sometimes a difficult bird to find, I think that most of the people who went to see it were successful. I never did connect with the Yellow-browed Warbler!

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Status of Arctic Warbler in Scotland

In 2012 the BOURC accepted the proposed split of Arctic Warbler into three species (Sangster et al. 2012), with all British records still considered to originate from the widespread former nominate race borealis. Within the revision Arctic Warbler remains *Phylloscopus borealis*, with a breeding range extending from northern Scandinavia eastwards across Siberia and northernmost Kazakhstan, Mongolia and north-east China to the Bering Straits and to Alaska (incorporating former sub-species *kennicoti*). The entire population is migratory and winters in South-east Asia from Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines to Malaysia and Borneo.

There were 266 birds recorded in Britain up to the end of 2004, with 165 (62%) of these in Scotland (Forrester et al. 2007). The vast majority of Scottish records (91.5%) were from the Northern Isles with 59 on Shetland, 72 on Fair Isle and 20 in Orkney. There were just 14 birds noted elsewhere: five on the Isle of May (1961, 1967, 1970, 1975 & 1996), three in Caithness (1978, 1983 & 1985), two each in North-east Scotland (1958 & 1979) and Lothian (1988 & 1995) and one in Fife (1996), with just a single west coast record of one on Barra, Outer Hebrides in September 2002. The temporal spread of these records runs from 21 June to 28 October, with a distinct peak in mid-September, and September accounted for 72% of the records.

Since 2004 there have been a further 79 accepted records in Scotland out of a total of 93 in Britain to the end of 2014 (85%), a notably greater proportion than in the period to the end

of 2004. A further seven birds have been reported in Scotland in 2015 to date. Within Scotland there is an even more pronounced dominance in records from the Northern Isles in 2005–14, with a first-winter at Grogarry, South Uist on 8 September 2010 - the second Outer Hebrides/Scottish west coast record - the only record away from there. The 77 Northern Isles records showed a distinct shift towards Shetland (56 birds) compared to Fair Isle (19) and particularly Orkney (two birds). The shift may in part be due to greater autumn coverage on Shetland in the last decade, but coverage on Fair Isle is still high and has apparently increased on Orkney, indicating there has probably been a slight change in the latitude at which birds have been displaced to our shores. In view of this potential change it makes the mainland Scotland records of 2015 all the more remarkable.

For 2005–14 Scottish records there were three find dates in June: singles on Fair Isle on 22–23 June 2005, at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 27 June 2012 and at the same location on 23 June 2013. There were none in July, 16 in August, 44 in September (56%), 13 in October and two in November. The latter were a first-winter at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 10 November 2007 and a first-winter at Helendale, Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 6–10 November 2012, and both were significantly after the previous latest find date of 28 October. The spread of find dates is also generally broader with the proportion of records in September considerably reduced. The pattern of records all being of single birds was finally broken when two were found at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 18 August 2010, and while there were several birds which lingered beyond the pre-2005 average stay of 1.7 days, particularly in 2009, none exceeded the previous 10-day record.

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Plate 349. Paddyfield Warbler, Collieston, North-east Scotland, August 2015. © Nick Littlewood

Paddyfield Warbler, Collieston, 28–29 August 2015 - the second record for North-east Scotland

P.S. CROCKETT

There was a long run of easterlies in late August, and migrants had been turning up in good numbers in the few days proceeding the last weekend of the month. So, first thing on the Friday 28th, after I had done my usual round of some of the easy-to-check patch bushes before leaving for work, I decided to take a quick look at the churchyard bushes. These, despite the recent influx, had been quiet recently.

This time not much was seen, until just before I left I caught a glimpse of a mostly silhouetted bird, in shape suggestive of an 'acro' in the top of one of the bushes. This seemed to show a very strong head pattern: dominant pale supercilium and darker brown area above it. The view was only 1–2 seconds at the most and the bird seemed to disappear into the thickest vegetation.

After waiting a while, and consoling myself by the thought that it had maybe been a worn adult Sedge Warbler, I had to head off to work. I

returned to the bushes that evening, but with no further sighting of the bird, Sedge Warbler or other species, and I put it out of my mind.

The following morning however, with it being Saturday, I had more time and spent it working round some of the same area, ending up back at the bushes in the churchyard at around 07:20. While standing in front of the bushes I heard a distinct, but quiet and soft-toned 'tac' - this was obviously not a Sedge Warbler. I had just a few minutes earlier seen a Reed Warbler in the roadside bushes, but this call did not fit with that species either.

I spent the next 45 minutes, with what felt at times a futile wait, scanning the bushes, and sometimes entering the one gap to have a scan around. I was considering what to do next by sitting on a seat in the churchyard when a small warbler shot over the wall, over my head, from the nearby gully area into the bushes. I caught a glimpse of some rich brown tones and a

relatively long tail, which immediately cancelled out Sedge Warbler in my mind. I started to feel more anticipation as I realised that the two observations over these two days were probably linked. I approached the corner of the bushes where the bird had flown in and now a number of 'tacs' followed by a double 'churr' resulted. This kept up my energy, though it was another ten minutes before I started to get some views of the bird that was being remarkably elusive.

I gradually accumulated views of its body (unstreaked brown) and then aspects of its head until the bird showed, albeit briefly, almost fully on top of the bushes. It was clearly a Paddyfield Warbler. I was delighted that persistence had paid off. Ironically, some of the first birders arriving on the scene got almost instantaneous good views, though the bird returned to being mostly very elusive shortly afterwards. It did regularly call which helped new observers, and I got my most prolonged views after 17:00 that evening. It was not seen the following day though I'm content that I had seen this bird the previous day during that very brief glimpse.

