



# Scottish Birds

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# Scottish Birds

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Email: [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk)  
Phone: 01875 871330  
[www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub](https://www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub)  
[twitter.com/ScottishBirding](https://twitter.com/ScottishBirding)

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*Co-ordinating editor:*  
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*Peer-reviewed papers:*

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Dr W.T.S. Miles

R. Swann

*Articles, news and views:*

Jimmy Maxwell

Dr Stuart L. Rivers

Harry Scott

## Editorial correspondence:

c/o SOC, Waterston House,  
Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.  
Email: [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk)

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

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish 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 1. Ian Thomson, Rutland Bird Fair, August 2015. © Dave Allan

As many of you will know, this year marks the Club's 80th birthday. This is perhaps a good time to be looking back at the SOC's history, to remember the huge contribution folk who may no longer be with us have made to the Club, and to reflect on the significant role the SOC has had in the study and recording of Scotland's fabulous birdlife. We should be very proud!

I think, however, more important is a need to look forward, rather than backwards, but always heed how we got here. The SOC is in a good place; our membership is increasing, albeit slowly; our finances are in good order; our conferences are popular; our headquarters are well used; and our events are well attended.

But, this is a good time to take stock and ask what we could do better? Is Scotland's Bird Club fit for the 21st Century? In order to answer this huge question, over the coming months Council will be starting a strategic review of where we are and where we want to go, looking at all aspects of the Club - governance, finances, branches, membership and many other issues. Where we want to get to is to produce an operational plan for the Club. As part of this process, we'll be looking for members' opinions - please keep an eye on the website or future editions of *Scottish Birds* to find out how you can contribute to this important process.

The beginning of a new year is always something I look forward to as a birder. A new year means a new year list! My 2016 started quite interestingly - lots of Little Auks in the Forth, following a prolonged spell of easterly gales, but also unseasonable Bonxies and a Sandwich Tern. I've also managed to see Tundra Bean Geese and Great Grey Shrike in East Lothian, had fabulous views of Willow Tits in Galloway, and good views of a female Smew at Lochore Meadows. It was also nice to see the Ring-necked Duck, found by folk attending our autumn conference, is still thriving in Pitlochry!

Talking of conferences, we will be holding our annual get-together in Pitlochry again this year, but for various reasons, a few weeks earlier than usual. Our theme this year will be Scotland's seas. All in all, I think 2016 is going to be an interesting year!

Ian Thomson, SOC President





Plate 2. Guillemots on the Isle of May, 21 October 1982 showing a range of plumages from full winter (extreme left) to almost full summer (extreme right). © Mike Harris.

## The use of webcams to monitor the prolonged autumn attendance of Guillemots on the Isle of May in 2015

M.P. Harris & S. Wanless

*Although Guillemots at the southern edge of the range are known to return to the colonies in autumn, usually only opportunistic observations of this behaviour are available. In the autumn of 2015 we took advantage of the live interactive cameras on the Isle of May, Fife to make systematic checks of Guillemot colony attendance. Birds were recorded at dawn on 59 consecutive mornings between 23 October and 20 December after which webcam images ceased due to lack of power on the island. This prolonged period of attendance covered several periods of stormy weather and appears unprecedented at this colony. Presumably local feeding conditions must have been extremely favourable to enable the birds to spend so much time ashore.*

### Introduction

Individuals of many species of pelagic seabird spend a relatively small proportion of the year at the breeding colony and are often said to 'only visit land to breed'. The Guillemot *Uria aalge* is therefore unusual in having a very variable pattern of colony attendance. Whereas in most populations Guillemots do not return to the breeding ledges until March or April, at the extreme southern end of the range in both the east Atlantic and east Pacific, birds start to come back to the colonies from October onwards (Taylor & Reid 1981, Mudge *et al.* 1987, Boekelheide *et al.* 1990). Indeed the earliest individuals return immediately after they have completed the main moult of the year, during which they are flightless, and are in full winter plumage with white faces and throats (Plates 2–4) (Harris & Wanless 1990a).

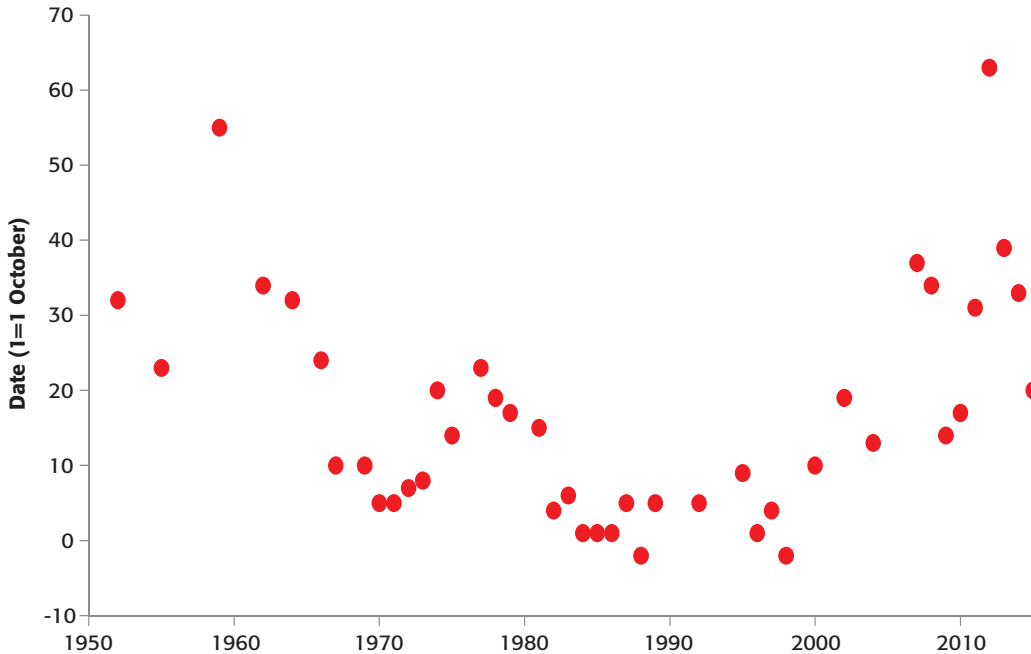


Figure 1. The dates that Guillemots were first recorded ashore on the Isle of May, 1952–2015. Data are from Taylor & Reid (1981), Harris *et al.* (2006) and personal records.

From the 1960s to the 1990s Guillemots returned to the Isle of May National Nature Reserve, Fife progressively earlier such that arrival dates advanced from early November to the late September or early October (Figure 1). However, since around 2000 this trend has been reversed so that in recent years return dates have again been in early November (Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) personal communication). During the 1980s, birds were sometimes present for many days in October but later in the autumn and in the middle of winter attendance became erratic with birds often absent for several weeks (personal observations). However, it was clear that levels of attendance at the Isle of May and other colonies in eastern Scotland varied considerably between years (Harris 1984, Mudge *et al.* 1987). Attendance also showed a clear daily pattern with birds starting to come ashore just prior to dawn and numbers peaking soon after. The time that the ledges were occupied each day varied greatly from less than an hour to 3–4 hours and generally attendance time was positively correlated with the number of birds ashore. Observations of colour-ringed individuals indicated that the birds were adults attending sites where they had bred the previous summer and that the most frequently occupied sites were those where birds had successfully reared a chick and those with many neighbours (Harris & Wanless 1989, 1990b). Thus autumn attendance appeared to be due to competition for the best breeding sites and/or birds returning to maintain their pair bond (Plate 3).

All these observations were made by observers present on the Isle of May for research on the seabirds or seals, or visitors to the Isle of May Bird Observatory. However, the advent of new technology has meant that it is now possible to monitor autumn attendance from the mainland.

## Methods

The Scottish Seabird Centre, North Berwick, has live interactive cameras positioned at Pilgrim's Haven on the Isle of May that are linked to the internet ([www.seabird.org/wildlife/webcams/isle-of-may-cliff/](http://www.seabird.org/wildlife/webcams/isle-of-may-cliff/)). In spring and summer the cameras are mainly trained on Shags *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* and Puffins *Fratercula arctica* while in the autumn and winter the main interest is the

Grey Seals *Halichoerus grypus* and their pups. However, one camera includes views of two sections of the Guillemot colony and staff at the Scottish Seabird Centre arranged for these to be monitored from first light until well into the day during autumn 2015. The images were refreshed every few minutes and this allowed us to check if Guillemots were ashore each morning from 16 October until 20 December.

A Guillemot in non-breeding plumage has a white throat and sides of the head which together with its white underparts makes it stand out against the dark cliffs even in very poor light. These features are particularly evident in the autumn when Guillemots are far less 'relaxed' than they are in the summer with the result that they spend a considerable amount of time facing outwards (Plates 2, 4 & 5). Although the quality of some of the images downloaded from the internet was poor, they were still adequate to identify when birds were ashore. Thus each morning from well before dawn we checked the website every 15–20 minutes and saved the images. We later counted the birds visible in the main area just to the north of Pilgrim's Haven (Plate 4) using Paint Shop Pro software. The counts of individual birds on the images were probably underestimates since individuals facing towards the cliffs and those in dense groups may have been overlooked but we considered that the counts were adequate to provide a reliable index of the numbers present. In 2014, some 200–400 pairs breed in this view. The other view showed just the edge of a breeding group of c. 100 pairs and was used to determine when birds were present when there were problems with the images of the main area.

Checks were made throughout the day to determine when the birds finally departed. Although the camera and the system for transmitting signals to the Scottish Seabird Centre are very robust, winter conditions can cause problems. Thus, during autumn 2015 occasional power and equipment failures resulted in a few breaks in transmission, spray from gale-driven waves reduced the clarity



**Plate 3.** Guillemots in winter plumage mating at a nest-site on the Isle of May, 21 October 1982. © Mike Harris





Plate 4. Guillemots ashore in the area monitored by the Scottish Seabird Centre's webcam at 06:55 hr on 29 October 2015. © Maggie Sheddán.



Plate 5. Guillemots still ashore on the Isle of May at 08:10 hr on 31 October 2015. © Maggie Sheddán.



Plate 6. Guillemots at the secondary monitoring site as seen via the webcam on the Isle of May at 10:00 hr on 8 December 2015. © Scottish Seabird Centre.

of the images and on a few days thick haar prevented anything being seen. Fortunately, staff from the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and visitors to the Isle of May Bird Observatory were on the island when these problems occurred and were able to check if Guillemots were ashore. However, on these occasions we could not obtain an index of the numbers present nor an estimate of when the birds departed. Observations ceased on 20 December when the power supply on the island failed and there was nobody present to make direct observations.

Hourly meteorological data for Leuchars, 30 km from the Isle of May (downloaded from [www.ogimet.com/gsocd.phtml.en](http://www.ogimet.com/gsocd.phtml.en)) were used to calculate the mean daily wind speed for the day of each observation and the previous day.

## Results and Discussion

Guillemots were first recorded ashore on the Isle of May in autumn 2015 on 20 October when three individuals were visible via the camera at 06:30 GMT. Numbers peaked at 10 individuals at 06:35 but the ledges were empty by 06:42, 11 minutes before official sunrise at Edinburgh, 30 km to the west of the Isle of May. We cannot discount the possibility that a few birds had been ashore on the Isle of May before this date but none was reported by observers present on the island. On 21 October five birds were present at 06:30 and these remained until 07:45. The following day was stormy with driving rain, rough seas and local wind speeds reached 82 km/hr. Viewing conditions were therefore extremely difficult, but no birds appeared to be ashore. However, birds were definitely present the following day and the colony was occupied every day until 20 December when the camera ceased to function (Figure 2). Comparing the frequency of Guillemot attendance in autumn 2015

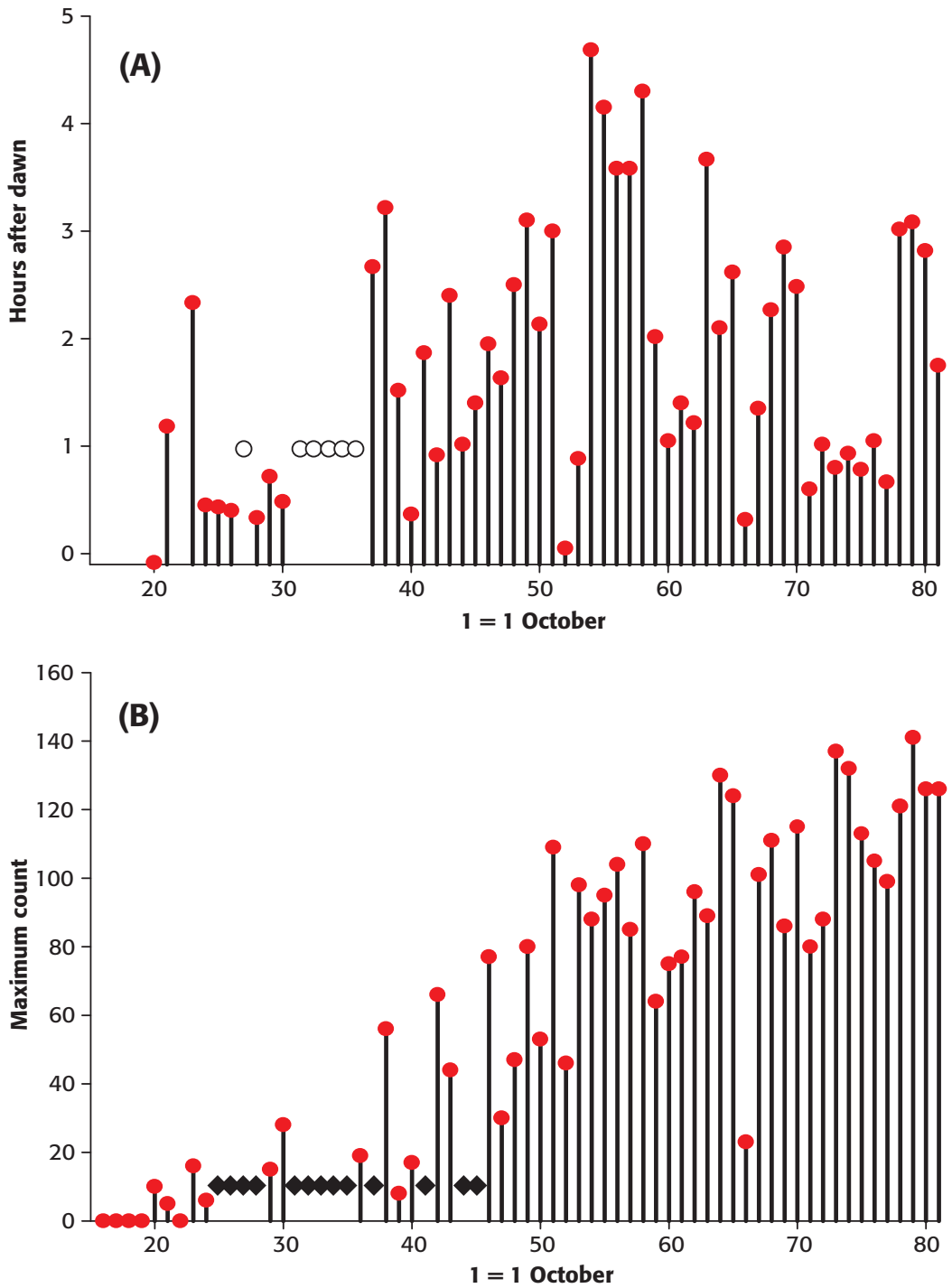


Figure 2. Guillemot attendance on the Isle of May in autumn 2015 as monitored by the Scottish Seabird Centre's webcams. (a) The length of time after dawn that birds were present on the ledges; open circles indicate days when departure times were not known. (b) Maximum counts of birds in the field of view of one camera; diamonds indicate days when birds were present but not counted.

with other records indicates that the presence of birds on 59 consecutive mornings is unprecedented. Staff from SMRU are usually present on the Isle of May throughout November. Their opportunistic records indicate that overall Guillemots were ashore on 19 of 57 (33.3%) of early morning checks in November in 1995, 2008 and 2011. In 1981–83, we deployed time-lapse cameras at the Guillemot colony at Fowlsheugh (85 km north of the Isle of May) and recorded birds ashore on 16 of 72 (22%) of days in November.

Data from the webcam indicated that the more Guillemots that were ashore, the later in the day they remained on the ledges. Thus by the last week in November when over 100 birds were present in the area covered by the camera, birds were sometimes ashore for almost four hours. The time spent ashore then declined somewhat but overall there was a highly significant positive correlation between the maximum number of Guillemots counted in a day and the length of time birds were ashore ( $r = 0.38$ ,  $P = 0.008$ ,  $n = 47$  days). The relationship was apparent despite the fact that in some instances Guillemot numbers suddenly declined and a Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* or Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus* could be seen standing in the area. In other cases where birds stayed for much shorter periods than anticipated, they could well have been disturbed by researchers or birdwatchers or by fishing boats close in under the cliffs. Using hide-based observations in the 1980s we had previously found a similar positive correlation between maximum numbers and length of time ashore when attendance levels were lower.

A previous study in Caithness in the 1980s suggested that periods of attendance in autumn always started when wind speed was low or declining (Mudge *et al.* 1987). However, conditions on the Isle of May in autumn 2015 were not unusually calm, indeed on the day prior to Guillemots starting to come ashore every day, local wind speeds reached 82 km/hr. Furthermore, during the sustained period of attendance there was no significant correlation between the maximum count and either mean wind speed on the current or previous day ( $r = -0.15$ ,  $P = 0.43$ , and  $r = 0.093$ ,  $P = 0.62$ , respectively,  $n = 62$ ). Similarly, data from Fowlsheugh over the 1980/81 winter found no evidence of a direct link with weather (Harris 1984).

Favourable local feeding conditions have also been suggested to be associated with autumn attendance. Thus in California, in years when food availability was high or average Guillemots returned to the cliffs in October whereas when feeding conditions were less good and/or winters were especially stormy as a result of El Niño, arrival was delayed until the spring (Boekelheide *et al.* 1990, Ainley *et al.* 2002). We have no information on feeding conditions for Guillemots around the Isle of May in autumn 2015 but the birds' behaviour suggests that they must have had access to a plentiful supply of food within commuting distance of the colony to enable them to visit their breeding sites when foraging time was limited due to relatively short days.

The Scottish Seabird Centre webcam did not allow us to follow individual birds to determine what factors influenced individual-level attendance because none of the birds in the viewing area were colour-ringed and in any case the quality of images would not have been good enough to facilitate this. However, breeding success of Guillemots on the Isle of May in 2015 (0.79 chicks fledged per pair laying) was very similar to the mean value for 1982–87 ( $0.78 \pm \text{SE } 0.01$ ) when hide-based observations indicated that the sites which were occupied most frequently were those where breeding success was higher (Harris & Wanless 1989).

Data from the webcam therefore indicated that Guillemots on the Isle of May in autumn 2015 returned when we expected but the frequency of colony attendance was the highest recorded at this colony, or indeed at any other colony in Scotland. Breeding success in 2015 was not exceptionally high nor were autumn weather conditions exceptionally benign, so the most likely reason why Guillemots were ashore so much is that local feeding conditions must have been extremely favourable.