Brief description

This was a relatively small *Acrocephalus* warbler, with a typical angular head. Its tail was long relative to its body, though accentuated by its short wings (shorter primary projection than a Blyth's Reed Warbler) with a rounded wing point. Its tail was rounded as with other related species. In flight, the bird contrasted with the appearance of Sedge Warbler, with its clearly longer tail. The bill was relatively shorter than other related species. Overall the bird appeared slightly smaller than a Reed Warbler and daintier.

Upperparts: The bird showed warm brown upperparts with rusty tones. There could be some grey tones to the head and neck in some lights. When in bright light overall could appear paler. In flight on two occasions a contrasting area of richer rusty-rufous colouration in the rump was obvious. There was no streaking in the head or mantle plumage. **Head:** This was distinctive, with a wide whitish-cream supercilium, broadening over and behind the eye. The supercilium was outlined by a darker brown area above, and blackish-brown eyestripe and lores. The whole effect was more marked than in a Booted Warbler. There was a paler, buff, half collar. **Wings:** The tertials showed well marked darker centers and the visible primaries were dark brownish-black. **Underparts:** These were pale, off white, with buff areas especially in the lower and upper flanks. This was not to the extent that Reed Warbler can show though. **Bare Parts:** Its legs were a pale brown colour. The bill was distinctive, being relatively short for an *Acrocephalus* warbler, with a yellowish lower mandible, but with a darker distal area, and darker upper mandible.

This is only the second record of a Paddyfield Warbler for the region, but is the first available for a wider audience. The first was observed by just a few when it was caught during a hirundine roost ringing session nearby at Logie Buchan in 2012. Paddyfield Warbler remains a very rare bird away from the Northern Isles, which have hosted the vast majority of records so far in Scotland.

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Plate 350. Paddyfield Warbler, Collieston, North-east Scotland, August 2015. © Nick Littlewood



Plate 351. Red-footed Falcon, Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, September 2015. © Harry Scott

Red-footed Falcons in Scotland during autumn 2015

M. LEWIS & D. STEEL

Red-footed Falcon, Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, 31 August–12 September 2015

A planned pre-work seawatch from Girdle Ness early on the morning of 10 September was quickly written off when on getting up, I found I could barely see across to the other side of the street. As such, I decided that instead I'd work the various bits of cover that are on offer, starting along the south bank before heading around towards the office in the harbour. I'd barely stepped out of Torry and on to the golf course when a small falcon zipped behind me and disappeared out of view, vanishing into the fog. I hadn't seen much of the bird, but I considered that it might have been a Hobby, which I'd have been very pleased with, as it would be a patch tick.

On relocating the bird on the golf course I was presented with a bit of a problem. It didn't look right for a Hobby due to several features such as the short moustache, and rather broad white 'collar', and especially, the fact that it was trotting around on the fairway. My thoughts pretty quickly turned to Red-footed Falcon, but



Plate 352. Red-footed Falcon, Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, September 2015. © Mark Lewis



Plate 353. Red-footed Falcon, Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, September 2015. © Mark Lewis

there were a few features that I felt didn't quite sit right for that species either. There was apparently no white on the forehead, and the bird appeared very dark on the crown and upperparts, with pretty heavy blotching on the underparts. I needed a view that was more than just a shape in the murk!

Getting closer to a bird that is sitting out in the open can be a bit of a problem, so I decided to box round the bird and try to approach it from behind a bank. On slowly poking my head over the top I had a moment of dread, thinking I was much too close and about to flush it. Indeed, it took off, but to my surprise it flew towards me and landed on a post about 5 m away! There it sat quite calmly (a lot more calm than I was being!), surveying the short grass around it, allowing me to take in all of its features. Still it looked dark and dark crowned, without any white in the forehead, but now I could see that the apparent heavy underpart streaking was due to the bird's breast feathers being wet, and that the tail was well marked with dark bars. A quick check of a few more features such as the orange feet, and barred tertials and greater coverts, confirmed the identification as a Red-footed Falcon. If only all rarities were as confiding!



Plate 354. Red-footed Falcon, Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, September 2015. © Ian Hastie

Later in the day it showed very well, in good light, and had dried out considerably too. Under these viewing conditions, it was a much more obvious bird, with pale, sometimes silvery upperparts, obvious barring on the coverts and tail, and a gingery cap. It was observed hunting insects for a good hour, hovering, swooping

down to grab food off areas of short grass, and occasionally chasing things down on foot (frequently craneflies, although it was also seen eating a worm on one occasion). It showed no fear of any of the golf balls that got a little too close for my liking, or the golfers who walked right past it - one of whom reported seeing the same bird a few days earlier, perched on one of the flags. Indeed, it later transpired that the same bird had been photographed in roughly the same spot on 31 August. Girdle Ness had been reasonably well covered in early September, so I can only assume that it had been elsewhere for much of this time.

Although rare at any time, Red-footed Falcons are much rarer in Scotland in autumn than earlier in the year, with approximately 75% of records of this species coming from the spring. In addition, records of juvenile birds like this one are even rarer. Up to 2004, the 18 autumn records were divided equally between adult

birds and first-summers (*The Birds of Scotland*), and the SOC's *Scottish Bird Report Online* reveals no records of juveniles between 2005 and 2009. It seems that after a record of one at Fife Ness on 2 November 2010, the Girdle Ness bird might be only the second juvenile recorded in Scotland. Like many other vagrant Red-footed Falcons, this bird lingered in the area for some time (although mostly before it was discovered!), and allowed many observers to catch up with not only a rarely seen plumage, but also an extremely charismatic and confiding little bird. It was last seen on 12 September, and I fully expected the one that turned up on the Isle of May on the 14th to be the same bird. However, the large amount of white on the forehead and crown of the Isle of May bird clearly shows that it was in fact a different individual.

Mark Lewis, Aberdeen.

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Plate 355. Red-footed Falcon, Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, September 2015. © Harry Scott



Plate 356. Red-footed Falcon, Isle of May, September 2015. © John Nadin

Red-footed Falcon, Isle of May, 14–19 September 2015 - third island record

Following a few days of south-easterly winds in mid-September, the east coast experienced a noticeable fall of common migrants, with a number of migratory raptors caught up with the movement. The Isle of May produced a noticeable peak of eight Kestrels on the 12th (although exact turnover of birds was not estimated) but this was eclipsed by a juvenile Honey-buzzard later that day (the eighth island record).

As the easterly air flow continued over the next few days, more birds arrived including highlights of Wryneck and a handful of Yellow-browed Warblers. On the afternoon of 14 September myself and work colleague David Kinchin-Smith went birding along the south end which produced a number of Kestrels but also a hovering falcon which caught the eye. Despite the distance (the bird was hovering against the light near the South Horn) the bird caught the

eye as its behaviour was noticeably different; the bird was dangling its legs and appeared to be catching insects on the wing.

As the pulse started to race, we decided to take a closer look and get some detail. On closer inspection a collar could be picked out... alarm bells started ringing. This was no Kestrel. Better views were required to confirm and to rule out other potential species (I was aware of Hobby records in nearby Fife including one earlier that day). Then eventually the bird swooped down below the sky line and allowed improved views (and better detail) at which point I uttered the words "David, it's *** Red-footed Falcon". Panic set in. Who what why? I knew the birding team at the Low Light Bird Observatory were on the island, but no idea where. I tried Ian Darling's mobile number; no response, no signal. An instant plan was hatched; David would watch the bird and continue to take photos whilst I would run the length of the island to inform everyone I could find.

However luck was in. On setting off, within minutes I discovered Ian Darling and Gordon McDonald in the nearby Byres building. No messing with words, I just shouted "juvenile Red-footed Falcon south end, Go Go Go". After the initial shocked response, Ian and Gordon sprang into life and were soon with David on the South Plateau looking for the bird. It appeared briefly but after several minutes searching we relocated the bird feeding on North Plateau and it performed well for the admiring crowd. Back-slapping and congratulations soon followed (I even witnessed a fist-pump from Ian in celebration) and soon after we were enjoying a celebratory wee dram back at the Observatory. This is what makes places like the Isle of May special, a stunning bird when least expecting it.

The bird remained for six days during which time eight mainland birders successfully twitched the individual. During its time on the island it was observed hawking and catching insects in the air

as well as beetles off the ground. The bird would often hover, more so than expected but wing width and shape were a good giveaway at distance to differentiate from Kestrel.

This same bird was subsequently seen at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire during 24–30 September - identifiable by a distinctive broken tip to an outer primary in its right wing, and regrowing primary in its left wing.

Previous Isle of May records

This represented the third Isle of May record following previous individuals on 5–12 May 1969 (which was caught and ringed) and another on 19 May 1973. However, it appears that only two juveniles have been seen in Scotland previously.

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Plate 357. Red-footed Falcon celebrations, Isle of May, September 2015. © David Steel

Scottish Bird Sightings

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

Dry and warm conditions at the start of July gave way to cool, wet weather mid-month with strong westerly winds, and this persisted into August. September was dominated by a high pressure system over the North Sea which gave favourable winds for the east coast but not the west.

American Wigeon: the female at Rigifa Pool, Cove (NES) in June was seen there again on 14–17 July; an eclipse drake was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 6–7 September; a drake was at Ardnave Loch, Islay (Arg) on 14–22 September; a drake was at Loch of Swartmill, Westray (Ork) on 28 September into October. **Green-winged Teal:** a presumed returning drake was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve on 10–11 July. **Garganey:** scattered records included one at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 10–11 July; four on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22 July; one at Loch of Skene (NES) on 22 August; one was at Vane Farm

RSPB Reserve, Loch Leven (P&K) on 23rd and 25 August; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25–27 August and 14 September; one at Caerlaverock WWT on 30–31 August; one at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 15 September, and one at Forfar Loch (A&D) on 29–30 September. **King Eider:** a drake was again off Nairn (M&N) on 14–21 July, and at Whiteness Head (M&N) on 31 July, and presumed same again at Nairn, in eclipse plumage, on 19–24 September. **Surf Scoter:** a drake was in Lunan Bay (A&D) from 9 July, with two there on 18 July, and a single still on 3 September; a drake was in the Sound of Gigha, near Ballochroy (Arg) on 10–13 July; a first-summer drake was noted intermittently off Blackdog/Murcar (NES) from 11 July to 14 September; a drake was in the Sound of Taransay, off Harris (OH) on 6–15 September, and a drake was off Ferry Ness/Gosford Bay, Lothian from 16 September into October.