Webcams are increasingly being used to record biological data and our observations highlight their potential to record colony attendance outside the breeding season. Although our interest was initially simple curiosity, plans for offshore wind and tidal energy generation mean that how much time pelagic seabirds spend close to the colony is highly relevant to marine spatial planning.

### Acknowledgements

We thank Alexander Turnbull, Nigel Ward, Claudia Gehrig and Caroline Vevers at the Scottish Seabird Centre for their help and perseverance in keeping the webcams functioning, David Steel (SNH), Mick Marquiss and Maggie Sheddan for reporting on the attendance of Guillemots when there were problems with the cameras and Simon Moss, Paula Redman and other members of SMRU for checking the colonies in previous years. Norman Elkins extracted and interpreted the relevant wind data.

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**Mike P. Harris & Sarah Wanless, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Bush Estate, Penicuik, Midlothian EH26 0QB**

Email: [mph@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:mph@ceh.ac.uk)

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## Do adult Golden Eagles teach their offspring to hunt?

On the morning of 15 August 2015 I was checking on the progress of a nesting pair of Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* as part of a monitoring programme in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. My observation point was on a hillside c. 500 m from the nest site in a small corrie.

I had just located a fledged juvenile Golden Eagle sitting on a small crag c. 80 m from the nest, when a female Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* began to mob the young eagle. The Kestrel repeatedly dived at the young eagle, which ducked several times but remained in situ. Then both adult Golden Eagles appeared and chased the Kestrel away from the juvenile eagle and into the middle of the corrie. During the next three minutes both adult eagles lunged at, chased and seemed to corral the Kestrel to retain it within the corrie and in front of the watching juvenile eagle. After approximately another minute, the flying adults began to call, and the juvenile eagle then flew towards the Kestrel and began to dive at and try to catch it. The adult eagles also continued to stoop at the Kestrel forcing it to twist and turn numerous times and remain within the corrie. The young eagle chased and missed the Kestrel on 3–4 occasions, before it seemed to get tired or lose interest and settled back on a different small crag. The observation ended when the distressed Kestrel disappeared over a rise at the edge of the corrie with both adult eagles c. 5 m behind it in a strong swoop. Hence, the final outcome of this chase was unknown.

Watson (2010) reported that for the first few weeks after fledging, young Golden Eagles generally stay within about 100 m of the nest and usually wait for food to be brought to them by the adults, and during these early weeks young eagles make only occasional and short flights. Alonso *et al.* (1987) describe the behaviour of five broods of Spanish Imperial Eagles *Aquila adalberti* in Doñana National Park, south-west Spain during the period of post-fledging

dependency. The young radio-tagged Spanish Imperial Eagles were not seen hunting, but depended on their parents for food and begged and chased their parents throughout the post-fledging period.

Juvenile Golden Eagles in Cumbria have been recorded hunting large prey 59 days after fledging (Walker 1987) and in Israel have been recorded making first hunting attempts 68 days after fledging (Bahat 1992). My colleagues had visited the nesting corrie two weeks prior to these observations and the single juvenile eagle was still within the nest on 30 July 2015. Thus, these first tentative and unsuccessful hunting attempts were made within two weeks of fledging, considerably earlier than reported by Walker and Bahat. In North Dakota, O'Toole *et al.* (1999) investigated the post-fledging behaviour of 28 radio-tagged Golden Eagles and recorded 11 attempts of prey capture by juveniles. Two of the observed attempts were successful; the prey items were an unidentified snake and a rodent. Unfortunately, O'Toole *et al.* did not report on the age of the young birds when hunting nor of any interactions between adult eagles and fledged juveniles hunting.

It seems that observations of when fledged Golden Eagles begin to hunt and interactions between adult Golden Eagles and juveniles are scarcely recorded. There appear to be no published observations of adult Golden Eagles teaching fledged young to hunt. It could be said that the sequence of behaviours recorded on 15 August 2015 are consistent with that idea, but it is not possible to establish 'intention' from these observations. Much of the recent published information on fledging Golden Eagles is based on satellite or radio telemetry led data collection, often with little ground checking of what the birds were actually doing. Perhaps other Golden Eagle workers have recorded similar developmental behaviour, or more direct observations could expand on this crucial stage in eagles' lives?

### Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Stuart Rae for scanning his notebooks looking for similar observations, reviewing an earlier draft of the text and for alerting me to a couple of references I may otherwise have missed.

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**Peter Cosgrove, Alba Ecology Ltd, Coilindra House, High Street, Grantown on Spey, Moray PH26 3EN.**

Email: [petercosgrove@albaecology.co.uk](mailto:petercosgrove@albaecology.co.uk)

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Plate 7. Red-backed Shrike (adult male), Aberdeenshire, 24 July 2015. © Ian Francis. This photograph was taken under licence.

## Red-backed Shrikes breeding in North-east Scotland in 2015

On 20 July 2015, DT and her husband were walking in a woodland area in central North-east Scotland and saw a bird fly onto a dead tree branch, followed by two juveniles. The initial impression of the adult was that it resembled superficially a male Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, but it was soon apparent it had a reddish back. The birds carried on flitting from branch to branch and sitting on plastic tree protectors. On returning home, reference to field guides did not resolve the identity of the birds. Two days later, a further visit revealed a male, a female and again apparently two juveniles. This time, photographs were taken which, when compared with books, showed that the birds were certainly Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio*. The information was passed to IF, who visited the site on 24 July and found a pair of shrikes around 200 m from the initial location, which were feeding three recently-fledged juveniles. The site was not visited again until 3 August, when DT noted that at least two juvenile birds were still present. They were not seen on any visit after that. Plates 10 to 15 illustrate both adults and the three fledged juveniles.

### Site details

The growth stage and behaviour of the juveniles suggested that they must have nested close to the area where they were seen on all visits. The habitat used by the shrike family (considering a wide area of around 400 x 400 m covering all sightings) consisted of clear-felled plantation on north-facing, well-drained sloping ground in a former high forest area (Plate 16). The clear-felling probably took place some 3–4 years previously and the terrain was open with frequent felled stumps and dead brash, supplemented with planted trees - principally Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis* and a range of broadleaves in tree protectors including birch *Betula* sp. and Elder *Sambucus nigra*. The ground vegetation was rank, rough and varied, and dominated by tall grasses such as *Deschampsia flexuosa*, *Agrostis* spp. and in places *D. cespitosa*, with many patches of scattered Raspberry *Rubus idaeus* and Gorse *Ulex europaeus*. Other tall herb vegetation included scattered Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*, Nettle *Urtica dioica*, Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium* and clumps of ferns.



Plates 8–12. Red-backed Shrikes, Aberdeenshire, 24 July 2015. © *Ian Francis*. (2) adult female, (3) female feeding fledgling, (4–6) fledged juveniles 1, 2 and 3. All these photographs were taken under licence.





**Plate 13.** Red-backed Shrike breeding area showing general habitat and favoured feeding area; the breeding site will be nearby based on age of fledglings, Aberdeenshire, 24 July 2015. © Ian Francis.

#### Other recent Scottish breeding records

Prior to 2015, there have been 18 other instances of confirmed breeding in Scotland, all since 1977, the most recent ones being in Moray in 2013 (Cook 2015) and in Highland in 2014, with a pair also nesting successfully in Shetland in 2015 (M. Holling, Rare Breeding Birds Panel, pers. comm.). Between 2010 and 2013, 1–2 pairs bred in England (RBBP; Davies & Lock 2016). The reporting of two confirmed breeding pairs of Red-backed Shrikes in Scotland in 2015 is the first time since 1977 that more than one pair annually has been proved to breed in Scotland (RBBP - see [www.rbbp.org.uk](http://www.rbbp.org.uk)).

#### References

- Cook, M. 2015. Red-backed Shrikes breeding in Moray in 2013. *Scottish Birds* 35: 30–31.
- Davies, M. & Lock, L. 2016. Return of the butcher bird? Prospects for recolonisation of the Red-backed Shrike in the UK and priorities for conservation. *British Birds* 109: 8–20.

**Donna Taylor & Ian Francis, RSPB Scotland,  
10 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB10 1YP.**

Email [ian.francis@rspb.org.uk](mailto:ian.francis@rspb.org.uk)

*Revised ms accepted January 2016*



# Letters to the Editors

## Tree-nesting Common Gulls

To the Editor, I was interested to read Anke Addy's note on a Common Gull nest on Donside (*Scottish Birds* 35: 322). Tree-nesting (in birches) in Aberdeenshire was mentioned by Baxter & Rintoul (*The Birds of Scotland* 1953, p. 642), and while such events are clearly unusual, I wonder if they might occur more often than we think. I say this because I saw two or three nests in birches along Loch Lomondside on a number of occasions between the 1960s and, at least, the early 1980s. To my shame, I made no notes on these observations, beyond the rather unhelpful comment in May 1983 that I saw "the usual tree nests beside the road." If nothing else, this illustrates the value to future observers of taking the trouble to note down interesting observations - but perhaps others can add to the story.

**Mike Everett, 7 Burlington Way, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon PE18 9BS.**

Email: [mikej.everett@icloud.com](mailto:mikej.everett@icloud.com)

## Red Grouse on small islands

To the Editor, I read with interest the note by Gillian Howie on the Red Grouse on the Isle of May (*Scottish Birds* 35(2): 186-187). It was an unexpected and unlikely visitor to an island some 7 km from the nearest land and much more than that from the nearest breeding area. However, Red Grouse on other small islands are not unknown. In winter 1915, Jimmy Girvan,

then tenant of Ailsa Craig, shot a Red Grouse on the island (Gibson 1951). Clearly it had come from the mainland or perhaps Arran, both in excess of 15 km away. Ailsa Craig has a fairly extensive patch of heather on the east side of the island (Plate 17), but since most of it is almost vertical, I should think it would not be conducive to breeding Red Grouse; so purely a visitor. There have been no records since then.

Another rather old and odd record is of a Red Grouse amongst gulls and terns on Sgat Mòr at the mouth of Loch Fyne, Argyll (Paterson & Renwick 1899). This very small, flat islet is barely a few kilometres offshore, but a Red Grouse was flushed from it, amongst nesting gulls and terns, on 6 June 1899, and promptly flew to the nearby mainland.

## References

Gibson, J.A. 1951. The breeding distribution, population and history of the birds of Ailsa Craig (3. The non-breeding species). *Scottish Naturalist* 63(2): 159-177.

Paterson, J. & Renwick, J. 1899. Narrative of a Cruise in Loch Fyne, June, 1899. *Transactions of the Natural History Society of Glasgow* 5(3): 366-378.

**Bernie Zonfrillo, Graham Kerr (Zoology) Building, Glasgow University, Glasgow G12 8QQ.**

Email: [b.zonfrillo@bio.gla.ac.uk](mailto:b.zonfrillo@bio.gla.ac.uk)



Plate 14. Potential Red Grouse habitat on Ailsa Craig, Clyde Islands, August 2015. © B. Zonfrillo

# Obituaries

## Maimie Nethersole-Thompson (1930–2015)

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Maimie was an important figure in Scottish ornithology, not just for being one of the relatively few published female authors, but for her unstinting support of Desmond Nethersole-Thompson.

Born and brought up Inverness, Mary Ferguson Ross (always known as Maimie) had a warm and happy childhood. Her father worked in the fire service while her mother was at home seeing to the family. She was the youngest in the family and was close to her two brothers, Ken and Sonny, and sister Joey (all deceased). She frequently got into trouble for playing in the grounds of the large, red sandstone castle (now housing Inverness Sherriff Court), and fondly recounted many family trips in the family's prized car, venturing as far as London - quite an experience in the 1930s.

She enjoyed school, worked hard and would have gone to university had that been possible. Instead she left school at 15 and went to commercial college before entering work for her uncle, who owned Cummings Hotel in Inverness.

She met Desmond whilst working at the hotel. Desmond stayed there regularly whilst campaigning, unsuccessfully, as the prospective Labour candidate in 1955 for the geographically scattered Westminster seat of Inverness. They moved first to a small house near Rogart in east Sutherland and then a short distance to Culrain, near Bonar Bridge. They had six children (three of them active in ornithology and conservation), marrying in 1977 and remaining together until Desmond died in 1989 (Obituary by Adam Watson: *Scottish Birds*, 1989, 15(3): 138–141).

Maimie was named co-author of two books: *Greenshanks* (1979) and *Waders: their breeding, haunts and watchers* (1986), both published in the Poyser series. In fact, she

helped write all but two of Desmond's nine books. She wrote the Foreword to *In Search of Breeding Birds* (1992), a collection of Desmond's early papers in *The Oologists' Records*, and gave one of her few lectures at the SOC conference in North Berwick in 1987.

Maimie led the logistics of the annual field expeditions by the Nethersole-Thompson family, accommodated for several years in bothies near Ben Armine, Ben Loyal and Arkle, and from 1964 in an isolated, tiny hut in Strath Dionard, which they last occupied together in 1982. These trips were remarkable for the endeavour of the fieldwork and contributions to ornithology but also for family life in unique circumstances. During expeditions, Maimie saw to her children's primary schooling so effectively that four of them went on to take PhDs, and to all camp administration, cooking, and recording of field notes (in impeccable Pitman's Shorthand), as well as contributing to arduous fieldwork.

Desmond and Maimie were regularly visited by birdwatchers, conservationists and research scientists who enjoyed discussing their work. The visits continued until Maimie's last days. She corresponded across the world with ornithologists, and frequently dealt with queries regarding Desmond's unpublished field notes, and the local birdlife. She enjoyed working with Adam Watson on the former population of Corn Buntings in Easter Ross (*Scottish Birds*, 1999, 20(1): 34), and his research on changes in bird populations in Speyside and other parts of the Cairngorms. Outings with Adam were referred to as "Adamventures" as they invariably involved visits to meet great characters, such as the ex-Gualin keeper Bob Macleod - to record his unique knowledge of north Sutherland place names and local Gaelic dialects - or places important for lichens, birds, soils or as examples of poor land management.



Plate 15. Maimie Nethersole-Thompson enjoying Paris, September 2014. © Maimie Thompson

Maimie supported Highland field studies by her sons and their friends and colleagues, and was a strong advocate for all things good about the county of Sutherland. Her many interests included politics (she was a fervent supporter of Old Labour, but most trenchantly argued that the political vote should be compulsory, as a hard-won democratic right), education (she was a champion of education in all its guises, and a passionate advocate of comprehensive schools), nature conservation (regularly giving vent to perceived shortcomings in the conservation agencies) and Paris. Derek Ratcliffe referred to her having a 'rasping intellect', and many people enjoyed lively conversations with her. She was a prodigious reader and correspondent, and formidably knowledgeable on world affairs.

Above all, she was respected as a confidant and loyal friend, and a fun-loving and family person. Her health was excellent until just months before she passed away, peacefully, at home in Culrain. She is survived by daughters Maimie and Katharine, sons Des, Pat and Eamonn, eight grandchildren and two great grandchildren. The dark cloud over her life was the death of son Richard who died following a car accident in 1982. She is remembered with great affection and respect, and leaves a hole in many lives.

**Compiled by her family and friends**



# NEWS AND NOTICES

## New members

**Ayrshire:** Miss A. Evans, **Borders:** Ms B. Cumming, Mr J. Douglas, Miss H. Murray, Mr A. Robertson, **Caithness:** Miss L. Kay, Dr K. Willis & Mr P. Gillibrand, **Central Scotland:** Mr G. Johnston, **Clyde:** Mrs A. Armstrong, Mrs M. Dillet, Dr & Mrs P. Duffty, Mr J. Dunlop, Mr & Mrs J. Farish-Brown, Mr & Mrs J. Haigh, Mr A. Kennedy, Dr P. McGill, Mr B. McGowan, Ms J. Miller, Mr P. Nunn, Mr R. Orr, Mr A. Russell, Miss J. Young, **Dumfries:** Mr A. Fleming Smith, Mr K. Haddow, **England, Wales & NI:** Ms D. Batchelor & Mr M. Hawkins, Mr D.G. Bell, Rev G. Booth, Mr B. Dickie, Mr M. Flavell, Mr R. Scott, Mr D. Steel, **Fife:** Mr C. Burton, Mr C. Park, **Highland:** Mrs L. Borthwick, Mr & Mrs S. Borthwick, Dr C. Davis, **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs S. Benson, Ms M. Beynon-Jones, Mr M.J.A. Black, Mr & Mrs M. Brook, Mr & Mrs D. Calder, Miss N. Cozzolino, Ms S. Davidson, Mr H. Davies, Mr D. Emsley, Ms D. Finlay, Mr & Mrs P. Flockhart, Mrs H. Fraser, Miss M. Grieve, Ms C. Hall, Miss P. Hodson & Mr T. Gibbons, Mrs C. Hunter, Ms D. Lothian, Mr D. Main, Mr A. McDonald, Mrs M. McLeish, Mr J. Napier, Mr A. Taylor, Ms F. Thomson, Mr & Mrs A. Weatherhead, Mr R. Williamson, Mr & Mrs M. Williamson, **Moray:** Ms C. James & Mr J. Scrimgeour, Mr I. Noble, **North-East Scotland:** Mr & Mrs F. Buckley, Mr & Mrs G. Davidson, Mrs M. Emslie, **Stewartry:** Mrs M. Welsh, **West Galloway:** Mrs G. Deacon.

## 200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **November:** 1st £150 David Merrie, 2nd £75 Alan Sidaway, 3rd £50 W. Scott, 4th £30 Miss J. Howie, 5th £20 Dr Oddington. **December:** 1st £30 Roger Evans, 2nd £20 Mrs M. Gregory, 3rd £10 S.S. Jackson. **January:** 1st £30 Dr Cullen, 2nd £20 Mrs V. Wells, 3rd £10 A. McNee.

The 200 Club was set up in 1989 by long standing SOC member Daphne Peirse-Duncombe with the aim of raising funds for equipping and furnishing the Club's headquarters. The 200 Club is a private lottery and is open to all members aged over 18 to join, with a membership fee of £12 payable each June. Members of the scheme are

entered into monthly draws run throughout the year for 40 cash prizes. Membership income is split 50:50 between the prize money and SOC funds for Waterston House. Since it was started, the scheme has raised over £30,000 for the Club and in 2015, funds were used to purchase a document scanner, a replacement fridge, a nest cam for HQ's visiting Swallows, an office laptop, a coin counter (for cashing up) and a new and improved pump system for the pond waterfall feature.

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

## Waterston House

### Art exhibitions

- Jane Smith, Saturday 20 February to Wednesday 6 April
- Greg Poole & John Threlfall, Saturday 9 April to Wednesday 25 May
- Richard Allen & Jan Wilczur, Saturday 28 May to Wednesday 20 July



Plate 16. Heron and reeds (relief print). © Greg Poole.



Plate 17. Kilspindie. © John Threlfall.

### Words and wings - nature writing workshop with Anna Levin and Alison Lock

Thursday 12 May 2016, 10 am–4 pm, £60 (£50 members). Booking essential.

A one day workshop using creative writing to explore our relationship with the natural world. The group will be reflecting on experiences from our own lives and 'sketching with words' as we look outside, harnessing the power of awareness to take us beyond our diaries and field notes. No experience of writing needed.