Great Shearwater: one flew past Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4 September. **Balearic Shearwater:** singles were off Maidens (Ayr) on 19 July; off Corsewall Point (D&G) on 4 August; off Tarbat Ness (High) on 14 August; flying past Saltcoats on 15th, Troon on 19th and West Kilbride on 22nd (all Ayr); one passed Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 23rd; one passed Corsewall Point on 27th; two flew past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 28th and one past Tarbat Ness (High) on 30 August. One was off the Kenacraig–Port Ellen ferry (Arg) on 3 September; two flew

past Tarbat Ness (High) on 16 September and singles on 19th and 21st, and one was off Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 27 September. **Bittern:** one was at Kinneil Lagoon on 13 September - the third record for Upper Forth; one was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 19–30 September. **Great White Egret:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) 24–29 July; one was near Fort George, (High) on 31 July; one was at Tongue (High) on 11 August; one noted at Loch of Strathbeg again from 17–30 August. **Black Stork:** a French-ringed juvenile (F05P) was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 6–24 August (interestingly its sibling F05R was present in Yorkshire at the same time). **Spoonbill:** two remained at Findhorn Bay (M&N) from June to 31 July.

Honey-buzzard: singles were on Fair Isle on 15 July; at Rendall, Mainland (Ork) on 20 July, on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21st and at Berstane Woods, near Kirkwall (Ork) on 21–24th; one was over Craiglockhart, Edinburgh (Loth) on 29 July; one flew over Ralia Café, near Kingussie (High) on 30 July; one over Kirkton of Logie Buchan (NES) on 8 August; a dark-morph adult was at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 18 August; one flew over Falkland (Fife) on 29 August; one went over the Isle of May on 12 September, and a juvenile flew over Noss (Shet) on 14 September. **'Northern' Harrier:** a male of the North American race of Hen Harrier was on North Ronaldsay from 25 September into November. **Pallid Harrier:**

one was at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 23 August, with one at Durigarth, Mainland on 27th, then two together (a British first) near Hillwell, Mainland on 30 August to 1 September; one or other was at Levenwick on 3 September and Hillwell again on 6–8th and 11 September; one on Fair Isle on 13–21st; two were at Northdale, Unst (Shet) on 13th, with one still there or nearby at Burrarfirth, Unst from 15th into October; one flew over Melby, Mainland (Shet) and Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 22nd; another juvenile was at West Sandwick, Yell (Shet) on 27th, with one at Uyeasound, Unst on 28th, and near Ungirsta, Unst on 29 September. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was at Hallam, near Thurso (Caith) on 26 August.



Plate 358. Long-billed Dowitcher, Swarta Shun, Yell, Shetland, September 2015. © Robbie Brookes

Red-footed Falcon: a juvenile was at Kingsbarns (Fife) on 24 August; a first-summer male at Newtonhill (NES) on 25th; a juvenile was at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen on 31 August and 10–12 September, with a different juvenile on the Isle of May on 14–19 September. **Hobby:** a pair bred in Perth & Kinross; at least 10 scattered records in July from Ayrshire to Shetland including two at Seafield Pond (Loth) on 28th. At least 10 again in August, from Islay and Lothian to Shetland, with late birds at White Sands Quarry (Loth) on 5 September, a juvenile at Kilminning/Fife Ness (Fife) on 24th, and one at Dundee Airport (A&D) on 27 September. **Spotted Crane:** one was heard calling at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 15 and 23 July, and a singing male was at Lower Carbars (Clyde) on 30 July to 1 August. **Crane:** three flew over Laurencekirk (NES) and Montrose Basin (A&D) on 19 September.

Avocet: one was at Bay of Suckquoy, Mainland (Ork) on 17–20 September, then nearby at Inganess/Tankerness on 21–23rd;

one was at Seafield (D&G) on 25 September. **American Golden Plover:** a moulting adult was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14–21 August; an adult was at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 5 September, with a juvenile there on 26–28th, and an adult at Sanday (Ork) on 26–30 September. **Temminck's Stint:** one was seen again at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve (P&K) on 7th and 11 July. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** an adult was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–24 July; one was at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 14–15 August, and an adult was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 15–16 August. **Baird's Sandpiper:** one was at Castlehill, Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 24 August and a juvenile was in Hough Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 29–30 September. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** singles were at Carlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 10–12 July; at An Fhaodhail, Tiree (Arg) on 10 July; at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 19 July, and one near Campbeltown, Kintyre (Arg) on 19–27th, was joined by a second on 27 July. One was near Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 23–29 August; one at Wilderness Gravel Pit,

Ladybank (Fife) on 2 September; one was at Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 4 September; two were at Widewall Bay, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6th; with singles on Fair Isle on 6–7th; at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 13 September; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 23rd; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 26th; on Sanday (Ork) on 28th, and at Balgarva, South Uist on 28–29 September. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** singles were at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 11th and 14 September; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 14th; at Bornish/Ormiclate, South Uist (OH) on 23–29th, and at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 23 September. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** one was at Swarta Shun, near Burraoave, Yell (Shet) on 8–13 September. **Wilson's Phalarope:** a juvenile was on the Monach Isles (OH) on 11 August. **Red-necked Phalarope:** a male was seen on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10–11 July and an adult there on 23rd; one was at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 18 July, and one at Dalsetter, Mainland (Shet) on 23 July. **Grey Phalarope:** singles were at

Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 12 September; off Balivanich, Benbecula (OH) and from the Calmac ferry near Coll (Arg) on 13th, 'at Sea' c.38 miles NNE of Durness on 14th, off Barns Ness (Loth) on 15th; with two seen from the Tiree ferry near Quinish Point, Mull (Arg) on 21st; then singles off Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) and Corsewell Point (D&G) on 24th; off Rubha Ardvule on 25th and 29th, and NNE of Aberdeen from the Shetland ferry on 29 September.

Pomarine Skua: seen in fairly small numbers mostly down the east coast from Shetland to Lothian, but with several from the Outer Hebrides south to Dumfries & Galloway. At least 10 were noted in July with a peak of three adults off Hound Point (Loth) on 27th, and at least 18 in August with peak counts of five between Kinghorn (Fife) and Granton, Edinburgh (Loth) on 19 August, and five off Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 30th. Over 30 in September included several twos and a peak of four adults past Musselburgh (Loth) on 8th. **Long-tailed Skua:** noted in small numbers from Orkney to Lothian and from the Outer Hebrides: one flew south past Lunan Bay (A&D) on 18 July, and one passed Marwick, Mainland (Ork) on 25 July. Just four singles were reported in August, but over 20 in September, including three twos and a peak count of four off Kinghorn (Fife) on 12th.

Sabine's Gull: the Minch between Staffin Bay, Skye (High) and the Shiant Islands (OH) provided sightings of a first-summer on 14 July and 15 August, single adults on 24th, 25th and 27 August, an adult on 9th and 14 September, up to seven birds on 17 September, and a juvenile on 21 September. Elsewhere a first-summer flew over Fair Isle on 31 July; another was seen from the

Uig, Skye to Lochmaddy, North Uist (OH) ferry on 4 August; an adult was at Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 6 August; an adult was off Balemartin, Tiree (Arg) on 9th; a first-summer was at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 10 August; an adult was at Sumburgh Airport, Mainland (Shet) on 20 August; one from the Ullapool (High) to Stornoway, Lewis (OH) ferry on 7 September; a juvenile was off Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) and an adult flew past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 13 September, singles were in the Sound of Harris (OH) and between Mull and Coll (Arg) on 24th; two were off Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 27th, and two juveniles off the Isle of May on 30 September. **Ross's Gull:** an adult was off Brora (High) on 12 September. **Laughing Gull:** a second-summer bird was present at Portnahaven, Islay (Arg) intermittently from June to 21 July. **Mediterranean Gull:** away from the Firth of Forth and Ayrshire hot-spots (see pages 356–358) sightings included: an adult and first-summer at Arbroath (A&D) on 9 July; a second-summer at Meikle Loch (NES) on 14 July; three near Falkirk FC Football Ground (UF) in mid-July; an adult at Lochgilhead (Arg) on 20 July; a first-summer at Carbarns Pool (Clyde) on 25 July; seven adults and seven first-summers at Stranraer (D&G) on 6 August; an adult at Brora (High) on 14–24 September, and one at Huxter, Mainland (Shet) on 29 September. **Ring-billed Gull:** a second-summer was at Lochgilhead (Arg) on 22 July and a first-summer there on 27 July. The returning adult was at Dingwall (High) from 27 August to at least 30 September (first noted in Jan 2004); a second-winter was at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 13 September, and an adult was on Vatersay (OH) on 15–20 September.

Yellow-legged Gull: a juvenile was at Lochgilhead (Arg) on

13–14 August. **Caspian Gull:** a first-summer was again at Lochgilhead (Arg) on 27 July to 8 August (same as in March), and a second-winter was there on 9–21 August. **Iceland Gull:** at least two lingered from June, but still only 10 reported in July from Ayrshire to Orkney - all singles except for two at the Lossie Estuary (M&N) on 12th. In August a second-summer was at Isle of Whithorn (D&G) on 2nd, a juvenile was at Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 3rd, an adult was at Brae of Achnahaird, near Rubha Coigeach (High) on 20th and one was at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 23–30th. A second-summer was at Bay of Skail, Mainland (Ork) on 2 September; one on Fair Isle on 6 September; an adult was at Marwick, Mainland (Ork) on 7th; a juvenile at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 17–29th; a second-winter on South Ronaldsay on 21st; one at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 27th, and a second-winter at Brora (High) on 30 September. **Glaucous Gull:** relatively few, with a couple lingering from June - single juveniles were in Vatersay Bay, Vatersay (OH) on 1 July and at Stratheast, Holm, Mainland (Ork) on 9–21 July; a second-summer was still at Brae of Achnahaird (High) on 11th; a third-summer at Graemeshall, Mainland (Ork) on 11th; a juvenile still at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 13–20 July; a juvenile on the Lossie Estuary (M&N) on 25 July and it, or another, at Hopeman (M&N) on 15 August; one was at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 29 August. The second-summer was still at Achnahaird on 1 September; a second-winter at the Lossie Estuary on 8th and 16 September and nearby at Burghead (M&N) on 17th; an immature was on Vatersay (OH) on 16 September; and one was on Sanday (Ork) on 28 September into October.