**Alison Lock** is an award-winning poet and short story writer whose work has appeared in anthologies and journals in the UK and internationally. Her latest work *Beyond Wings* has been acclaimed for its 'delicate, evocative nature poetry' and 'a spirituality and sense of wonder, an attentiveness to the heart of things'. She is the author of a short story collection, two poetry collections, and a forthcoming fantasy novella. She has an MA in Literature Studies and is a tutor for courses on Transformative Life Writing.

**Anna Levin** is a writer and editor with a special interest in people's connections with the natural world and the interface where words and pictures meet. A former Section Editor with *BBC Wildlife Magazine*, she has been freelance for over ten years, specialising in wildlife and

natural history journalism for magazines, newspapers and environmental organisations, including eight years as Contributing Editor with the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. In recent years, she has been working in collaboration with renowned wildlife photographer Laurie Campbell. Their book *Otters Return to the River* celebrates the recovery of UK Otters.



Plate 18. Alison Lock.



Plate 19. Anna Levin. © Collins Photography.

To book a place on the course please contact Waterston House on 01875 871 300 or email [jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk). Further workshop dates may be announced depending on interest.

### Optics Demo Day

Sunday 15 May 2016, 10.00 am–4.00 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.

### SOC Treasurer – vacancy

The Club's current Honorary Treasurer, Alan Fox, has indicated his wish to stand down from the post at this year's AGM (24 September 2016). Alan has been an excellent asset to the SOC during his seven-year tenure and Council is particularly grateful for his key role in guiding the Club through the process of conversion to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This is an exciting time for the Club; we are in a positive position financially so this is a fantastic opportunity for someone with a bit of free time available and appropriate skills to play a key part in helping the Club to grow and to develop its objectives. If you think you may be interested in the role, please contact Wendy Hicks at Waterston House for details: 01875 871330 / [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk)

### Conferences

SOC Annual Conference, **23–25 SEPTEMBER 2016**. Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitochry.

Unfortunately, the hotel had no dates available in October or November for this year. However, the event will be back to its usual October slot (20–22nd) in 2017.

### Branch updates

#### Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report 2014

Copies of the latest Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report (No. 25) are now available, priced at £6.00 for members (£8.00 non-members) plus £1.50 p&p. Copies can be purchased by sending a cheque (payable to 'SOC Dumfries & Galloway Branches') to Peter Swan, 3 Castle View, Castle Douglas, Kirkcudbrightshire, DG7 1BG. Enquiries: [pandmswan@btinternet.com](mailto:pandmswan@btinternet.com) or telephone 01556 502 144.

#### Borders Bird Report 2014

The 31st Borders Bird Report covering 2014 is available from Malcolm Ross, Westfield, Smailholm, Kelso TD5 7PN (email: [eliseandmalcolm@btinternet.com](mailto:eliseandmalcolm@btinternet.com)). The cost is £7 (plus £1.70 postage if received that way), but copies will also be available at local SOC branch meetings (both Lothian and Borders), the Borders RSPB group and the Viking Optical Centre at 101 Rose Street, Edinburgh. Cheques should be made payable to 'Borders SOC'.



#### Lothian Bird Report 2013

The 2013 report can be purchased from the SOC at Waterston House. Copies are also available from the Viking Optical Centre at 101 Rose Street, Edinburgh. The report can also be



ordered by post. Send a cheque for £8.50 plus £1.60 p&p to Gillian Herbert, 19 Cammo Grove, Edinburgh EH4 8EX (email: gillianiherbert@btinternet.com). Please make your cheque payable to 'SOC Lothian Branch'.

### Clyde Birds 2007 & 2008

The Clyde branch is pleased to announce (at last!) the publication of *Clyde Birds* for the years 2007 and 2008, to be followed soon by the 2009 issue. Production has been even slower than usual in recent years for a variety of reasons, including work for the Clyde Atlas. Compilation is currently underway on the reports for 2010 to 2014, and we would appeal to Club members and Clyde birdwatchers to submit any outstanding notes for these years as soon as possible. We appear to be particularly short of breeding data for common birds. *Clyde Birds 2007 and 2008* are available from Val Wilson, Flat 2/1, 12 Rawcliffe Gardens, Glasgow G41 3DA (email: val.wilson38@btinternet.com), for £7 plus £1.50 p&p each (cheques payable to 'Clyde SOC'), or at the Lochwinnoch RSPB Nature Centre. Both the 2007 and 2008 reports will be on offer to SOC members for the reduced combined price of £12 (at Lochwinnoch) or by post from Val Wilson for £14.80 including p&p. Also available at Clyde SOC meetings.

The SOC HQ shop at Waterston House, Aberlady, also stocks a small supply of a selection of local bird reports, including those listed above.

### Birds of Caithness

The digital *Birds of Caithness*, published by the Caithness branch, is now available. The status of all species which occurred in Caithness during 2007–2012 is described in text, maps and photographs by seven authors. Only 200 DVDs have been produced and already half have been sold or given as complimentary copies!

The *Birds of Caithness* DVD costs £15 + P&P and orders can be placed by emailing [birdsof-caithness@gmail.com](mailto:birdsof-caithness@gmail.com). More detail can be found at the [caithnessbirds.co.uk](http://caithnessbirds.co.uk) website.

### Branch Award to Willie Prest

The Lothian Branch Award for 2015 went to Willie Prest in recognition of all his hard work for the branch and the Club (Plate 20). Brought up



**Plate 20.** Willie Prest (right) receiving his Branch Award from James Main, Edinburgh, December 2015. © Doreen Main

in Moffat, Willie joined the Dumfries branch in 1966. After moving to Inverness he was branch secretary there for two years. He then served as vice chair, followed by branch chair of Lothian branch and member of Council during 1984–87. He also served on the 'Creative Executive and Development Group' which looked at ways and means of increasing membership and influence of the SOC. This was a well-deserved award!

*James Main*

### Isle of May Bird Observatory T-shirt

The new IoMBO T-shirt is available at £14.00 (inc p&p) from Stuart L. Rivers, Flat 8 (2F2), 10 Waverley Park, Edinburgh EH8 8EU. Please make cheques payable to 'Isle of May Bird Observatory Trust' and remember to include your postal address and state size (S, M, L or XL) and quantity required.



### Changes to the Editorial Group

We would like to welcome Will Miles and Clive McKay to the group of experts who assist Stan da Prato with the examination of peer-reviewed papers and notes submitted to *Scottish Birds*.

Will has a doctorate in storm-petrel ecology and now does research on migration and seabirds at the University of Aberdeen. In addition to these subjects, his interests include Scottish islands, bird conservation, bird art and literature, and UK rarities.

Clive studied Choughs on Islay for his Ph.D. and has a keen interest in bird ecology, visible migration, ringing and woodland raptors.

We should also like to take this opportunity to extend our thanks to the voluntary work of the whole team completed by stalwarts Ian Bainbridge, Mick Marquiss and Bob Swann.

*Ian Andrews on behalf of the Editorial Group*

### British Birds magazine - monthly newsletter

Many members will already be subscribers to *British Birds* magazine or may have taken up one of several trial offers available recently. Whether you subscribe or not, however, you may like to join the list of those who receive a free e-newsletter every month. This offers a nice flavour of what has been published recently and what is in the pipeline in areas such as book of the month, news and comment, the rarities section and further special offers.

This is a new initiative from what we believe to be Britain's leading birding publication. It covers the UK and Western Palearctic and has been the birdwatchers' journal of record since 1907. It is read and recommended by many well-known amateur and professional ornithologists, writers and photographers with Simon King stating that "*British Birds* is the gold standard of ornithological literature in the UK".

To receive the newsletters, you merely have to log on to [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk) and complete the sign up form at the bottom of the page. Give it a try!

### Digital access to SOC publications

Although there have been downloadable versions of older volumes of *Scottish Birds* available from the SOC website for some time now at [www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-birds-onlinethe-journal-of-the-soc](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/scottish-birds-onlinethe-journal-of-the-soc), the journal is now also available from the Biodiversity Heritage Library [www.biodiversitylibrary.org](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org), which has recently added digitised versions of the *Scottish Bird Reports* which were printed separately from *Scottish Birds*, and our early *Raptor Round-ups*. These can all be found at

#### *Scottish Birds*

[www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/67110](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/67110)

#### *Scottish Bird Report*

[www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/98363](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/98363)

#### *Raptor Round-up*

[www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/69323](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/69323)

In addition, work is progressing on digitising the full run of *Scottish Bird News*, and the post-1922 issues of the *Scottish Naturalist* (volumes up to 1922 have already been digitised). In the meantime, the *Western Naturalist* which appeared from 1972 to 1982 under the supervision of Dr Jack Gibson has also been made available [www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/106848#/summary](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/106848#/summary)



**Plate 21.** Wildlife cameraman and presenter Simon King (left), here with Dave Allan, visited Waterston House, Aberlady in November 2015. © SOC

# ***YOUNG BIRDERS' TRAINING COURSE***

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



- Course will be held on 2-9th July 2016
- Limited to six participants
- Basic, hostel-style accommodation
- Course substantially sponsored by SOC
- Course content will include species recording and data handling, seabird research, bird ringing, Isle of May NNR & aspects of bird observatory life
- Deadline for applications – Monday 2nd May 2016 at 5pm



*To apply and for further information,  
visit the SOC website: [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk)*





# Birding and the younger generation

A. RUSSELL



**Plate 22.** Andrew Russell enjoying photographing the King Eider, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, May 2015. © Colin Russell

My name is Andrew Russell and I live in central Scotland. I am currently 17 years old. When I was eight I became very interested in birds of prey and a year on, my interest developed into all species of birds and nature in general. I enjoyed going birdwatching with my dad and began to photograph birds too. Before long I had become a keen photographer.

As a family we love the great outdoors, whether it's local terrain or up in the mountains of Scotland in sunshine, rain, hail or snow. During our wildlife/bird watching trips we would often meet people who had similar interests, but they were predominantly adults, the same age as my parents or older. I learned lots of interesting and useful information from people we met, but was very aware that we rarely came across people of my own age.

In the last few years I have been involved in monitoring autumn and winter populations of local Jack Snipe and have helped Jimmy Maxwell and other local birdwatchers record the expansion of Nuthatch. My local pond had a

peak total of 25 Jack Snipe which was one of the largest in Scotland and seeing them was amazing. More experience was gained when I assisted Clyde SOC member Iain Livingstone in ringing this interesting species.

Fortunately for me I had heard of, and have recently become involved in, a joint project with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Young Scot. The purpose of the project is to engage young people aged 13–23 across Scotland in nature, led by a youth panel in which I am working with 15 other young people spread throughout Scotland. There is a varied skills set between the members and all have a genuine passion for promoting nature in Scotland. The aims and objectives of the project are to take forward the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Route Map, with a specific focus on engaging the young population in Scotland.

I was really excited to be chosen to take part in this project as I have a love of wildlife and conservation within Scotland but have not come across many other young people with the same interest

or passion. We have met together as a group twice during residential trips to plan how we would take the project forward. It's great having the opportunity to develop our social and personal development skills within the project too with support from SNH and Young Scot.

You will see some of the work we are involved in as the project evolves and one of our aims is to make sure that it becomes nationally known. We realise the importance of making the above issues relevant to young people and hope to ensure that the process and methods of participating in the project will encourage young folk to get involved. We have had many conversations with birders and ecologists across the country who currently see birding and conservation as an "ageing" hobby. Thanks to the project our knowledge of birds and wildlife is growing all the time, but there are still relatively few young people interested. Hopefully the project will inspire future generations to get interested in wildlife.

It is refreshing to see that there are now social media groups set up for young birders. I have

engaged in many interesting conversations through "Next Generation Birders" (NGB). We share ideas, knowledge and experiences in terms of general birdwatching, twitching and ecological work. The group aims to connect young birders through trips and holidays throughout Britain, including future activities based in Scotland to look forward to. It has been set up for young birders with at least a basic knowledge of birds, however anyone looking for help with identification will receive helpful answers or advice to improve their skills and become more knowledgeable birders. Some of these members may also be involved in future ecological studies and research as many of them are already involved in this field.

Between groups such as NGB and the Young Scot project that I am involved in, I believe there is hope that our current younger and future generations will sustain the ecological interest and appreciation of wildlife in Scotland. The future is looking brighter!

**Andrew Russell, Carluke.**

*Email: [andrew.russell98@googlemail.com](mailto:andrew.russell98@googlemail.com)*



 giving nature a home

# Scotland's big nature festival

Levenhall Links, Musselburgh  
**21-22 May 2016**  
 10 am-5.30 pm

Featuring the Scottish Birdfair, specialist talks, walks, workshops and over 100 stalls.

Tickets £12, children £2 (under 5s free)  
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**EARLY BIRD OFFER - BOOK NOW!**

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Helping to give nature a home

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity. England and Wales no: 207076, Scotland no. SC037554. Images: puffin by Photoshot (shutterstock.com), 770-1844-16-16.



Plate 23. Joan Howie (left) and Peter Swan (back right) from the Stewartry branch with Professor Glen Chilton (second from left) and some of the pupils from Kells Primary, New Galloway, November 2015. © Zane Gray

## Adventures with creatures that were thought to be extinct – primary school talks in Dumfries & Galloway

P. SWAN

Prior to giving his talk 'The Return of the Flowerpecker Zombies' to the Dumfries & Galloway SOC branches in November 2015, Emeritus Professor Glen Chilton (from James Cook University in Australia, but currently on sabbatical at Glasgow University) had offered to give a presentation to any primary school in the area that would like one. This offer was relayed by the Stewartry branch to Mr Zane Gray, Depute Head Teacher of Kells Primary School in New Galloway who is also the Acting Depute Head Teacher of the nearby Dalry Primary School in St. John's Town of Dalry, and he enthusiastically took up the offer on behalf of both of his schools.

Liaison between Mr Gray, the Stewartry branch and Professor Chilton resulted in Glen, having given a talk to the Dumfries branch on the Wednesday evening, arriving at Kells School, the venue that has been used by the Stewartry branch for its winter talks for 39 years, mid-morning on the 12th to give his presentation to a group of about 20 pupils (Plate 23). The talk, with an amended title, was based on his trips around the world to try to see animals such as the Jamaican Iguana, the Black-footed Ferret and Javan Elephant that had been considered extinct and had been proved not to be so. Although in one case, that of a tardigrade (an aquatic eight-footed invertebrate), it seemed that the 'discoverer', a monk, had not been honest and evidence of its existence was not found by Glen and a specialist group.



Having given his talk at Kells School, Professor Chilton had his lunch with the children at Dalry Primary School and then, in the afternoon, gave about 70 children from that school together with some children from Kells School who had missed the morning session, the same presentation (Plate 24).

Both talks, supported by wonderful and in the case of the tardigrade, weird photographs, given with flamboyance and much animation by Glen, were thoroughly enjoyed by attentive and enthusiastic children.

At the end of the talks many searching questions were raised by the children at both schools and answered by Glen, who had worn his bright orange shoes deliberately to help relax the children and to realise that he could be approached with any question without fear.

In the evening Glen, who had been asked for his autograph by several of the children, admitted to being 'buzzing' after his talks at the schools and gave his full talk to the Stewartry branch.

He was no doubt very pleased to board a train back to Glasgow the following morning and have a few quiet moments to reflect on a very busy and successful day.

Our thanks go to Mr Gray and his staff at both schools for facilitating the talks and the hospitality extended to Professor Chilton and members of the Stewartry branch.

*Peter Swan, Stewartry branch.*



**Plate 24.** Glen Chilton (centre) with the pupils from Dalry Primary as well as P7 pupils from Kells, St. John's Town of Dalry, November 2015. © Zane Gray

# A summer night on North Rona

S. MURRAY, M.C. SHEWRY, S. ELLIOTT, D. JONES & J. HARDEN



Plate 25. Leach's Petrel after ringing, North Rona village, 3 July 2015. © S. Elliott

'A dull calm night of maximum activity', that, to quote Robert Atkinson from back in 1936, is what the would-be petrel ringer needs to be successful. We were on North Rona from 20 June to 4 July 2015 with the aim of resurveying the Leach's Petrel colony, to see how it had fared using our surveys made in 2001 and 2009 as a baseline (Murray *et al.* 2008, 2010).

Although ringing was not an essential part of the work, this chance to catch and handle the elusive and nocturnal petrel was not to be passed up. Weather conditions, especially on wind-scoured Atlantic islands are rarely perfect for netting birds and wind was something we had too much of this summer. It does not take much of a breeze for the nets to swell like taut sails. This makes them more visible to the birds and those that fail to avoid them tend to bounce

out again, trampoline fashion. Rain is the other stopper, a heavy shower when birds are caught in the meshes can disorder their feathers and chill them very quickly, and so it is unjustifiable to net in such conditions. After too many nights of either wind or rain, or both, we finally got our calm, but far from dull night on 3 July. One other condition needs to be met to encourage the birds to come ashore, darkness, but we had a full moon rising to the zenith at what would have been the blackest hour of the short summer night. We were unlikely then to catch many, but always a few birds are overcome by the urgency of breeding to risk the dash ashore and relieve their incubating partners.

In moonlight the birds would easily see and avoid the nets, but we decided to carry on, erected the nets among the village ruins and

left them tightly furled until midnight. Leaving the hut later for the short walk to the village, we were pleased to find ourselves stumbling into a pea-soup fog. A dense sea mist had enveloped the island, hugging the land, shrouding the moon and bringing the petrels with it. Their urgent cackles, muted by fog, grew sharper and more distinct as we picked our way through the ruins to the net site. Set on flat ground, low in front of the graveyard with its chapel, the position is ideal for catching incoming birds. Those with serious intent come in fast and straight, knowing where their nest burrows are and focused on relieving their partners, who may have been sitting for days in the darkness waiting for this moment to quit the egg.

Responsible ringers are aware of this and so keep their operations to the minimum, for instance, by not netting two nights in succession in the village. Rather, nets are resited to reduce the chances of catching the same birds again. We want to catch previously ringed birds of course, but from earlier years; to establish how old they are and whether they are transient immatures prospecting for a breeding site, or established adults with a long history of occupation. Unfortunately, not enough ringing has been done on Rona to calculate year-to-year survival of breeding adults. We caught 56 new birds, and also five ringed previously, four from 2009 and the oldest from 2003.

Leach's Petrels are censused using the responses when a tape recording of their call is played near a potential breeding site (Taoka *et al.* 1989). Between 2001 and 2009, the colony had declined by 34% from 1,084 apparently occupied sites (AOS) to 713 AOS. The 2015 survey data are still subject to further analysis, but initial results suggest a continued, although smaller decline, of about 15%. However, there is still considerable uncertainty in the actual population change and the data used to estimate the rate of response to tape playback needs further consideration. Nonetheless, it is clear that the population in the village section has continued to decline whilst the other 15 sections showed little change or modest increases and 90% of the latest losses were within the small village section. This has always been known as the

best site for the birds and in 2001 it held 30% of the island total: 314 AOS, falling to 234 AOS by 2009, to about 149 AOS in 2015. Despite this, the overall island population is in better shape than we feared, but the situation in the village is concerning. It would be a sad loss if the thrilling, evocative calls of the petrels were to be lost from here, the spiritual heart of the island. All we can do is keep a watchful eye on the birds and hope that the next survey finds an improvement in their situation.