Black Tern: singles were on North Ronaldsay on 9 July and 18–26

July; off Earlsall, near Leuchars (Fife) on 1 August, off Tentsmuir Point NNR (Fife) on 16 August; at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 20th; near Stornoway Airport, Lewis (OH) on 21st; a juvenile was at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 22nd; four flew past Pathead, Kirkcaldy (Fife) and one was off Musselburgh (Loth) on 23rd; further singles were at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 25th; west past Anstruther (Fife) and north past Saltcoats (Ayr) on 27th; two juveniles were off Dornoch (High) on 8 September; and singles off Hound Point (Loth) on 12 September; off Brora (High) on 14 September; a juvenile at Dalgety Bay (Fife) on 22–23rd; a juvenile passed Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 29 September. **Turtle Dove:** the decline continues with few reported: singles were at Plockton (High) on 2 July; at Calligary, Isle of Skye (High) on 4–5 July; at Treshnish, Isle of Mull (Arg) on 8 July; near Reston (Bord) on 23 August; near Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 22 September; at Aird Mhor, Barra (OH) on 28–30th; on Sanday (Ork) on 29th, and on Isle of Arran (Ayr) on 30 September. **Chimney Swift:** one was seen in The Minch about three miles from Staffin Bay, Isle of Skye (High) on 23 August. **Bee-eater:** four were on The Oa, Islay (Arg) on 1 July; two flew over Bavelaw Mill Farm (Loth) on 3 July; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18 July and on Sanday (Ork) on 19th; it, or another, was on North Ronaldsay on 12 August; one was heard flying over Stevenston (Ayr) on 15 August; seven were at Veensgarth, Mainland (Shet) on 26–28th, with four still there on 28th; one was at St. Fergus (NES) on 27th and presumed same was at Loch of Stratheg RSPB Reserve and Collieston (both NES) on 29 August. **Hoopoe:** one was at Ardivarsar, Skye (High) on 26–29 August, and one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 4 September. **Wryneck:**

at least 48 in August starting with singles at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) and on Fair Isle on 18th. At least 13 were on Shetland, seven on Fair Isle, 10 on North Ronaldsay including at least six there on 19th, and four others elsewhere on Orkney, eight in NE Scotland, with singles at Kilminning (Fife) on 24th, on the Isle of May on 23rd, at Barns Ness (Loth) on 20th and Torness (Loth) on 23–27th, and at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 24th. Markedly fewer noted in September, with singles on Fair Isle on 12th and 22nd, on North Ronaldsay on 11th, 14th and 16–22nd, and on the Isle of May on 11–12th.

Golden Oriole: a 1st-summer male was at South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 1 July. **Red-backed Shrike:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4–5 July, and a male was on the Isle of May on 28–29 July. In August there were

at least 22 birds on Shetland, around seven on Fair Isle - including three daily on 26–29th, and four on Orkney. Elsewhere there were singles at Noss Head (Caith) on 18 August; at Nigg Bay, Aberdeen (NES) and Castle Douglas (D&G) on 19th; at Balmeddie CP (NES) on 20th and 24th; at Collieston (NES) on 20–22nd; on the Isle of May on 21–22nd and 24th, at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 21–24th; at Corstorphine Hill, Edinburgh (Loth) on 24th, and a juvenile at Knockintorran, North Uist (OH) on 31 August. In September there were around 11 birds on Shetland, singles on Fair Isle on 9th and 12–13th, four on Orkney and one at Boarhills (Fife) on 11th. **Lesser Grey Shrike:** one was at Lunna, Mainland (Shet) on 25 August. **Red-rumped Swallow:** one was noted intermittently at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 2–13 July.



Plate 359. Lesser Grey Shrike, Lunna, Shetland, August 2015. © Hugh Harrop

Greenish Warbler: singles were at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 19–25 August, and on Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19 August; one at Boarhills (Fife) on 23rd; one at Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 24th; with it, or another, at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 25th; one on North Ronaldsay on 28 August, with another there on 3–6 September; one on Sanday (Ork) on 16 September.

Arctic Warbler: one was at Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 19–20 August; one at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 25 August; one at Scousburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 28 August; one on Fair Isle on 8 September; one at Skateraw (Loth) on 11–16 September; one was at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 23–27 September and one at Weisdale, Mainland (Shet) on 30 September.

Yellow-browed Warbler: very large numbers seen, especially on the Northern Isles - the first were singles at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) and Papa Westray (Ork) on 8 September; with well over 360 on Shetland to the end of the month, with peak counts of 22 on Out Skerries on 30th and 13 on Foula on 21st. Fair Isle started with 10 on 9th, building to 53 on 21st and culminated with 76 on 28 September - a British record site count. North Ronaldsay (Ork) had a peak count of 31 on 21st, and seven still there on 22nd, and over 20 were seen elsewhere on Orkney including 10 on Sanday on 29th. One was at St. John's Loch (Caith) on 17th. At least 15 were reported in Highland, including eight at Durness on 24th, with five in NE Scotland, about nine on the Isle of May - including three on 17th, at least four in Lothian and one at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 10th and two there on 11th. On the west side there were at least 11 on the Outer Hebrides including three at Aird Mhor, Barra on 30th, four were on Tiree (Arg) and one at Ballygrant, Islay (Arg)

on 30th. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 14–18 September, and one at Burrafirth, Unst on 15–18 September.

Barred Warbler: first of the autumn was one on Fair Isle on 14 August, with two there on 15th. There were at least 17 on Shetland in August, with a total of about 11 on Fair Isle, peaking at six on 25th, and at least three on North Ronaldsay (Ork), with two present most days from 18–26th. Away from the Northern Isles all August sightings were singles along the east coast between Wick (Caith) and St. Abb's Head (Bord) from 19th to 26th except for two on the Isle of May on 23–24th (with 5+ there overall. In September there were at least 40 on Shetland, up to 13 on Fair Isle including three on 30th, and up to 13 on North Ronaldsay including three on 1st, with singles elsewhere on Orkney at Deerness, Mainland on 24th, on Westray on 26th and on Sanday on 27th. Beyond the Northern Isles there were singles at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 6–7th; at Mire Loch, St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 10th; at Europie, Lewis (OH) on 12th; at Earsairidh, Barra (OH) on 13th; at Cove Bay (NES) on 15th; at Melvich (High) on 25th and at Tarbat Ness (High) on 27th.