### Acknowledgements

The work was made possible by grants from the Seabird Group, SNH, SOC, the Gibson Trust and RSPB, for which we are very grateful.

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S. Murray, Easter Craigie Dhu,  
Butterstone, Dunkeld PH8 0EY.  
Email: murraysurvey@yahoo.co.uk

M.C. Shewry, Lylowan Cottage,  
Dunfermline, Fife KY12 0SG.

S. Elliott, D. Jones & J. Harden,  
RSPB Scotland, Etive House,  
Beechwood Park, Inverness IV2 3BW.



# ARTIST PROFILES

## Greg Poole

Greg is an artist, printmaker and illustrator based in Bristol. He has been a member of the Society of Wildlife Artists since 1993, is a frequent participant on Artists for Nature Foundation projects, and since 1996 a tutor on the annual John Busby seabird drawing course now based at Aberlady.



Plate 27. Otter, flat fish & Arctic Tern. © Greg Poole

*Sitting and watching in the field until things reveal themselves.*

*Zooming in and out using optics, finding birds or animals that draw the eye through space. Patterns of plant growth suggest rhythms for drawing.*

*Learning to stylise the imagery helps allow near and far converge.*

*A sense of things pushing at the edges of an imaginary frame gives the impetus to start sketching.*

*And then the use of memory - what sticks and what is lost?*

*Back in the studio, printmaking (mainly monoprint or woodcut) helps to simplify and reconfigure these memories of field events.*

Website: [www.gregpoole.co.uk](http://www.gregpoole.co.uk)

Plate 26 (left). Arctic Terns, Oystercatchers & Ringed Plover. © Greg Poole



Plate 28. Arctic Tern. © John Threlfall

### John Threlfall

"In order to draw and paint birds and animals from life, the focus of your looking and concentration must be total. Thereby lies the appeal. To be absolutely absorbed in your subject matter and their surroundings, to look as if you have never seen before, and so wonder at it all, is an enthralling and enchanting state to be in. Here is the true value of drawing, irrespective of the outcome."

This is my way of connecting with the natural world around me, of acknowledging and celebrating the existence of other species and so I draw and paint from life as much as I can and encourage others to do the same. Through weekly classes, workshops for Art Societies or for the Field Studies Council, tutoring for ArtSafari Holidays or on John Busby's Seabird Drawing Week I hope to open eyes to the spectacle all around us.

Ultimately, of course, you hope that your own paintings also achieve that. I moved to the Solway coast of Dumfries and Galloway 25 years ago to paint, stimulated by the vastness of the space and the quality of the light, just as many artists before me had done. But that seasonal dimension of migrating waders and wildfowl gives me something else, it animates the skyscape, it adds the prefix 'wild' to all before me.

So, whatever the creature, I am equally intrigued by its habitat, its landscape, the context, whether in woodland looking for Redstart and Pied Flycatcher or on the coast painting Razorbills or Eiders. It is that wildscape that compels me to get the paints out. I tend to work outdoors in acrylics, pastels or watercolour, maybe quick sketches or if light, time and tide are waiting, however impatiently, then a more 'finished' piece. Back in the studio, I hope to combine these primary studies into a bigger painting, the compositional arrangements of shapes, tones and colour, of texture, space, movement and mark making. If this work can then communicate to others something of the awe, the spectacle, the fascination and the beauty of the natural world then, as an artist, I have succeeded to some extent.

I am a member of the Society of Wildlife Artists and the Artists for Nature Foundation. I was the Swarovski Bird Artist of the Year in 2007 and have two books published by Langford Press: *Between the Tides* in 2007 and *Close to the Edge* in 2013.

Website: [www.johnthrelfall.co.uk](http://www.johnthrelfall.co.uk)

**Greg Poole and John Threlfall will be exhibiting at Waterston House, Aberlady between Saturday 9 April and Wednesday 25 May.**



### Richard Allen

Originally from Newbury, Berkshire, an Art Foundation Course at Brighton was followed by a degree in Graphic Design at Kingston Polytechnic. After graduating in 1987, I became a freelance illustrator working mainly in scraperboard for advertising, publishing, packaging and newspapers. However, my work has gradually drifted towards my main interest of birds and wildlife especially after winning "British Birds Bird Illustrator of the Year" in 1993. Moving to Essex in 1988, and more recently to Wivenhoe, the bird-rich estuaries and marshes of the Essex coast have provided an endless source of inspiration and fuelled a passion for field sketching. I enjoy the immediacy of working directly from nature, trying to capture the life and vitality of wild birds, and the patterns of plumage, light, water and foliage.

This essential field experience has proven invaluable when working on paintings in the studio, or when illustrating bird identification guides. Publications include: *Concise Birds of the Western Palearctic*, *The Handbook of Birds of the World*, *A Field Guide to the Birds of South East Asia* and the solely illustrated *Sunbirds and Flowerpeckers*. Such work has



Plate 30. Lapwing (detail from). © Richard Allen

led me on exciting trips to China, USA, southern Asia, Senegal and many parts of Europe and I've filled many sketchbooks with observations of wildlife and landscape.

This grounding in the field is also a considerable help when producing wildlife interpretation illustrations for nature reserves and visitor centres. A rounded knowledge of all forms of wildlife is vital when designing complete habitat compositions such as chalk streams, ancient woodland or estuary saltmarsh. I don't however confine myself to wildlife and a varied portfolio of work has come my way, from Iron Age hill forts to Olympic stamps, medieval monasteries to a range of TV-related walk maps for the Radio Times.

I do always though come back to my passion for studying and depicting the natural environment. After many years working in watercolours I have recently been experimenting with oils, and I've enjoyed using a new medium, developing a new style, and revelling in the rich colours attainable in oil paint. I have also returned to print making and am currently working on my next book of lino-cuts showing the birds of cliffs and shingle shores.

Recently commissioned work includes projects for the Great Fen Project, Exmoor National Park, Leeds Castle, and Castell Henllys Iron Age Fort. Of late I have returned to printmaking, and my book of lino cuts *Coastal Birds* was published in 2014.

Website: [www.richardallenillustrator.com](http://www.richardallenillustrator.com)



Plate 29. Peregrine, South Stack. © Richard Allen





Plate 31. Ringed Plover and runnel. © Jan Wilczur

### Jan Wilczur

I have been an inveterate artist since childhood, so when I developed an interest in birds in my late teens I soon began to draw them. Inspired by the publication of Tunncliffe's sketchbooks and the first few volumes of Lars Jonsson's *Birds of Europe*, I then began sketching in the field and painting. As an avid birder I became aware of birdwatchers contributing drawings to bird reports and magazines such as *British Birds* - which also organized the Bird Illustrator of the Year competition. I began submitting illustrations myself and entered the competition achieving a third place and a new telescope! Subsequently, over many years, I contributed numerous black and white illustrations to bird reports, magazines, tour company brochures and books.

It was not until I was commissioned to work on a major book - illustrating identification plates for *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* - that I gave up my 'proper' job to become a full-time illustrator. Since then I have contributed to several books including ten volumes of *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, *Concise Birds of the Western Palearctic*, *Birds of South-east Asia*, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Brazil*, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Armenia*, *Cuckoos of the World* and *Thrushes*.

I live in Putney, south-west London, with my wife and family and have birded in this area most of my life. I have also visited many locations in the UK and a few around the world in pursuit of birds. Family life has limited traveling so I have become more involved in studying my local birds. I have conducted surveys, written and illustrated papers and bird reports on my local patches of Richmond Park and the London Wetland Centre.

Working as a full-time bird illustrator did not allow much time to indulge in painting. In recent years, however, I have done so, finally exploiting my many field-sketches of birds and thousands of photographs of backgrounds and landscapes. I have always taken an interest in the habitats and landscapes that birds occupy and have tried to give them as much attention as the birds themselves in my artwork.

The constraints of what is essentially scientific illustration are difficult to break free from when painting, but I am alternatively delighted and frustrated by the process. My natural inclination is to explore so I find it difficult to sit still long enough to sketch, let alone paint 'en plein air'. My preference is to take photos and return to the studio and to reflect on what has excited me. Usually a subject for a painting presents itself obviously but occasionally a sideways look at a seemingly ordinary photo can initiate a creative charge. My background in zoology and the need to identify most of what I see means I take pleasure in detail and do not feel the need to abandon it altogether. I hope to achieve a balance between impression and detail when depicting, in paint, aspects of landscape and the natural world that inspire me.



Plate 32. Long-eared Owl. © Jan Wilczur

**Richard Allen and Jan Wilczur will be exhibiting at Waterston House, Aberlady between Saturday 28 May and Wednesday 20 July.**

# IDENTIFICATION SPOT: Meadow Pipit and Tree Pipit

I.J. ANDREWS



Plate 33. Meadow Pipit, Fife, September 2010. Note the orange bill base and orange-yellow legs. © John Anderson

Meadow Pipits are one of our commonest upland birds, but they occupy a variety of habitats at all seasons, and on passage they can occur in large numbers. Tree Pipits on the other hand are a comparatively scarce summer migrant. Tree Pipits associate with scattered trees in areas where they breed, and can also be seen on passage. As with some other difficult species pairs, these two pipits are often easier to separate on song and call, and it is always worth trying to confirm an identification by waiting to hear a call or song. A poor view of a silent bird can be a challenge, but don't fall into the trap that if it's on a tree it must be a Tree Pipit! The key to identifying a Tree Pipit is to know your Meadow Pipits first, so don't ignore what you might think of as commonplace.

Meadow Pipits are basically brown above and whitish with dark streaks below, but the overall upperpart tone can vary dramatically across the year and between individuals; some birds appearing greyish, others warm brown and others strikingly olive-green above. The mantle/back is boldly streaked. On the underparts, the streaks

are usually equally heavy on the breast and the flanks (except in juveniles when the flank streaking can be finer or lacking) and the breast streaks can join to form a dark spot in the middle of the chest, particularly in the breeding season. The underparts are off-white with the strongest colour on the flanks and sides of the breast. Meadow Pipits have a rather bland face pattern without a distinct supercilium or marked ear-coverts. If seen close enough (or photographed), the hind claw is often rather long and only slightly curved. The legs tend to be reddish-brown or even orange (pink in Tree Pipit).

Meadow Pipits usually keep low down and rather rarely sit in trees, and they walk with a jerky gait. The song flight starts from the ground and usually ends on the ground, but this is not 100% and shouldn't be used as a means of identification! The song begins with a repeated "zip zip zip ..." and develops into a series of fluty, buzzy and complex repeated phrases as it reaches the apex, giving a "tu tu tu" as it descends. The flight call is a repeated "seep", "zip", or "mip" if that makes it easier to remember.



**Plate 34–35.** Meadow Pipit, Barns Ness, Lothian, December 2009. The low winter light accentuates the warm colours on this bird. Note the yellowish bill base and the yellow-orange legs. © *Ian Andrews*

The Tree Pipit is a slightly larger and more robust bird. As they walk through the grass and leaf litter, they are more confident and stealthy, with a smooth, bold walking action, contrasting with the jerkiness of the Meadow Pipit. A Tree Pipit also rhythmically pumps its tail rather than flicking it nervously. On passage, they are decidedly more confident than Meadow Pipits and are less readily flushed. This gait and behaviour is similar to that of the rarer Olive-backed Pipit.



The bill looks shorter than Meadow Pipit's, with a deeper base. The base of the bill is pink (orange in Meadow) - although good views are required to spot these slight differences. Tree's upperparts are more consistently olive green. The breast is usually rather heavily streaked, thinning to fine streaks on the flanks. The underparts can appear two-toned with the cleaner whiter belly contrasting with a creamy breast which can be a particularly eye-catching warm orangey-buff on the unstreaked chin and throat. Tree Pipits have a crisper look than Meadow Pipits, with a pale eye-ring and contrasting median coverts which have clean,

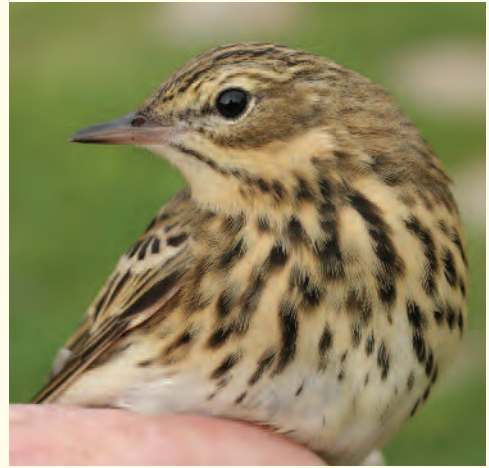
white tips and dark centres. The face is better marked than in Meadow Pipit, with the buff of the chin extending up to a supercilium. Some birds also have a pale spot on the ear-coverts (something that is better developed in Olive-backed Pipit). The legs are usually pink, and shorter than Meadow Pipit, giving a more considered and less tripping gait. Characteristically, the hind claw of the Tree Pipit is relatively short and strongly curved.



Tree Pipits are often seen in trees and they often sing from the treetops, but they also spend time feeding on the ground. The song is richer and more powerful than that of the Meadow Pipit, often starting with “chip chip chip” notes and developing in a varied range of repeated notes, sometimes including a decidedly Chaffinch-like flourish at the end. The song flight invariably ends with the bird returning to a tree or perch, descending with legs dangling. As they descend, a distinct, decelerating “see-you, see-you, see-you” phrase ends the song. The Tree Pipit’s flight call is a distinctive, drawn-out, buzzy “teez” or “skeeze”; once learnt it makes Tree Pipits relatively easily to pick out as they fly over. Their flight action is less jerky than that of Meadow Pipits, comprising smoother more regular undulations, more like the flight of a wagtail.



Plate 36–37. Tree Pipit, Fair Isle, October 2015. © Ian Andrews



**Plates 38–42.** Meadow Pipit (left) and Tree Pipit (right), Portland Bill, Dorset, September 2008. **(38)** The difference in bill shape and colour. **(39–40)** Differences in head pattern, breast streaking and underpart colour. **(41–42)** The leg colour and hind claw length. © *Martin Cade*





**Plates 43–44.** (left) Meadow Pipit, Barns Ness, Lothian, March 2003. © Ian Andrews. Rarely, birds can have a peachy or orangey wash to the breast. Not a Red-throated Pipit though! (right) Meadow Pipit, Fife, December 2009. Note the orange bill base and orange-yellow legs. © John Anderson



**Plates 45–46.** (left) Meadow Pipit, Fife, July 2008. This worn bird was photographed late in the breeding season. (right) Tree Pipit, April 2011. Note the pink bill base, stout bill and short pink legs. © John Anderson

At the risk of ending this article on a negative note, the text above concentrates on the birds in fresh plumage, but things can get more difficult in summer when the birds' plumage can become tatty and worn. The paler feather edges generally wear away and the underparts lose their bright hues, so that both species appear more uniform and darker. Some of the key identification features may become more subdued, but if you have become familiar with the structural, behavioural and vocal differences, then the chances of a successful identification increase.

Also, Meadow Pipit plumage varies across its range and we are still learning about the differences between British, Scandinavian and Icelandic populations. However, leg and bill colour, shape and flight remain as consistent differences.

### Resources

Describing the songs of any birds in words is not only difficult, but can be unhelpful. The xeno-canto website is a superb source of recordings of both the species discussed here, and many more:  
<http://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Anthus-pratensis>  
<http://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Anthus-trivialis>

Thanks go to Clive McKay for contributing to a draft of this article.

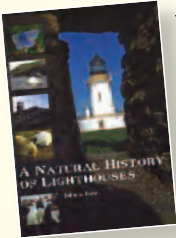
*Ian Andrews, Musselburgh*  
Email: [ijandrews@live.com](mailto:ijandrews@live.com)



# BOOK REVIEWS

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

**A Natural History of Lighthouses.** John A. Love, 2015. Whittles Publishing, ISBN 978-1-84995-154-8, hardback, 295 pages, £30.00.



This book encompasses both the history of lighthouses and the wildlife recorded and observed by their keepers.

The author writes from a wealth of experience and the book is profusely illustrated. The first few chapters describe the history of lighthouses in Britain and Ireland, the emphasis being on Scottish lights. Within these descriptions are narratives of the lighthouse builders and their families, most notably the Stevensons, who designed and erected the majority of the Scottish lighthouses.

The natural history is expanded upon in later chapters, beginning with excerpts from the diary of a Bell Rock keeper, one of the early ornithological chroniclers who also described other marine wildlife. The building and occupation of the remoter lighthouses was often undertaken in the severest of weather conditions, sometimes so severe that early structures were often blown away. Light keepers must have been strong characters to reside there for long periods and it is no wonder that they turned to

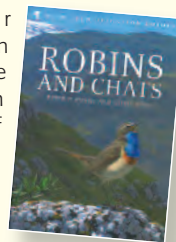
watching birds and other wildlife to pass the time. In the early days, they were well placed to observe migration, as lighthouses dazzled and killed (by striking the towers) enormous numbers of migrating birds, eventually prompting efforts to mitigate this problem. The final chapter describes the last Scottish lighthouse to be automated (Fair Isle in 1998) – the end of an illustrious story well worth the telling.

This is a very readable work, interspersed with many anecdotes. I was somewhat disappointed by the lack of both bibliography and index, but this is only a slight detraction. I can recommend this book, especially if, like me, you have a penchant for visiting lighthouses.

*Norman Elkins*

**Helm Identification Guides: robins and chats.** Peter Clement & Chris Rose, 2015. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-0-7136-3963-6, hardback, 688 pages, £60.00.

Another masterpiece in this authoritative series, with an instant feel of quality (the dustjacket is stunning), this volume covers the world's 175 species

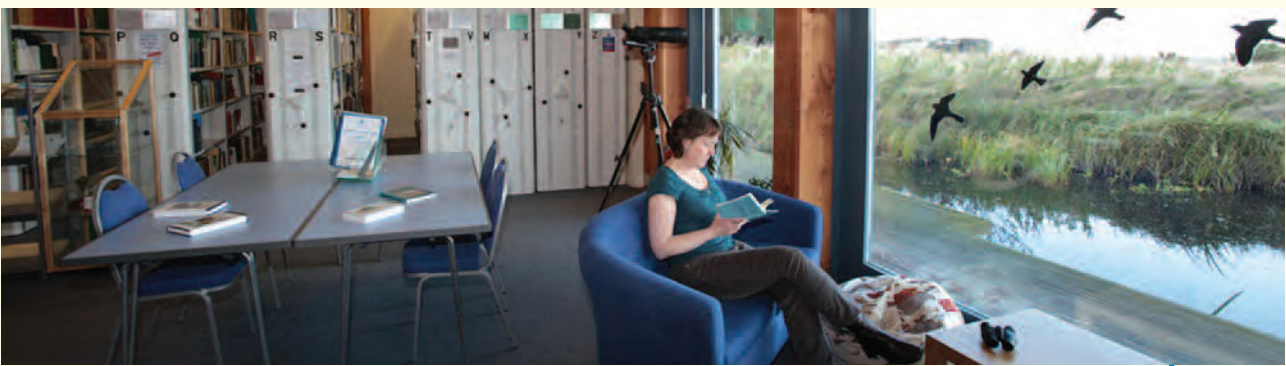


of robins and chats, including wheatears. The 688 pages include List of Contents, Acknowledgements, Introduction, "How to Use This Book", a review of Chat Systematics, 62 colour plates with facing text describing plumages shown, 617 pages of species accounts (with over 600 colour photos), an extensive bibliography (over 900 references) and a thorough index of common and scientific species names (to subspecies level).

The strength of any ID guide is the plates and species accounts and this volume is of the very highest standard - a joy to flick through and dip into. Every species is superbly illustrated in great detail, with male/adult and typically female, juvenile and different subspecies plumages depicted. The species accounts are concise but packed with information and cover the headings: name and subspecies, field identification, similar species, voice, habitat, behaviour, breeding, status and distribution, movements, description, geographical variation, moult, measurements and taxonomy. Each account has a map showing resident, breeding and non-breeding ranges, plus areas of uncertain occurrence, and features a series of high-quality photographs.

Highly recommended - a definitive reference.

*Stuart L. Rivers*



**What Nature Does For Britain.** Tony Juniper, 2015. Profile Books, London, ISBN 978-178125-3281, paperback, 281 pages, £9.99.



Juniper takes the reader on a fascinating tour of the British Isles, using countless case studies to illustrate the purpose of this book: to show that nature has an immense economic value to this country.

I read this over the Christmas break and seeing the images on the television of the devastating floods in Cumbria and Aberdeenshire, made the chapters *Waterland* and *Taming the Flood* especially captivating. Juniper argues that by managing our water catchment areas in a more natural way (planting trees, creating larger wetland areas to enable the land to store more water during heavy rains), we can not only increase benefits for wildlife, recreation and tourism, but also save the country substantial sums of money. He illustrates that here in Scotland we have already taken the first step in one such way – with the trialled reintroduction of beavers.

The book covers a wide range of topics over nine chapters – from examples showing the value of our pollinating bees, our incredible marine resources, and our sensitive peatlands, to our country's huge potential to lead the way in renewable energy production. Although full of facts, figures and statistics, it is still an easy and captivating read.

Politics is at the heart of this book, and it is in our government's policies where many of the necessary changes should be

made. There is obviously still some way to go before changing old-fashioned views and unproductive policies. Each chapter concludes with a manifesto stating what should be done to enable the country to take the right steps to a greener, sustainable, happier, and wealthier society. Personally I think Juniper makes a compelling case and if a political party were to adopt this manifesto they would, without a doubt, get my vote!

Some say that by adopting these ideas we would be 'putting a price on nature', and that nature is priceless and by giving it an economic value obscures and endangers the true value of the natural world. If this is your current view, I urge you to give this book a read before making your mind up.

*James Allison*

**The Merlin.** Richard Sale, 2015. Snowfinch Publishing, Coberley, ISBN 978-0-9571732-1-7, hardback, 304 pages, £40.00.



We have waited a long time for an authoritative monograph on the Merlin and perhaps, surprisingly, it has not been written by one of the better known UK Merlin enthusiasts who have studied the species for decades. Unlike most of the other raptor species monographs, it is neither published by Poyser nor does it closely follow the familiar style where most of the figures, tables etc. are placed in an appendix. Here these are located amongst the text along with a large number of fascinating photographs illustrating most aspects of the species' behaviour and biology.

This format makes for a very interesting and in some ways easier read than what might be called the traditional approach. The use of highlighted boxes throughout the book containing, what the writer has identified as particularly interesting observations, research findings etc. can, to my mind, be an effective way of focusing the reader's attention. All of the expected topics such as breeding, movements, diet, survival, falconry etc. are covered mostly very comprehensively. There is also a chapter "Some General Characteristics of Falcons" which contains some fascinating if complex discussion on the evolution of the Merlin and its relationship with the four groups of "True Falcons".

Richard Sale has already written and co-written several books on the Arctic and its species and has drawn on his own observations and photographs, several taken in Scotland, but most usefully draws on published data and images from the UK and from a large number of studies of all of the subspecies across their extensive world range. The Merlin has been well studied and the reader is given some fascinating comparative insights into how the different subspecies manage to make a living in quite different environments.

Anybody interested in Merlins, and who wouldn't be, will want to read this interesting book.

*Alan Heavisides*

**Undiscovered Owls: a Sound Approach guide.** Magnus Robb and The Sound Approach, 2015. The Sound Approach, Poole, ISBN 978-90-810933-7-8, hardback, 398 pages, £39.95.



This is the fifth book produced by a group of recordists who call themselves

The Sound Approach. Their aim is to raise standards in the use of bird sounds in species identification, ageing and sexing, and recognising other genotypic variation. The book comes with four inclusive CDs with 327 previously unpublished digitally recorded sounds from 38 owl species from the Western Palearctic, North Africa and Middle East. There are some additional sounds from a few other birds and animals to complement the text.

After an Introduction the book is divided into nine chapters, each dealing with a different genus of owl. It is well illustrated throughout with excellent photographs, distribution maps, and artwork by Hakan Delin and Killian Mullarney. The informative text covers each species in turn and provides entertaining descriptions of where, when and how the numbered recordings were obtained, and what other background sounds can be heard. The idea is to listen to them on the CDs (best using headphones) as you read the book and most calls are analysed and interpreted in detail using sonograms. This approach is used for comparing owls of different ages, males and females, and related species. It is

also used for identifying rarities, possible subspecies and one new species, the Omani Owl *Strix hadorami*. Hence the "Undiscovered" in the book's title.

At the end of the book there are ten pages of references and a helpful species guide to the four CDs. This guide shows that some owl species have many more sound recordings than others, and they are not all of high quality, so I do wonder if all were really necessary. Nevertheless, anyone interested in owl taxonomy and distinguishing owls by their calls should find this ingenious book fascinating, illustrated as it is with both visual and auditory imagery, and I recommend it.

*John Savory*

**Collins BTO Guide to British Birds.** Paul Sterry & Paul Stancliffe, 2015. William Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-755152-1, £19.99 paperback, 320 pages; ISBN 978-0-00-755151-4, £25 hardback.

This new identification guide features all of the birds that occur five or more times in Britain and Ireland, including all species that breed regularly in the region plus those that winter here and occur as common passage migrants.



Each species has a page including a distribution map, calendar wheel and very clear, detailed photographs of the bird in its typical habitat. There are special ID

pages for comparing similar species and ID tips.

An excellent field guide and highly recommended.

*Karen Bidgood*

**Also received in the Library**  
**The History of the Tree Sparrow in Japan.** Fumio Taguchi, 2015. Self published (300 copies), hardback, 140 pages in English. Email address: passeroitaliano@gmail.com or wnrsparrow@yahoo.co.jp

Written in Japanese as well as English, this beautifully presented book has a foreword written by Dr J. Denis Summers-Smith. It is an observation of the close relation between man and the Tree Sparrow in Japan. The House Sparrow does not occur in Japan and is replaced by the Tree Sparrow in urban habitats. Not only does it cover the ecology of the species, but also its place in Japanese culture. It is also accompanied by 26 colour plates.



*Karen Bidgood*

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# RINGERS' ROUNDUP

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

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

## 'Diana' the Icelandic Greylag Goose

Carl Mitchell of WWT has been suggesting for the last few years in *GooseNews* and the IGC reports that there are now probably few Iceland Greylags found wintering in Scotland south-east of a line from Bute to Moray. And, even if small numbers do venture south, they are becoming increasingly hard to detect when they are in the range of British (i.e. summering) Greylags and the count numbers don't quite stack up with similar numbers of Greylags found in, for example, Borders in very early autumn (probably British) and also early winter when Iceland migrants might venture south.

Carl has been following an Iceland Greylag Goose (named 'Diana' by the Icelanders), caught during its moult in summer 2014 in east Iceland and marked with a GPS tag. It spent the whole of winter 2014/15 in about 12 fields in Caithness, using one roost. So far, so good.

Same again in winter 2015/16? Somewhat counter to Carl's suggestion of very few birds venturing south, Diana turned up on the Scotland/England border on 21 November 2015 and has remained in that area all winter so far (up until mid-December 2015). Such a contrast in wintering range and movements to last winter!

In 2014, Diana bred successfully and was accompanied by its family; in 2015 it was a failed breeder. Perhaps this has affected its wintering strategy? A brief period of snow and northerlies at the time of Diana's arrival in Scotland would seem to have been unlikely to push her so far south (and it will be interesting to see if and when it heads north again), since it is well used to harsh conditions in Iceland.

Carl wonders how many more Icelandic Greylag Geese sneak down to south-east Scotland, but are largely undetected - and probably, given the presence of large numbers of British Greylag Geese, undetectable.

## Unexpected Rock Pipit movements

Seven years into a Rock Pipit colour-ringing project in North-east Scotland, and this winter Amanda Biggins has received her first recoveries of any distance south of Aberdeen. Thanks to Chris Delaney and Keith Avery for their very interesting and useful observations and great photographs.

Rock Pipit 2611447 was seen and photographed by Chris Delaney in Ayr Harbour on 19 December 2015. It had been ringed as a first-year bird on 19 March 2015 at St. Combs, just south of Fraserburgh (North-east Scotland), a movement south-west of 296 km. Judging from



Plate 47. 'Diana' the Greylag Goose in Iceland. © Arnór Þórir Sígfússon



**Plate 48.** Colour-ringed Rock Pipit BT34170 Kirkcaldy, Fife, 12 February 2016. © Keith Avery



**Plate 49.** Colour-ringed Rock Pipit 2611447 Ayr, Ayrshire, 19 december 2015. © Chris Delaney

the amount of white in the outer tail feathers and its eager feeding behaviour on the day of ringing it was suspected to be a *littoralis* (Scandinavian bird) feeding up prior to heading across the North Sea. It appeared to be just starting its pre-breeding moult, so the other *littoralis* features were not that obvious.

This is also Amanda's first recovery of a *littoralis*-type Rock Pipit There is little known about wintering *littoralis* birds, particularly in Scotland.

Rock Pipit BT34170 was seen and photographed by Keith Avery near Seafield Tower in Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 12 February 2016. It had been ringed as a chick on 1 June 2013 at Girdleness foghorn, near Aberdeen Harbour, a movement south of 136 km. It was a surprise to hear back about this bird for the first time in nearly 2½ years after ringing, with no previous resightings since it was last seen in its family group on 26 June 2013. It is also by far the furthest movement of a chick and the first to move south of Aberdeen. Those that are known to have survived their first winter are usually found breeding around their natal area but lack of re-sightings suggests this bird has emigrated.

### Shag and Cormorant sightings please

Thanks very much to the ever increasing number of folk looking out for and reporting colour-ringed (darviced) Shags and Cormorants (amongst other species of course). An email in mid-January from Rob Hughes of the CEH Shag team informed us that observers had recorded 6,855 sightings of 2,407 individuals so far this

winter, a great effort by all. There can never be too many though so please keep reporting them to shags@ceh.ac.uk.



**Plate 50.** Juvenile Shag JPS at Rosehearty, North-east Scotland, 8 September 2014. © Euan Ferguson



**Plate 51.** Cormorant PJF back on the beach at Redcar, Cleveland, 22 February 2016. © Dave Britton. Ringed as a chick in 2011 near Inverberrie, this bird winters around Stockton-on-Tees, Redcar and was recorded back breeding at its natal colony for the first time in 2015.

We are also interested in colour-ringed Cormorants please. Colonies are currently being ringed in North-east Scotland and Strathclyde with white rings with green letters. Please report these to raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk. It is not uncommon for birds ringed from outwith Scotland to be reported here (e.g. Wales, Isle of Man and Denmark), so if the ring is not white and green you're maybe onto something even more exciting.

### Declining winter Twite

A sighting of a colour-ringed Twite by Ron Summers on 13 December 2015 at Alness Point on the Moray Firth was of interest as it appeared to have changed wintering areas. It had been ringed the previous winter at Montrose Basin by Ben Herschell and other Tay Ringing Group folks. Numbers of Twite wintering on the east coast of Scotland (and inland) have declined dramatically in recent years. Not so long ago flocks in excess of 200 frequented Montrose Basin and the Ythan Estuary. Ringing has shown these birds to be highly site faithful within and between years, with

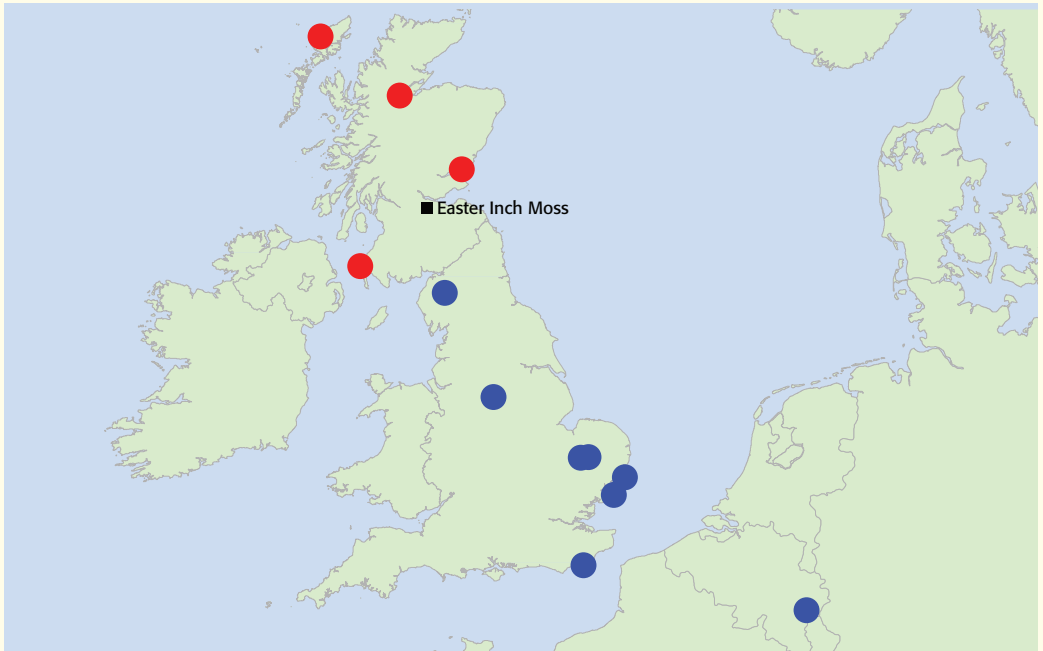
many individuals being retrapped in several successive winters. Such is still the case, despite flock sizes now down to less than 50 birds. Ben and co. at Montrose still retrap birds from previous winters, while a catch of 18 on the Ythan Estuary this winter was followed by another catch a few weeks later which contained 16 retraps from the first catch and only one unringed bird. The reduction in supplementary swan feeding at Montrose may have reduced the available food for the Twite there, but there is no obvious change in sheep farming, dune systems at the Ythan, which the birds frequent.

Ringling has also shown the origins of these Twite to be largely from the west coast of Scotland and its numerous islands (Corse *et al.* 2011).

### Reference

Corse, C.J., Clark, H., Duncan, R., Mainwood, T., Patterson, D., Wells, L., Adam, R.G. & Ribbands, J.B. 2011. Movements of Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* in northern Scotland. *Ringling & Migration* 26(2): 101–108.





**Figure 1.** Map showing the origins of selected Lesser Redpolls controlled/ringed at Easter Inch Moss, West Lothian. Red dots indicate the origin of birds on autumn passage; blue dots show onward movements and wintering areas

### Lesser Redpolls heading south

Most ringers love a nice recovery map demonstrating the fascinating movements some of our birds undertake. So well done to Clive Walton and his Lothian Ringing Group colleagues for the one shown here as Figure 1 of Redpoll movements through Easter Inch Moss in West Lothian. It is based on a few thousand Lesser Redpolls (and the occasional Mealy) controlled and ringed there on autumn passage.

### 'Tarfie' the Common Gull

'Tarfie', the Scottish Common Gull (given the name by its winter observers from its place of ringing), has appeared in previous Ringers' Roundups, so it's great to report that it is still going strong, photographed by Michael Bell on 1 September 2015 back in Sligo Harbour, Ireland for its 18th winter (Plate 53). Ringing has shown just how site faithful some species can be. The longevity record for Common Gull is nearly 28 years old (per BTO on-line ringing report), so Tarfie, ringed as a chick on 26 May 1997 at Loch Tarff near Fort Augustus, has a few years to go yet to become a record OAP Common Gull.



**Plates 52.** Lesser Redpoll, Easter Inch Moss, Lothian, September 2012. © Clive Walton



Plate 53. "Tarfie" the Common Gull, Sligo, Ireland, 1 September 2015. © Michael Bell

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# Northern Harrier, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2015

M. Warren



**Plate 54.** Northern Harrier, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2015. © George Gay

With a move to the Highlands looming, this was going to be my last autumn working on North Ronaldsay and just like the previous four, my expectations were high and there was no disappointment. This, the most eagerly anticipated period of the year had already seen the team unearth and enjoy great birds such as Booted and Blyth's Reed Warblers and on 25 September I was lucky enough to bump into 'the biggy'!

To be honest, the male Northern Harrier found me rather than the other way around. There wasn't a whole lot of skill involved in its initial discovery as it flew past me at the Laird's Park. I often mutter to myself while out birding and such mutterings during those few seconds more or less went as follows "male Hen Harrier", "oh, it's got reddish-brown spots on the underwing coverts, breast and flanks", "it's also got a really dark, hooded head", "it's also got a large white rump patch and brown markings throughout the upperparts", "it's a NORTHERN HARRIER!" I'd never seen one before (although there was a possible juvenile on North Ron for three days back in October 2011), but Northern Harriers, or 'Marsh Hawks' as they were traditionally known,

have featured in the birding media a fair bit recently now their vagrancy potential and identification has been recognised.

Despite the straightforward identification, this was still a very rare bird and it didn't stop me sprinting up the hill at Breck where the bird had now headed. Frantic calls to the rest of the Obs team were also made and it wasn't long before this fantastic raptor was being enjoyed by all. Luckily, he was a bit of a show off, performing for the rest of the day and was well photographed. Additional features noted were a striking underwing pattern with a broad, black trailing edge restricted to the secondaries and just five black 'fingers' (outer primaries) as opposed to six in Hen Harrier. If accepted by the BBRC, North Ronaldsay will be able to boast both of the two Scottish occurrences of this distinctive bird, following a juvenile which was identified by Alex Lees *et al.* in September 2008 and it could become just the eighth British record overall.

**Plates 55–58 (overleaf).** Northern Harrier, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2015. With Lapwing and Starlings in bottom left image. © George Gay







**Plate 59.** Northern Harrier, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, September 2015. © George Gay

Although Northern Harrier was officially a subspecies of Hen Harrier at the time of the sighting, the news that Northern and Hen Harriers were to be recognised as separate species was announced by the BOU in late 2015 (BOURC 2016, Sangster *et al.* 2016).

Our Northern Harrier was still present on the isle at the time of writing (30 November at least) and we've been fortunate enough to see it alongside Hen Harriers on numerous occasions, including an adult male twice. We'd already noted some clear differences in wing structure with the Northern appearing broader and shorter winged than a Hen and side by side the two males couldn't have looked more different!