Subalpine Warbler: the first-summer male 'Western' was on Fair Isle from 30 June to 3 July; a probable Western female was at Europie, Lewis (OH) on 4–5 September, and a probable 'Eastern' was at Mossbank, Mainland (Shet) on 25–29 September.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler: one was at Isbister, Mainland (Shet) on 11–12 September.

Lanceolated Warbler: one was at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 26 September, and one on Fair Isle on 27th. **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler:** one was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 12–16

September. **Booted Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 19–22 August; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21–22nd and one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 22 August. One was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 9–14 September.

Icterine Warbler: one was on Fair Isle on 21–25 July. In August there were about 15 on Shetland, at least five on Fair Isle, up to seven on North Ronaldsay (Ork), with one on Burray (Ork) on 20th. Away from the Northern Isles one was on the Isle of May on 18 August, with five there on 23rd - a new record day count for the island, with three still on 24th and one on 25th; and singles at Rattray Head (NES) on 19th, at Collieston (NES) on 21st and 24th, at Boarhills (Fife) on 23–24th, at Auchmithie (A&D) and at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 24th, at Fife Ness Muir (Fife) on 25th and at Torness (Loth) on 26th. In September one was still on Fair Isle on 1–4th, one at Skaw, Whalsay on 16th and one at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 25–26th.

Melodious Warbler: one was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 25–27 August.

Aquatic Warbler: one was on Fair Isle on 15–16 August.

Paddyfield Warbler: one was on Noss (Shet) from 22 July to 16 August; one was at Collieston (NES) on 29 August - second for the NES recording area.

Marsh Warbler: singles were on Fair Isle on 15 July and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15 August, with another there on 19 August.

Blyth's Reed Warbler: 11 were on Shetland during 23–30 September, with one on Fair Isle on 20–25 September and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22 September.

Thick-billed Warbler: one was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 24 September.

Nuthatch: one at Glen Shee (P&K/NES) on 26 September was particularly notable. **Rose-coloured Starling:** an adult was on Fair Isle on 2–5 July; an adult

was at Garrabost, Lewis (OH) on 5–8 July, and at South Dell, Lewis on 18–31 July; one was on Fair Isle on 1–4 August; an adult was at Luskentyre, Harris (OH) on 10 August; an adult was at Gairloch Fire Station (Arg) on 15–28 August at least; an early juvenile was at Peterhead (NES) on 16 August; an adult was noted near Machir Bay/Loch Gorm, Islay (Arg) on 18–23 August, and 7th and 16 September; an adult was at Stornoway, Lewis on 27 August to 6 September. **Swainson's Thrush:** one was at Cleatt, Sanday (Ork) on 28 September. **Grey-cheeked Thrush:** one was at Ollaberry, Mainland (Shet) on 28 September. **Thrush Nightingale:** one was on Fair Isle on 19 August. **Bluethroat:** all were on the Northern Isles. On Shetland there were singles at Burravoe, Yell on 22 September; at Walls, Mainland on 25th; at Tumblyn, near Bixter, Mainland on 27–28th; on Out Skerries on 28–29th and at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland on 28th, near Sullom, Mainland on 29th, at Quendale, Mainland on 29–30th and at Durigarth, Mainland on 30 September. Three were on Fair Isle

on 28 September. On Orkney there were singles on Papa Westray on 6 September, on Westray and Stronsay on 28th and on Sanday on 30 September.

Red-flanked Bluetail: one was at Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 22 September.

Red-breasted Flycatcher: one was on the Isle of May on 19 August; singles at Gutcher, Yell (Shet) and Kinneff, near Inverbervie (NES) on 24 August; one at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 31 August; one at Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 10 September; one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 11–16 September; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12th; one on Fair Isle on 18th; one at Skaw, Unst on 20th; one at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 21st; singles on North Ronaldsay on 21st and 24th; two Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 28–30th; one on Foula (Shet) on 28th; one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 29–30th; one at Baltasound, Unst on 30 September; one North Ron on 24th; one at Aird Mhor, Barra (OH) 29–30 September.

Collared Flycatcher: an adult male was at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 21 September.

Yellow Wagtail: the only reports were one over Carbarns Pool (Clyde) on 6 September; one over Irvine (Ayr) and one at Burleigh Sands, Loch Leve (P&K) on 9 September; one on Noss (Shet) on 10th and one near Loch Grogarry, South Uist (OH) on 28th. **Grey-headed Wagtail (*M.f. thunbergi*):** two were on Fair Isle on 19–23 August, one on 25 August, one on 17–18 September, and probable there on 21–22 September. **Blue-headed Wagtail (*M.f. flava*):** one was on the Isle of May on 24 August, and one on Fair Isle on 12 September. **Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*M.f. simillima* ?):** a bird showing characteristics of an eastern subspecies was on Fair Isle on 12–14 September. **Citrine Wagtail:** single first-winters were at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 25–27 August; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 August; on Fair Isle on 1–8 September, with another there on 12th; another on North Ronaldsay on 6–9 September; one was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 17–19 September. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 27–30 September; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 27–29th; at Brough, Whalsay (Shet) on 28th and Pierowall, Westray (Ork) on 28 September. **Olive-backed Pipit:** one was on Fair Isle on 28 September. **Pechora Pipit:** one was at Melby, Mainland (Shet) from 22 September and nearby at Loch of Norby, Mainland on 29 September to 2 October.

Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll: one showing characteristics of this form was at Burravoe, Yell (Shet) on 11 July. **Coues's Arctic Redpoll:** one showing characteristics of this form was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 11 July. **Common Rosefinch:** one was on Fair Isle on 20–21 July and 1 August; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19 August;



Plate 360. Collared Flycatcher, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, September 2015. © Rebecca Nason

two at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 20–21st; singles on Noss (Shet) on 22–23rd; at Burray (Ork) on 22nd; at Gloup, Yell (Shet) on 24th; two on North Ronaldsay on 26th and one on Fair Isle on 31 August. In September there were 15 on Shetland, at least five on Fair Isle, singles on North Ronaldsay on 3–7th and 21st, and one on Sanday (Ork) on 28th. Away from the Northern Isles one was on the Isle of May on 8–10th, with three there on 11th, and one still to 16th, and one at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 11th. **Snow Bunting:** first of the autumn was one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5 September, most were in north and west thereafter with peaks of 111 Fair Isle on 20th; 230 at Butt of Lewis,

Lewis (OH) on 29th, and 760 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29th, with 725 still there on 30 September. Highest count on mainland Scotland was of four at Thorntonloch (Loth) on 7 September. **Lapland Bunting:** first of the autumn was one on Fair Isle on 10 September. Scattered records thereafter with no double figure counts - peaks were four on Fair Isle on 20th and 23rd and six on 27 September, two on Sanday (Ork) on 26th, four on North Ronaldsay on 29th and seven there on 30th, with four at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) also on 30th. **Ortolan Bunting:** one flew over St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 24 August, and one was between Hallival and Askival, Isle of Rum (High) on 7

September. **Rustic Bunting:** one was at Hametoun, Foula (Shet) on 20–23 September and one at Gorie, Bressay (Shet) on 24 September. **Little Bunting:** one was on Fetlar (Shet) on 14 September; two at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 21–22nd; singles were on Out Skerries (Shet) on 22–30th; on Fair Isle on 27–29th, and at Brough, Whalsay on 29–30 September. **Black-headed Bunting:** a female was at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 24 August.

'VisMig'

In addition to the rare and scarce birds seen, a number of significant observations of commoner species occurred in this period. Our thanks to Clive McKay for these items from the Scottish entries on the Trektellen website (www.trektellen.org):

Pink-footed Goose: a count of 3,107 over Glen Isla (A&D) on 25 September coincided with large numbers leaving Iceland on 24th and a big arrival of birds at Aberlady Bay (Loth), while 13,815 flew SW over East Haven (A&D) in four hours on 26 September - the second highest UK migration count on record. **Sparrowhawk:** a total of 21 birds flying E out to sea off the Mull of Galloway (D&G) on 1 October is by far the largest Scottish migration count on record. **Buzzard:** a count of eight flying E off the Mull of Galloway plus 13 others which U-

turned back down the peninsula on 1 October constitutes the largest count from the site. **Skylark:** 1,202 flying E at the Mull of Galloway (D&G) on 30 September is the sixth highest Scottish migration count. **Mistle Thrush:** a total of 82 flying SW at North Queensferry on 25 September is a notable high count for (East) Scotland. **Tree Sparrow:** a total of 89 passing through East Haven (A&D) on 5 September is a notable migration count for (East) Scotland. **Tree Pipit:** a total of 67 birds flying SW at North Queensferry (Fife) on 30 August constitutes a new Scottish record count and was preceded by totals there of 31 on 8 August, 30 on 15th, 38 on 22nd and 25 on 29 August. **Meadow Pipit:** a total of 4,805 birds flying over East Haven (A&D) on 26 September was the highest ever Scottish visible migration count (third highest UK in recent years), while the total of 3,571 heading SW at Mull of Galloway (D&G) in four hours on

30 September was the third highest Scottish count (40th UK). **Siskin:** totals of 92 heading SW at North Queensferry (Fife) on 8 August; 197 SW in three hours at East Haven (A&D) on 6 September and 76 heading SW in 35 minutes at Inverkeithing (Fife) on 18 September were all high counts for the respective dates suggesting an early emigration of birds from breeding areas. **Linnet:** a total of 979 heading E at Mull of Galloway (D&G) on 30 September is the third highest Scottish migration count. **Lesser Redpoll:** a total of 555 heading SW in a four hour count at East Haven (A&D) on 26 September constitutes a record UK visible migration count, and followed a total of 167 there on 19 September.

Another remarkable event involved **Swifts**, with an unprecedented movement through Orkney in August of well over 2,000 birds including a peak count of 700 heading E past Skipi Geo, Birsay on 22nd.

Scottish Birds

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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.

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A large flock of Knot birds flying over the sea at Nairn Harbour. The birds are seen from below, creating a dense pattern of wings and heads against the blue sky and water. The birds have light-colored bodies and dark wings, and they appear to be in various stages of flight, some with wings spread wide and others with wings tucked.

PhotoSP©T

Plate 361. They say with bird watching and bird photography that you need a bit of luck to be in the right place at the right time. Well, it has taken me eight years of sitting at the end of the pier at Nairn Harbour, binoculars in one hand and camera in the other in the chilly, often biting winter wind, to get that bit of luck!

The sandbars in the Moray Firth at Nairn are favoured by the Knot in winter, often present in their thousands, moving in and out with the tide flow. I have many hundreds of photos of them, each time trying to capture them flying directly towards me rather than across the lens. My wife can take some credit for this photo, as she allowed me to indulge myself with the new Canon 7D mk2 for Christmas, which helped me track them as they flitted from side to side.

Equipment used: Canon 7D mkII, Canon EF300mm f4 L lens, ISO 1250, shutter 1/2000, aperture f4.

Seamus McArdle, Nairn. Email: seamusmcardle491@btinternet.com

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