I've been fortunate enough to see this great bird, almost daily for two and a half months now, right up to my very last working day. Not a bad way to sign off, eh!

## References

- British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC).** 2016. British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee 45th Report (October 2015). *Ibis* 158: 202–205.
- Sangster, G., Collinson, J.M., Crochet, P.-A., Kirwan, G.M., Knox, A.G., Parkin, D.T. & Votier, S.C.** 2016. Taxonomic recommendations for Western Palaearctic birds: 11th report. *Ibis* 158: 206–212.

*Mark Warren, c/o North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory, Twingness, North Ronaldsay, Orkney KW17 2BE.*

*Email: markwarren1980@hotmail.co.uk*

## Status of Northern Harrier in Scotland

*Northern Harrier is the North American counterpart of Hen Harrier, and has variously been regarded as a full species or subspecies of the latter by different taxonomic authorities. In January 2016, BOURC announced that there was sufficiently strong evidence to consider it as a full species. Its breeding range extends from Alaska to California and eastwards across sub-Arctic Canada and central USA to Newfoundland south to the northern Appalachians and Delaware. The northern populations are migratory or partially-migratory and winter mostly in the USA and Mexico and in smaller numbers south to NW Colombia/Venezuela.*

*There have been seven accepted records in Britain to the end of 2014, with one of these in Scotland. The first British record was a long-staying individual on the Isles of Scilly from 22 October 1982 to 7 June 1983. It is almost certain that the species occurred prior to that but not identified due to its sub-species status putting it under the radar of most British birders (and field guides) and the relative lack of accurate published ID information on how to distinguish it in immature plumages from Hen Harrier.*

*The Scottish record (2nd British) was a juvenile on North Ronaldsay, Orkney from 24 September to 3 October 2008. The other five accepted records involve a second-winter male at Selsset Reservoir, County Durham on 22 February 2009, a juvenile/first-winter male at various sites on the north Norfolk coast from 27 October 2010 to 27 February 2011, a juvenile female at Ouse Washes RSPB Reserve, Cambridgeshire on 18 October to 12 November 2013, an adult male at Men-an-Tol, near Morvah, Cornwall on 23 November and an adult male which flew north over Portland, Dorset on 21 April 2014. As such there is no clearcut geographical bias to records, though individuals appear to arrive in autumn, and then presumably over-winter in Britain or elsewhere in Europe and head north again in spring. There are numerous records from southern Ireland from Co. Wicklow and particularly Tacumshin, Co. Wexford since 2009 - mostly involving juvenile birds but also a second-winter male and these include several long-staying and over-wintering individuals.*

# Pallid Harrier, 10–12 October 2015 - the first Isle of May record

## B. Outram

It was Saturday 10 October, there was an easterly wind and I was on my own on the Isle of May. With Steely (SNH warden, David Steel) being off for the weekend and only (House) Mouse researchers working hard in Fluke Street, I was trying to stay out and about as much as possible. It was mid-afternoon and I was just heading down to the south end to take a sign down, packing away items for the winter on the island. I stopped to chat to the Bird Observatory residents, who were present in the ringing hut as I was heading down.

Once at the Mousehouse field, beside the site of the old Visitors' Centre, I could see a large orange-toned bird of prey hovering over the south end, through binoculars I had a good look and immediately thought 'harrier' from the facial markings and overall shape. As I haven't seen many before I ran back to the ringing hut to find the Low Lighters, but they had all disappeared, so I ran to get my camera and had a quick flick through the Collins Guide. At this point, I was thinking Pallid Harrier, but knowing these are rare, I knew I needed to get a better view and some photos.

I went back to where I had originally seen it, but it was nowhere to be seen, so I rang my other half, Ciaran, who is the Assistant Warden on Fair Isle, to get advice whilst running up to the South Plateau to get a view over the island. There was again no sign of it over the land, Ciaran suggested that at this time of year, anything is possible, but the identification of harriers isn't always straightforward. There had been a Hen Harrier seen a week earlier on the island, but he wasn't about to fob it off (I think he must have learned from the Red Grouse episode earlier in the year!). He gave me advice and listed the features I should look out for. So, I walked along the cliffs and back down to head up the north end, walking across the high west cliffs it was all a bit quiet and I had lost hope thinking it had flown off. I sat scanning over Rona, but still saw nothing. I headed back through the 'owl grass' thinking I could at least go in search of the Hoopoe which had been present since the previous Tuesday and there it was again - the gingery raptor was there by the Beacon hovering and looking for prey. It started to fly north, over the Low Light and out the sea, I managed to get my camera up and took a couple of distant shots as it flew past and then it was gone heading straight to the Fife mainland. It must have been up the east side as I had been along the west.

I was so happy and relieved I found it again and could definitely identify it as a Pallid Harrier, with its four visible primary tips, striking orange underparts and the obvious pale neck collar in contrast with the black 'boa'. I was in contact with Steely who was at the football and sent him and Ciaran the photos and both could confirm it was indeed a Pallid Harrier - the first for the Isle of May! I couldn't believe it; I had found another first (following the Red Grouse in the spring)!

It was a shame that others didn't manage to see the bird that day, but unbelievably, after a couple of days of great birding (three Firecrests, stacks



Plate 60. Pallid Harrier, Isle of May, October 2015.  
© Bex Outram



of Yellow-browed Warblers and an Olive-backed Pipit) the bird, presumably the same individual rather than a different one, flew back over the island on 12 October around 11:20. This was the exact time Steely got back to the island on the boat – jammy bugger! We left the shopping and luggage lying on the jetty and headed straight down to south end, where we saw it fly off south-east across the Forth. If it was the same bird, I wonder where it had been hiding in between sightings? A juvenile Pallid Harrier was seen later that day at 17:10–17:20 flying over Holy Island (north Northumberland), which as the harrier flies isn't too far at all.

**Bex Outram, Assistant SNH Warden,  
Isle of May.**

*Email: bex.outram@snh.gov.uk*

### The status of Pallid Harrier in Scotland

*This species breeds from the northern edge of the Black Sea eastwards through south-east Russia and northern Kazakhstan to southern Siberia and north-westernmost China. The entire population is migratory, and the vast majority winter in sub-Saharan and East Africa, eastern Pakistan, India and Burma, with a few in North Africa and the Middle East, and occasionally birds have over-wintered in Europe.*

*There have been 76 accepted records of Pallid Harrier in Britain to the end of 2014, with 37 of these in Scotland. The first British record was a second-year male on Fair Isle on 24 April to 8 May 1931 (when shot), with the next Scottish records (fourth & seventh British) not until a second-summer male was present at Bolfracks, near Aberfeldy (Perth & Kinross) on 5–7 May 1993 and a juvenile in the Exnaboe area, Mainland Shetland on 15–16 September 1993. Since then, apart from a second-summer male at Durkadale, Mainland Orkney on 18 April to 27 June & 13 September 1995 and a first-summer male at Haroldswick, Unst (Shetland) on 23–25 May 2003; all records have involved juveniles in autumn.*

*This change in pattern is not seen south of the border, where records still include older immatures and even adult birds. The earliest autumn find date in Scotland is 12 August on Fair Isle in 2011, and the latest 27 October - the*



**Plate 61.** Pallid Harrier, Isle of May, October 2015.  
© Bex Outram

*latter a juvenile female at Garnock Floods (Ayrshire) in 2011, which lingered to 7 November, with a marked peak in September. In England & Wales the 'autumn window' of find dates covers the whole period from 29 June to 30 December, though September is still the peak arrival month, and spring occurrences are still regular (38% of find dates).*

*The Northern Isles dominate Scottish records with 24 from Shetland, four on Fair Isle and three on Orkney compared to two in Argyll and singles in Highland, North-east Scotland, Perth & Kinross and Ayrshire. South of the border most records have been south of a line from Lincolnshire to Pembrokeshire, with eight in Norfolk and four on the Isles of Scilly, though five have been found in Yorkshire. Just under a third of Scottish records refer to birds only seen on one day, while the longest staying individual was the 1995 Orkney bird which was seen over a period of 149 days (it paired with a female Hen Harrier but did not breed successfully), while overwintering birds in the Stiffkey area, Norfolk in 2002/03 and at Lough Corrib, Co. Galway in 2011/12 were present for 97 and 188 days respectively.*

*There was an unprecedented influx of 29 birds into Britain in 2011 (20 in Scotland; Chapman 2012), which exactly doubled the previous overall total of individuals recorded, and four of the five Irish records came from this influx. This supports the idea that most sightings, particularly in Scotland, refer to post-breeding dispersal prior to southward migration to the wintering areas, though single birds have lingered in England during the winters of 2002/03, 2009/10 and 2015/16, and in Ireland in 2011/12.*

### Reference

**Chapman, M.S. 2012.** The autumn influx of Pallid Harriers into Western Europe 2011: a Scottish perspective. *Scottish Birds* 32(4): 340–349.

# Chestnut Bunting, Papa Westray, 19–29 October 2015

J. Branscombe



**Plate 62.** First-year male Chestnut Bunting, Papa Westray, Orkney, October 2015. © Jonathan Ford

In spring 2015 I moved to Papa Westray (Papay to the locals), an island four miles long and nearly a mile wide, nestled at the north-western edge of Orkney. Although I grew up spending as much time as possible birding at Fife Ness, since then I've spent years living in areas where unusual migrants were few and far between. Now I'm living in Papay, it is wonderful to be back in a place where just about anything is possible.

Papay hasn't been very well watched over the years. Having said that, the birders who spent a week here in October 2014 found an Ovenbird, and the island has also had the likes of Steller's Eider, Scops Owl, several Snowy Owls, Steppe Grey Shrike, Melodious Warbler, Red-flanked Bluetail and Black-headed Bunting. It is clear it gets good birds from all quarters.

A White-rumped Sandpiper was my highlight this spring. This autumn, I enjoyed the Icterine and Barred Warblers, a Turtle Dove and Bluethroat along with the host of Yellow-browed Warblers passing through the island. However, perhaps I am someone who is never truly satisfied as by mid-October I was grumping about, muttering that I'd still never found a BB rarity anywhere, ever.

Then it happened. On Monday 19 October, I was out birding with Michael Schott who was visiting us. A bunting flew up from a pile of garden waste, called "stit", and landed briefly in a shrubby Sycamore. I immediately thought it was rare, but then it was off. All I'd seen was a brownish-grey bird with a strongly chestnut rump and well-streaked brown flanks. Michael had seen the extensive yellow wash on its belly. In the end though, we convinced ourselves that it must have been a Yellowhammer.

We got two more brief glimpses of the bird over the next 24 hours, and took a couple of photos - which showed some chestnut present on the face. That didn't look right for Yellowhammer. We put the pictures on-line, and within hours Chestnut Bunting was being discussed as the most likely possibility. From the other characters that we had seen - but which weren't visible in the awful photos - I was pretty sure it had to have been one. But now it seemed that the bird had gone.

From the Tuesday afternoon onwards, we looked repeatedly where we'd seen it before briefly on three occasions, and indeed we felt we'd been looking everywhere else on the island too, but

we just couldn't refind it. With all past UK records of Chestnut Buntings having been assigned to Category E as presumed escapes, we'd had a first-year, at the right time of year, and where true vagrancy was to be expected, and it had got away! I had been grumpy earlier in the month, but now I was in despair.

By Saturday 24th, after days of searching, I had no hope left. Michael's trip had been enlivened by a Glossy Ibis coming in off the sea from the north-west on the Friday afternoon, but if anything the bunting that had got away had really soured his time here. We gave up, and decided to go sightseeing, and set off to the island's Stone Age farmstead of Knap of Howar. At least that wouldn't have flown away.

We were going down the track to the Knap when Michael said "What's that?" and I could hear what sounded a bit like a Robin ticking. And there it was, grovelling around on the track about 15 metres away. It gave great views, notes and photos were taken, calls were made and I went from agony to ecstasy. We watched the Chestnut Bunting for over four hours until dusk.

**Plate 63.** First-year male Chestnut Bunting, Papa Westray, Orkney, October 2015. © Jonathan Ford

About a dozen islanders came out to see the bird that afternoon. Barrie Hamill even made the late afternoon scheduled plane from Mainland Orkney, and was delighted to see it well in the failing light. That evening spent with Barrie and Michael at Papay's regular Saturday night "pub-in-a-cupboard" was very special indeed.

The bird – immediately named 'Chester' – was still there in the morning. Very soon the unfamiliar drone of charter planes could be heard over the island, as folk flew in from Yorkshire or were shuttled in from Kirkwall and Wick. Chester spent most of his time on the track itself, feeding on the seeds of Annual Meadow Grass on the edge of the wheel ruts. When there was a crowd, he tended to edge away, but he was unafraid, especially when there were just a few birders there, coming within two or three metres at times.

He was very obliging for the next four days – a huge contrast to his initial behaviour. At least 120 people twitched him successfully. He stayed until dark on 29 October, but that night was clear and there was no sign of him on the 30th, much to the disappointment of the birders who arrived that day.







Plate 64. First-year male Chestnut Bunting, Papa Westray, Orkney, October 2015. © Jonathan Ford

This sighting fits an emerging pattern of immature Chestnut Buntings occurring in western Europe in late October and November. In contrast, the previous UK records – none since 2002 and all currently judged to have been escapes – were generally adult birds at less usual times of year for long-range Siberian vagrants. Since the 1990s, I understand that Chestnut Buntings have become much rarer in captivity due to import restrictions. Did anyone in Europe manage to breed one in captivity in 2015, and then leave the cage door open?

Anyone wanting to question the origins of this cracking little bird will seize on its confiding nature. However, I've seen young birds recently arrived from the Arctic or Siberia – from Snow Buntings and Dunlin to a Lanceolated Warbler – which have been just as tame. I think that Chester turned up hungry after a very long journey, spent a day or two casting around for the richest food source on the island (finding it four days before Michael and I did) and then settled down to feed up furiously before moving on. We'll see what BOURC makes of this one, but I think we found what will (hopefully) be judged as the first vagrant Chestnut Bunting for Britain and Ireland.

We may have been very confused initially, but the identification was pretty easy in the end. The photos probably say it all, but key features were the chestnut on the rump and tertials, the all-dark tail, the extensive yellow on belly and lower breast fringed by neat fine streaks, and the subtle head pattern with evenly-brown ear coverts and a noticeably contrasting sub-moustachial stripe.

An article in *British Birds* (Votier & Bradshaw 1996) was invaluable in enabling us to age the bird. The tertials and most of the coverts were juvenile, but the innermost greater covert on each wing had been moulted (differing in having broad gingery fringes, without obvious white tips). The lesser coverts were rarely visible but at least some of them were bright chestnut which also will have been recently moulted. We believe that the chestnut tones in the crown and ear-coverts indicate that it was a first-year male.

When seen close up, it looked tiny – visitors were often stunned by how minute it was. Having said that, its size didn't strike us in our glimpses of the bird on 19–20 October. Throughout its stay it could give a rather different impression of its appearance from

moment to moment. It often showed little or no apparent yellow when on the ground, in contrast to how beautifully bright its belly looked when it flew up onto one of the dykes. The tone of the head and upperparts also changed noticeably depending on the angle and light.

I've not seen Yellow-breasted Bunting which tends to be cited as the most similar species. That species was never in the frame when trying to identify this bird, despite my rubbish photos having led to a very wide range of bunting species being discussed on birding forums on 20–21 October. Whilst the eventual stunning views showed it to be very clearly different from a Yellowhammer, now that I am calmly reflective, I feel our original mistake in writing it off as such is not quite as embarrassing after all. I suggest you all have a careful look at the range of plumage variation in Yellowhammer, next time you are in a stubble field or a migrant site in autumn, just so you are sure what the grotty ones look like. Perhaps it won't be one!

Papa Westray is a great place to live, as well as to go birding. I am extremely grateful to the warm and supportive community, who were very tolerant of October's excitement – and generally interested. I'd like to offer particular thanks to the staff at the airfield and hostel, to Jonathan Ford (the Papay Ranger) who did so much to make sure the twitch went well, and to Neil and Jocelyn Rendall whose land was graced by Chester.

## Reference

Votier, S. & Bradshaw, C. 1996. Identification of Chestnut Bunting. *British Birds* 89: 437–449.

*Julian Branscombe, Papa Westray, Orkney*  
Email: [julianbranscombe@yahoo.com](mailto:julianbranscombe@yahoo.com)

## Status of Chestnut Bunting in Scotland

*This species breeds in south-eastern Siberia eastwards to the Sea of Okhotsk and south to Mongolia and north-eastern China. The entire population is migratory and winters in Burma, southern China, western Thailand, Vietnam and Laos. As such its breeding and winter ranges overlap with several bunting species recorded as vagrants in Britain, being most similar to Yellow-browed and Black-faced Buntings, but also including Pine, Yellow-breasted, Little and Rustic Buntings although this latter group all have breeding ranges stretching much further west into Europe.*

*There have been eight previous records in Britain, with five of these in Scotland: an adult male on Foula, Shetland on 9–13 July 1974; a first-year female on the Isle of May on 11 June 1985; a first-summer male on Fair Isle on 15–16 June 1986; an immature male on Bardsey, Caernarfonshire on 18–19 June 1986; an adult female on Out Skerries, Shetland on 2–5 September 1994; a male at Salthouse, Norfolk on 30 May to 1 June 1998; a first-summer male at Whitburn, County Durham on 17–20 May 2000 and an adult female on Fair Isle on 4–7 September 2002. Although the records are all from known vagrant-finding hotspots, the preponderance of adult birds rather than immatures, and the fact that the find dates did not fit the pattern of mid to late autumn arrival seen with the occurrence of other rare eastern buntings, meant that these records were initially placed in Category D and subsequently Category E by BOURC (in 2009) as probable escapes.*

*There are at least nine accepted records of Chestnut Bunting from Europe which do conform to the expected pattern of first-year birds found in late September and October: Netherlands (November 1937), Norway (October 1974 & October 2010), Malta (November 1983), Slovenia (October 1987), Finland (September/October 2002), France (October 2009 & October 2014) and Hungary (September 2011). The 2015 Orkney bird fits well with these records.*



# Wilson's Warbler, Port Nis, Isle of Lewis, 13–17 October 2015 - the first Scottish record

B.A.E. Marr & R.H. Dennis



Plate 65. Wilson's Warbler, Port Nis, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, October 2015. © Graham Jepson

As we reached the top of the garden and went through the gate into the field beyond, a slight movement and a flash of yellow caught Tony's eye. A tiny bird was flying along the top of the main boundary hedge. 'Roy – there's a Goldcrest flying towards us'. It landed in the vegetation atop a small Sitka Spruce tree only ten metres from us. As we lifted our binoculars, it moved forward and faced us. We gasped. It was vivid, luminous, glowing, bright yellow, with plain olive green wings and tail, and appeared to have a small black cap! We took all this in during a heart-stopping second or two, and called in unison 'It's a Wilson's Warbler' (Tony's shout needed an expletive to be deleted). Then it was gone.

We looked at each other in stunned silence. We could remember the last, and only, British one, at Rame Head, Cornwall, decades ago; and then recollected that there had been one in Ireland a

couple of years ago, although most British birders 'don't count Ireland'. We were to learn quickly that the Cornish one had been seen on this self-same date, 13 October, in 1985 – 30 years ago. This was just the first of a number of extraordinary coincidences in what became an almost-week-long event.

What do we do now? We must get a photograph. We must phone it in. People will come. A lot of people will come - the Cornish bird had stayed for just one afternoon and was seen by only ten people. Will it still be here tomorrow? How do we organize a twitch? Who should we tell? We swithered in a no-man's land between triumphant elation and complete disbelief. But if there was one vital lesson we two old chaps had learned through our combined age of 150 years, it was not to leave the scene of the crime! Stay put. It will probably return. So we waited, and waited, and waited.



And it did return, but not for long. After what felt like an eternity, but was actually only 25 minutes, Roy spotted it in some low shallows some 20 m from the last sighting. Once more it immediately flew into deep cover and again completely vanished. We spent the next three hours looking in vain for our beautiful little colourful waif. But before that, we had to make some decisions. Having perhaps a little more recent experience than Roy of the habits and needs of twitchers, Tony knew that the imperative was to let people know as soon as possible, to help them to start planning their journeys to 'one of Britain's remotest outposts', as BBRC described the Isle of Lewis in its *Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2014*.

It was now 14:45 on 13 October. Decision time. With two very brief sightings under our belts; a quick check of the literature to eliminate Yellow Warbler, which we had both seen in North America; confirming also that it just could not be any other North American wood warbler; and with four hours of daylight remaining in which to relocate, and hopefully photograph, the bird; we agreed that we would phone out the news at 15:00 hrs.

We wondered what the morrow would bring, and set off around the garden again to try to relocate our little golden friend. The garden is about half an acre in size, planted as a windbreak in this wild and exposed northern tip of Lewis, and in places is dense and virtually impenetrable, with a lot of Sitka Spruce, so finding one individual bird here is never easy. Great patience is needed.

We had one very important task to complete before doing the rounds of the garden. Tony has permission from David and Dolina Nichols, the owners of the garden behind Burnside, his own house, to go into their big garden any time he wants, to look for birds. But things would be quite different for a twitch, and potentially a big one. We called on David, explained the situation, and were very grateful when he said it would be no problem for him; Dolina was away at the Gaelic Mod in Oban for the whole week, and as it transpired was to miss all the fun.

Three hours later we experienced another strange quirk of fate. Two RSPB staff arrived at Tony's house around 18:00 hrs, having just driven the 100-or-so miles from the southern part of Harris

Plate 66. Wilson's Warbler, Port Nis, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, October 2015. © Matt Eade



on receiving a message about the bird from an RSPB colleague, Dave Flumm, an old friend of Tony's from near Penzance. They had been en route to the Shiant Isles to join a team setting up a rat eradication project. We whizzed them up to the garden, and half an hour later they scored. They even clearly saw the warbler's black cap, thus eliminating any lingering doubts we may have had. We had a wild celebration in the house over a cup of tea before they left, Tony's stocks of champagne having previously been exhausted by toasting an Eastern Subalpine Warbler seen earlier in the autumn.

In the event, Wednesday was a slow-burning success. The first few car loads of twitchers were outside around 9.00 am, ready to 'follow on-site directions' as instructed by the pagers and smartphones of the bird information services, and we were ready for them. The location was perfect, at the northern end of the road up from Stornoway, with parking space, toilets and only 50 yards to walk.

The first necessity was to find the bird, which took about an hour on a dull, cool morning. Presumably still tired and hungry, like the previous day our quarry was really elusive, unseen for long periods and appearing for sometimes just a few seconds. This was particularly frustrating for the photographers present, and by the end of the

Wednesday I had seen only one acceptable image, really just a record shot. About 60 people arrived to see the bird on the Wednesday and also on Thursday, and with improving weather, and by now a more active bird, some really good pictures were obtained. The local newspaper held the front page for photographs, and on Friday published the first of two major reports on the twitch. This was the largest gathering of birders on Lewis since the Purple Martin at the Butt of Lewis in September 2004. A group arrived on a charter flight from the Midlands into Stornoway on Thursday. When it was suggested to them that it was rather expensive at £450 a head, they said that Flybe were charging £550 for a standard scheduled return!

Friday saw another charter flight arrive, and on Saturday, an exquisite warm, still and sunny day, the bird gave a bravado display of activity right around the garden, visible every few minutes, and offering terrific opportunities for the photographers. The warbler was stuffing itself with insects, grubs and bugs, especially in the apple trees, and clearly building up its energy ready for departure. It left that night.

Over the five days around 250 people came to see the bird, and although it was often mobile and elusive, most people's patience was eventually rewarded with great views and

Plate 67. Wilson's Warbler, Port Nis, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, October 2015. © Matt Eade



photographs. David Nichols, other neighbours including Carol and John Burgis and Tony himself gave arriving birders a warm Lewis welcome, clear directions on where best to see the bird and much-appreciated refreshments, including cups of tea and coffee and bacon and sausage rolls to keep them going after their long journeys and a sleepless night.

The customary twitch collection (a bucket shaken under happy birders' noses when they have seen the bird) produced £500 which has been donated to a local man with a severely autistic son, to spend on improving his son's quality of life. The man's name is - John Wilson! He is a local birdwatcher who also saw the bird. Another wee coincidence in this good news story!

The bird itself was utterly charismatic, cute and spectacular. Its tiny size, vivid colours, neat little black skull cap and unbelievably fast movements produced more 'wows' and cheers than one usually hears at a twitch. It turned out to be a situation where everybody won. The location was easy to find and to access. The twitchers got the bird and the photographers eventually secured some wonderful photos, while the island's ferry company, airlines, car-hire firms, hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, shops, restaurants and bars did brisk business.

The arrival of the bird was totally unexpected because it appeared in a relatively settled period of weather. A week or so before, Hurricane Joaquin had been heading vigorously towards western Britain, but had been deflected by a huge high pressure system sitting over Britain. The expiring hurricane separated into one part heading south-eastwards towards Iberia and France, causing torrential rain and floods, with the rest heading north-eastwards towards Iceland. Our bird was presumably caught up in the latter, maybe making landfall in Iceland and later heading south-eastwards and stopping in the Outer Hebrides.

Several people asked who the Wilson after whom the warbler is named was. He was Alexander Wilson, a Scot who was born in Paisley in 1766 (see Zonfrillo & Monaghan 2013). He earned a meagre living as a poet and peddler, and was imprisoned for libel during a

labour dispute. Released in 1794 he emigrated to the United States, where he developed a serious interest in birds and became known as the pioneering 'Father of American Ornithology' and the greatest American ornithologist before Audubon. He published the nine-volume 'American Ornithology' and had several bird species named after him, including the warbler, a storm-petrel, a plover, a phalarope and a snipe. Many of these have also reached Britain.

Alexander Wilson would surely have been delighted had he known that the warbler given his name in the USA would attract such attention, awe and admiration in Scotland, almost 200 years later and only 200 miles from where he was born. Even better, it has enabled a distant relative to benefit from the generosity of his warbler's admirers. Perhaps John Wilson will be tempted to trace his family tree!

#### Reference

Zonfrillo, B. & Monaghan, P. 2013. Alexander Wilson Bicentenary. *Scottish Birds* 33(1): 54–56.

**Tony Marr, Port of Ness, Lewis  
& Roy Dennis, Moray**  
Email: [baemarr@btinternet.com](mailto:baemarr@btinternet.com)

*These two 'senior' birders have long and distinguished involvement in various aspects of British ornithology and still inspire the rest of us! This find caps a series of top birds found in the northern tip of Lewis by Tony in recent years, e.g. Black-winged Pratincole (Scottish Birds 32: 362–365), though his identification of Britain's first Greater Sandplover at Pagharn Harbour, Sussex in December 1978 runs it close. Roy is probably best known to the current generation of birders for his work with raptors, but his earlier spells as an Observatory warden saw him find several British's firsts including Northern Oriole on Lundy in October 1958, Song Sparrow on Fair Isle in April 1959 and Sykes's Warbler there in August 1959 - an amazing 'purple patch', and Cretzschmar's Bunting on Fair Isle in June 1967 plus Scottish firsts of Olive-backed Pipit, Pallas's Warbler and Sardinian Warbler all on Fair Isle in the 1960s - though apparently there were more possibilities back then!*



# Autumn birding on Sanday, Orkney

## 'The Lady Boys'



Plate 68. Little Sea, Sanday, Orkney. A productive site for waders. © Mark Lewis

For five consecutive autumns (2011–15) a group of five or six birders have visited the island of Sanday, north eastern Orkney, during a period covering mid-September to early October. This article aims to give a flavour of our experience to date.

The original decision to visit Sanday was based on several factors – we were keen to do something a little different and have somewhere to ourselves, and we'd had relatively unsuccessful trips elsewhere (such as Cornwall and the Outer Hebrides). Crucially, looking at its geographic position, Sanday looked very well placed for good birds in east coast fall conditions. Having now

explored the island for five consecutive autumns we can confirm that it gets its share of eastern migrants, but there's plenty more to it than that. To be clear, we are not making any claims that Sanday is the next Barra – while it gets rarities, it cannot compete with the likes of Fair Isle, or its neighbour North Ronaldsay. It could however be argued that it offers one of the most complete autumn birding experiences in Scotland, with a wide variety of waders, wildfowl, raptors and passerines available during September and October. The diversity of habitats means that even during 'slow' weeks we are recording upwards of 120 species. Over the course of our five autumn visits we have recorded 177 species.

Figure 1. Map of Sanday, Orkney. Contains OS data © Crown copyright 2016



### General birding

Sanday is a big island (about 20 km in length) and the distances between the better sites, shops, and accommodation make a car essential (although you could do it by bike if you were feeling intrepid). Despite recommending a car, a lot of legwork is also essential for birding Sanday. Many of the best sites are distant from roads, and, just as importantly, the whole island has turned up interesting birds, many of which might have been missed if had we not been walking between more obvious areas of water or cover. We conservatively estimate that each of us covers over 120 km during a week on Sanday, splitting up each day to try and maximise coverage.

We base ourselves in Lady, roughly in the middle of the island, for several reasons. It's well located for accessing the rest of the island, and has some excellent birding spots nearby. It also has an excellent shop, and until recently, was the home of the Sanday ranger, who has been very helpful indeed over the years. The only pubs on the island are several miles away in Kettletoft, so perhaps staying in Lady facilitates an earlier start most mornings, too! Another dubious benefit of being based there is that we can call ourselves 'The Lady Boys'!

In general land access has been straightforward. Most people have been extremely accommodating in terms of accessing gardens, and a knock on the door and a friendly chat is usually all it takes. That said, a respectful and common sense approach is always taken when considering access anywhere, and the cover around the school is avoided during classroom hours.

### Wildfowl

Wildfowl are a very prominent feature of the Sanday avifauna, and have received a good deal of attention from us.

Whooper Swans usually arrive at the end of September and can be found on the larger lochs, especially North and Bea Lochs. At this time of year, geese start pouring through as well. The island has an increasing resident population of Greylags which is augmented by further arrivals from Iceland, along with a sometimes heavy passage of Pink-footed Geese. Among these

birds the odd wanderer occurs, with Barnacle regular, and White-fronted, Cackling, and Snow Goose all being found. It's worth remembering that there are free-flying resident white phase Snow Geese breeding on Orkney - which would make claims of this form a little more dubious, but a blue phase bird arriving with pinkies and Greylags (such as our bird from September 2012) would have much better credentials.

During our autumn visits we would expect to encounter over 1,000 Wigeon and several hundred Mallard. Teal must also be present in the high hundreds, but as they are spread around all over the island, coming up with a representative total for them has proved very difficult. Pintail are also well represented, with over 100 present in some years.

Such large numbers of ducks must make the island attractive to rarer species too. Our visits unfortunately coincide with a period when males birds are still in eclipse, making identifying many species a lot more difficult, and as such our list of ducks isn't perhaps what it could be. An American Wigeon was well picked out in 2013 with another, or perhaps the same bird returning in 2014. A Smew in 2013 was a great record for the northern isles – but we could easily be overlooking species such as Green-winged Teal. Sanday has previous with rare ducks, recording Scotland's first Canvasback (on Loch of Rhummie, near North Loch), which was found while the observers were watching a White-winged Black Tern!



**Plate 69.** North Loch, Sanday, Orkney. The southern end of the loch can be excellent for waders and wildfowl. © Mark Lewis



**Plate 70.** Start Point, Sanday, Orkney. Seawatching, waders and wildfowl on the loch, and loads of migrant potential. © Mark Lewis

The best places for viewing wildfowl are the larger lochs. North Loch has the best track record for attracting the largest numbers (and has held both American Wigeons) but in some years, other lochs have been favoured. Bea Loch, Roos Loch, and the loch on Start Point are all well worth checking. North Loch can be viewed from the road that runs along its east side, with slightly better viewing from the buildings on the east and west sides at the southern end of the loch - note that these may not be accessible, depending on access to fields. Bea Loch is best viewed from the east side, just south of Castlehill, and Roos Loch can be viewed best from the car along either of the roads that flank it.

### Seabirds

Seawatching hasn't generally been a high priority on our trips, resulting in a relatively small amount of effort to date. Brief seawatches in 2014 revealed good numbers of Sooty Shearwaters passing close in to Start Point, and they have also been seen from other locations. A little more effort in 2015 from the east end revealed another strong passage of Sooty Shearwaters (86 birds in two hours) as well as a lone Balearic Shearwater. More seawatching in 2015 from south facing viewpoints produced Grey Phalarope and Pomarine Skuas.

Greater effort and at a more productive time of year would undoubtedly be rewarded – North Ronaldsay has a decent track record for rarer seabirds and there's no reason why concerted effort at the east end couldn't produce similar. As well as looking out for shearwaters and petrels there are usually divers available (White-billed must be an option at the right times of year), plenty of visible wildfowl passage, and Black Guillemots.

Start Point, at the east end of Sanday offers the best position for seawatching. However, crossing over to Start Point is only possible at low tide. Seawatching at the tip of the 'mainland' can also produce results without the worry of getting cut off. As with all east coast seawatching, early mornings appear to be the most fruitful times, but with the complication of the rising sun.

### Raptors

A typical week in late September/early October sees multiple records of Hen Harrier with fewer, but still regular Peregrine and Merlin. Kestrels can be seen anywhere, as can Sparrowhawks and there have been a few records of Common Buzzard from 2013 onward. Two of these have been wing-tagged birds that have made short movements from mainland Orkney. Rare raptors must be a possibility (look at North Ronaldsay's Northern Harrier and *calidus* type Peregrine, in recent years).

### Waders

Sanday is impressive for the abundance of common waders. Typical numbers present in late September/early October would be approximately:

- 3,000 Golden Plover
- 100 Grey Plover (good total for northern isles)
- 600+ Dunlin
- 1,000+ Sanderling
- 1,000 Bar-tailed Godwit

All of these birds are present along with unknowable numbers of Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank, Ringed Plover etc. There were also exceptional numbers of Snipe present in 2013, with a conservative estimate of 10,000 on the island. With all these birds and the great array of habitats available, it's inevitable that some rarer species turn up. A dowitcher sp. seen briefly by one of our group in 2015 was almost





**Plate 71.** American Golden Plover, September 2013. A regular Sanday scarcity. © Mark Lewis

certainly a Long-billed Dowitcher, but unfortunately evaded attempts to relocate it and clinch the ID. We have had multiple records of American Golden Plover in three years, and at least four Buff-breasted Sandpipers have been recorded. Pectoral Sandpipers are almost annual, with probably five birds in 2012 - and possibly even more than that. Ruff, Greenshank, Curlew Sandpiper and Whimbrel are recorded most years, and we have also seen Little Stint, Wood Sandpiper and Jack Snipe. The rare 'peeps' still elude us - but that's a good reason to keep going back.

For sheer number of waders, The Cata Sand and Little Sea are the best places to watch, although the large intertidal area at Stove probably deserves more coverage than we've given it. Golden Plover flocks have proved most productive in terms of rarities. They can be difficult to pin down, but fields south of Whitemill Bay, around North Loch, between Overbister and the Little Sea, and around Bea Loch are worth checking.

### **Gulls and terns**

There are few areas that regularly hold large gatherings of gulls on Sanday – fields around the larger lochs sometimes hold roosts but these have yet to turn up any major birds. Recently cut stubble fields are also worth checking. 2013 was a bumper year for gulls though with our first Iceland Gull being eclipsed by a cracking adult Laughing Gull that remained on the island for most of our stay, and 2015 yielded two different Glaucous Gulls. Terns are generally uncommon due to the timing of our trips, but we generally encounter small numbers of Sandwich and 'commic' terns most years.

### **Passerines**

There aren't many resident passerine species on Sanday, but even at times when there is no apparent movement of birds, there are usually plenty of Wheatears, Meadow Pipits, Linnets and a few Twite to be seen. Starlings are everywhere, as are Hooded Crows and Ravens

**Plate 72.** Cata Sand, Sanday, Orkney. On a rising tide, this site can hold impressive numbers of waders. © Mark Lewis





**Plate 73.** Laughing Gull, Sanday, Orkney, October 2013. The UK's only Laughing Gull that year. © *Tim Sykes*

are common (up to 60 can be seen together in some places, and a huge count of over 130 birds was recorded on a spring visit), Snow Buntings can occur anywhere, but Lapland Buntings favour the eastern end of the island.

Classic drift migrant passerines can and do turn up anywhere. Over the five years we've had multiple Red-backed Shrikes, Barred Warblers,

Bluethroats, Common Rosefinches and of course Yellow-browed Warblers, along with singles of Wryneck, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Icterine Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Woodlark (an excellent Scottish record – as rare as White's Thrush!) Little Bunting, Richard's Pipit, and Blyth's Reed Warbler (Table 1). Not too bad considering we've had predominantly south-westerly winds in each of our trips. However, we were extremely fortunate to record a Swainson's Thrush in 2015. 'Classic' conditions for falls have been few and far between, but on two occasions, easterly winds have produced falls of passerine migrants and these have been amongst the most enjoyable days we have had on Sanday. The 19 Yellow-browed Warblers in a single day in 2012 was especially memorable, and this demonstrated that birds can be found all over the island in these conditions, not just at the east end.

Along with the aforementioned Woodlark, we have done well for other species that are hard to get on the Northern Isles. Yellowhammer, Yellow Wagtail, Blue Tit, Wood Warbler and Great Spotted Woodpecker all fit into this category.

It should though be mentioned that some groups of passerines are likely to be hard to find

**Table 1.** Annual occurrence of some scarcer species on Sanday, Orkney, 2011–15.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Snow Goose		1			
Cackling Goose			3		
American Wigeon			1	1	
Smew			1		
Balearic Shearwater					1
American Golden Plover		2	3		2
Pectoral Sandpiper		5	1		1
Buff-breasted Sandpiper		1	2		
Dowitcher dowitcher sp.					1
Grey Phalarope					1
Laughing Gull			1		
Wryneck	1				
Woodlark			1		
Richard's Pipit	1				
Bluethroat		1		1	1
Swainson's Thrush					1
Barred Warbler	1		1	2	1
Blyth's Reed Warbler		1			
Icterine Warbler			1		
Greenish Warbler					1
Yellow-browed Warbler	3	19	15	12	15
Red-breasted Flycatcher			1		
Red-backed Shrike	1	1	1	1	1
Common Rosefinch	1	2		1	1
Little Bunting	1				

or relocate on Sanday. The size of the island and the sheer amount of open habitat perhaps explains our poor return for groups such as scarce/rare pipits or Short-toed Lark, the latter of which we are yet to find. Unlike some of the other Northern Isles, which are covered in large areas of moorland and bog, there are few areas of Sanday that are inhospitable to birds, with much of the island comprising improved or semi-improved farmland. The patches of cover are often quite dense, especially in some of the gardens. There are also some dauntingly large Iris beds which we have so far not made much attempt to work, as well as numerous ditches. So while turning up a Northern Isles speciality such as a rare *Locustella* warbler is a dream, this is perhaps not what Sanday is best suited to.

Sanday is a flat island and, when you see the bulk of Fair Isle on the horizon, and the height of Stronsay to the south you wonder whether this may work against it to some degree in attracting migrants. Our experience to date, and that of North Ronaldsay, suggests it isn't a major issue.

### Summary

Sanday provides a great all-round autumn birding experience with the numbers and diversity of waders and wildfowl complementing its ability to turn up interesting migrant passerines, and other rarities. The island is large, meaning a car is probably essential, but even then reasonable coverage can only be achieved by a group of birders splitting up and walking long distances each day. This means that it is unlikely that Sanday will ever rival smaller Northern Isles in terms of number of rarities, but for us this does not detract from the enjoyable birding experience it offers. Every trip has been different which is reflected in what we consider to be an impressive list of species given that each trip has been at a similar time of year. One of the great things about returning to Sanday is that we have really got to know the island and where the best areas are. Therefore, as soon as we get off the boat, we now know where to look to get an idea of whether there is much around. This year (2015), in our first 40 minutes on the island, we collectively saw American Golden Plover, an unstreaked *Acrocephalus* which unfortunately got away, Yellow-browed Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. It's a real joy to know

somewhere like Sanday so well. We hope to continue our trips and also see what the mid to late October period brings. With Shetland seemingly receiving ever-increasing numbers of autumn rarity-hunters, other parts of Orkney surely offer similar opportunities to Sanday for those who want to avoid the crowds and are prepared to put in the hard graft to find birds. Aside from North Ronaldsay with its superb track record, there are some good recent finds on Westray, Papa Westray is a neat, workable size (and hosting potentially Britain's first Chestnut Bunting as we write!), and islands such as Stronsay are well placed to receive quality birds. With 20 inhabited islands and 50 more islands and skerries to choose from, there is much scope for exploring Orkney as an autumn birding destination.

*'The Lady Boys' are: David Douglas, Graeme Garner, Iain Hartley, Mark Lewis, Tim Sykes and Andrew Whewell.*

**Correspondance address: Mark Lewis,**  
*Email: lewis\_sparky@yahoo.co.uk*

**Plate 74.** Swainson's Thrush, Sanday, Orkney, September 2015.  
The rarity we'd been hoping for for five years! © Tim Sykes





# Field identification of Russian Common Gull and its occurrence in Scotland

C. Gibbins & P. Adriaens



**Plate 75.** Second-cycle *Larus canus heinei* ('Russian Common Gull'), Istanbul, Turkey, 7 January 2014. © Chris Gibbins. The lack of a mirror on primary 9 and extensive black in the wingtip (black extending inwards as far as primary 3, and critically the full band across primary 4) are indicative of *heinei* at this age; the strong black markings in the secondaries and vivid bill tones further support identification, as do the pattern of head streaking (dark largely confined to nape) and the extensive brown cast to the wing coverts. This is an identifiable Russian Common Gull.

The Common Gull *Larus canus* is generally considered to consist of four subspecies: nominate *L. c. canus* (hereafter referred to as '*canus*'), breeding in Britain and Europe (including parts of European Russia), 'Russian Common Gull' *L. c. heinei* throughout Russia and Siberia, 'Kamchatka Gull' *L. c. kamtschatschensis* in eastern Siberia, and 'Short-billed Gull' *L. c. brachyrhynchus* (sometimes treated as a full species) in western North America. 'Russian Common Gull' (hereafter referred to simply as '*heinei*') is thought to be a regular winter visitor to Europe (Bengtsson & Pedersen 1998), but the lack of known field characters has hindered assessment of its true status. Its occurrence in Britain is based only on a small number of ringing recoveries (Parkin & Knox 2010) and it has not yet officially been recorded in Scotland.

The identification of extralimital *heinei* has generally been considered impossible in the field (Malling Olsen & Larsson 2003, Howell & Dunn 2007). On average *heinei* is larger than *canus* and so trapped birds have been

identified using biometrics: a bird with a wing length of more than 390 mm is generally considered to be *heinei* (e.g. Schmitz & Degros 1988, Kompanje & Post 1990, Kompanje & Post 1993, Bengtsson & Pedersen 1998, Hein & Martens 2002). However, as more studies are being carried out, breeding *canus* with wing lengths of up to 395 mm have been recorded (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003). Thus, even with trapped birds, relying solely on size to identify *heinei* can be problematic.

As part of work on all four Common Gull taxa, we recently developed criteria that allow *heinei* of all age groups to be separated from *canus* in the field (Adriaens & Gibbins 2016). Here we summarise these criteria and discuss what the status of *heinei* might be in Scotland.

## Methods

A detailed methodology is described in Adriaens & Gibbins (2016), so only a summary is provided here. We studied both taxa in the field within accepted core ranges (Table 1). To supplement field studies we examined

**Table 1.** Summary of all locations and sample sizes for adult and second-cycle Common Gulls included in the analysis. Third-cycle types, and birds from the presumed intergradation zones, were excluded from the analysis and therefore are not listed in this table.

Taxon	Age	Location	Season	Number of birds
<i>canus</i>	adult	Estonia	summer	94
		Finland	summer	47
		Iceland	summer	6
		Netherlands	summer	1
		Norway	summer	1
		Russia	summer	3
		Scotland	summer	250
	<b>total = 402</b>			
	second-cycle	Estonia	breeding	6
		Finland	summer	5
		Iceland	summer	2
		Netherlands	summer	2
		Russia	summer	5
Scotland		winter	101	
<b>total = 121</b>				
<i>heinei</i>	adult	Georgia	winter	163
		Istanbul, Turkey	winter	97
		Kazakhstan	summer	10
		Russia (western)	summer	20
		Siberia (Russia east of Ob River)	summer	40
	<b>total = 330</b>			
	second-cycle	Georgia	winter	79
		Istanbul, Turkey	winter	37
		Kazakhstan	summer	1
		north-west China	winter	1
Russia (western)		summer	1	
Siberia (Russia east of Ob river)	summer	12		
<b>total = 131</b>				

specimens of both taxa in the Zoological Museum of Moscow, collected in breeding areas extending from European to Eastern Russia, including birds from the overlap zone. We were also sent photographic material from Estonia and Finland. All locations of sample birds are shown in Figure 1. We then developed a scoring system for adult and second-cycle<sup>1</sup> birds to characterise wing-tip features and bare parts (Tables 2 and 3). Scoring (402 adult and 121 second-cycle *canus*, and 330 adult and 131 second-cycle *heinei*) was done from

photographs or directly from examination of skins. We also produced general categories to help describe the tail and rump patterns of first-cycle birds. The frequency (% of sample) of different tail and rump patterns shown by first-cycle birds of each taxon was calculated to help compare them. Sample sizes for this analysis, as well as those for assessment of post-juvenile moult, are given in respective figures. We also measured the wing lengths and assessed the upperpart grey tones of the specimens we examined in Moscow.

<sup>1</sup> **Footnote.** We use the term 'cycle' to avoid the confusion and ambiguity that comes with other ageing systems and associated terminology. A plumage cycle runs from the start of one complete moult to the start of the next. The first-cycle starts with juvenile plumage. A bird is in its first-cycle until it commences its first complete moult, signalled by the shedding of its first primary in the summer of its second calendar year (when it is around nine months old). Once this moult has commenced it is in its second-cycle, and it is considered a second-cycle until it commences its second complete moult more or less a year later, at which point it becomes a third-cycle. Our paper focuses on identification in the winter period (when *heinei* are likely to appear in Europe) so in practice first-cycle birds are birds over their first winter of life and second-cycle birds over their second winter. Some third-cycle Common Gulls can be aged as such (they may have some dark in the alula or primary coverts), but as some adults (20 years old) can also retain such features, it is best just to talk about third-cycle 'types'. Exact ageing of these two classes is not critical for the present paper as the features for adults apply also to third-cycle types.



**a** *heinei*



**b** *heinei*



**d** *canus*



**f** *heinei*



**g** *heinei*





c *canus*



e *canus*



h *heinei*

## Plate 76. Adult Common Gulls.

- a Adult *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © Peter Adriaens. Note rather pale eye (iris slightly paler than pupil), and that the white primary tips are rather small so black dominates on the closed wingtip.
- b Adult *heinei*, Romania, February 2011. © Chris Gibbins. Many *heinei* (63%) have eyes that look pale, though not all are quite as pale as this startling individual. A deep black band is visible across P5 and some black is also present on P4. Although this is mid-winter, head streaking is limited. Bare parts are vivid, mustard coloured.
- c Adult *canus*, Scotland, December 2011. © Chris Gibbins. Note extensive streaks distributed uniformly across the head, dark eye and yellow-green bill. The white primary tips are large.
- d Adult *canus*, Scotland, June 2014. © Chris Gibbins. This is a Scottish *canus* photographed in summer on the breeding grounds. Note the complete absence of black on P5. This is frequent in *canus* (9% of our sample), but very rare in *heinei* (none of our sample birds). Also note that the tongue on the underside of P8 is very long - more than half of the length of the exposed feather. *Heinei* typically have a shorter tongue (less than half of the length of the feather).
- e Adult *canus*, Scotland, November 2013. © Chris Gibbins. Broken black band on P5 is typical of *canus* and note also that black on the outer web of P8 falls well short of primary coverts.
- f Adult *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © Peter Adriaens. Black on the outer web of P8 reaches primary coverts and black on P5 forms a complete band across both webs. Pattern of nape streaking and vivid mustard bill help confirm identification as *heinei*.
- g Adult *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © Peter Adriaens. Note full black band on P5, black on both webs of P4, and that black on the outer web of P6 reaches more than half of the way to the primary coverts.
- h Adult *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © Peter Adriaens. Note black on both webs of P4 (frequent in *heinei* (29% of our sample), but rare in *canus* (1% of sample). Also, P7 has no white tongue tip, a feature frequent in *heinei* (24%), but not found in any of our sample *canus*.



**a** *canus*



**c** *canus*



**d** *heinei*



**f** *heinei*



**g** *heinei*





**b** *heinei*



**e** *canus*



**h** *heinei*

**Plate 77. Second-cycle Common Gulls.**

- a Second-cycle *canus*, Scotland, February 2015. © *Chris Gibbins*. On standing birds, second-cycle Common Gulls can be told from adults by the absence of large white spots at the tips of the outer primaries. Note that on this second-cycle *canus* the wing coverts and tertials are grey and adult like. A few have dark marks in the tertials so this is of no significance, but extensive brown in the coverts is very rare in *canus*.
- b Second-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Peter Adriaens*. Two second-cycle *heinei* together. Note the extensive brown in the wing coverts of the bird in front. The bill is in shadow here, but in life it was rather bright and vivid yellow, unlike the green-tone typical of *canus*. These features would draw attention to this bird on the ground; details of the open wing would then be needed to confirm identification. The other bird exhibits the typical white-headed appearance of *heinei*.
- c Second-cycle *canus*, Scotland, February 2011. © *Chris Gibbins*. Note the presence of mirrors on both P9 and 10, with the mirror on the former extending across both webs. Also note the absence of black on P4. Head and neck streaking is extensive; many *canus* in fact are more heavily marked than this.
- d Second-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Peter Adriaens*. As this bird banks, its head and neck pattern are shown to full effect. Notice that, as with many *heinei*, streaks are concentrated on the nape and neck sides, forming a boa. The P9 mirror is tiny, to the point of hardly being visible at all.
- e Second-cycle *canus*, Scotland, October 2014. © *Chris Gibbins*. Black extends to P4, but is confined to the outer web only on this feather. Also note that the P9 mirror extends across both webs. As with the previous *canus*, head is streaked extensively on the crown and ear coverts.
- f Second-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Peter Adriaens*. No mirror on P9 and black on primaries extends inwards as far as P2. Black on P4 forms complete band. P10 mirror small compared to most *canus*.
- g Second-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Peter Adriaens*. Streaking confined to nape. Also note black on both webs of P4 and absence of P9 mirror.
- h Second-cycle *heinei*, Romania, February 2011. © *Chris Gibbins*. Very well-marked bird looking very immature for its age. Such contrasting, sharp and extensive black piano keys in the secondaries are not seen in *canus* (though rarely *canus* can have a few subtle brown spots or smudges). Also note extensive brown in wing the coverts and the boa of nape streaks set off against the white head. Black on primaries extends to P3. P9 mirror confined to inner web.





**a** *canus*



**c** *canus*



**d** *heinei*



**f** *canus*



**g** *heinei*



**b** *heinei*



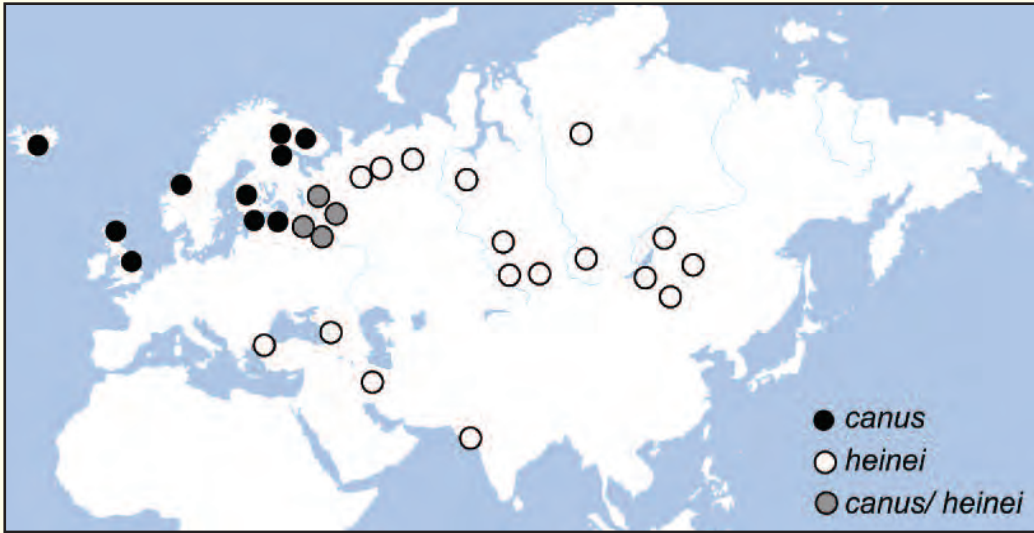
**e** *heinei*



**h** *heinei*

**Plate 78. First-cycle Common Gulls.**

- a** First-cycle *canus*, Scotland, February 2015. © *Chris Gibbins*. Note extensive streaks on crown, ear coverts and across breast and down flanks. Some arrowheads also present on undertail coverts.
- b** First-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Chris Gibbins*. More or less unmarked on whole of head and body giving snowy impression. Also, pink of bill in first-cycle *heinei*, as with this bird, is often brighter than typically seen in *canus* (which ranges from greenish to flesh).
- c** First-cycle *canus*, Scotland, November 2015. © *Chris Gibbins*. Note extensive head, breast and flank markings, dark tips to many underwing coverts and well marked axillaries. Undertail coverts with dark crescents.
- d** First-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Peter Adriaens*. Identifiable *heinei* are snowy white, and more or less unmarked on underwings and underbody. Note also the dark trailing edge to the underwing, as well as the long, slender wing shape.
- e** First-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Peter Adriaens*. A few *heinei*, like this one, have strangely chocolate underwings, but note how the head and body remain white.
- f** First-cycle *canus*, Scotland, January 2015. © *Chris Gibbins*. Note the five o'clock shadow on the upperside to the tail, adjacent to the black band, and the well-marked rump and uppertail coverts.
- g-h** First-cycle *heinei*, Georgia, January 2014. © *Peter Adriaens*. The most typical *heinei* have a clean white rump and uppertail coverts and a neat black tail band, with the tail otherwise lacking any dark markings. Note the lead pellet eye set off on a snowy white head. Any dark markings are confined to the nape, giving an impression quite like some of the large Asian white-headed gulls.



**Figure 1.** Locations of sampled Common Gulls. The points marked on the maps are a mixture of those visited by us to study birds in the field, and the collection locations of skins we examined in the Zoological Museum, Moscow. Note that many birds were examined from each location (sample sizes in Table 1). For those locations where we did not have exact grid co-ordinates (e.g. many of the specimens examined in the Zoological Museum, Moscow were referenced simply by administrative region) the symbol is positioned in the centre of the region. Grey shaded symbols are birds from the assumed intergradation zone (as given by Malling Olsen and Larsson 2003)

### Separation of *heinei* and *canus* in the field Size and structure

While there may be average differences in size, there is much intra-taxon variation so it is unlikely that a *heinei* will stand out in terms of its physical bulk. However, in flight some can look strikingly long-winged, with a narrow hand, and this may catch the eye. The long wings of *heinei* can sometimes also be evident on standing birds when the wings appear to droop, with their tips almost reaching the ground. Evaluation of any such size or structural differences depends on observers being extremely familiar with *canus*. In practice, it is only a percentage of *heinei* that might stand out for such reasons, so structure is not hugely significant for field identification.

### Adults

**Grey tones:** The upperparts of adult *canus* are very similar to nominate Yellow-legged Gull *L. michahellis michahellis* and so slightly paler than Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*. On average *heinei* is a little darker than *canus*, and best matches Kittiwake; however, some are darker than this, in extreme cases even matching Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* of the subspecies *graellsii*. Figure 2 plots Kodak grey

tone values, based on our own measurements (of skins in the Zoological Museum of Moscow) integrated with published ones (Malling Olsen & Larsson, 2003, Howell & Dunn, 2007). It is evident that grey tones differ somewhat between the taxa, but also that there is considerable overlap. The published values for *heinei* are 6–8, but we found nine adult birds in the museum collection that we assessed as Kodak 5 (i.e. as pale as the palest *canus*) and six adults with Kodak 9 (i.e. far darker than any *canus*).

The overlap in grey tones, and the fact that they can be hard to assess in the field, mean that they are of only limited use for field identification. Many *heinei* should stand out amongst *canus* as being a little darker, but not all will. However, a bird looking distinctly dark grey among its congeners should be checked for other features.

**Bare parts and head pattern:** In winter, adult *heinei* regularly show a clean, unmarked white head sharply set off from a 'boa' of dark, pencil-like streaks or neat, rounded and often rufous spots on the lower hindneck. This gives them an 'Asian look' somewhat reminiscent of adult Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans*. In winter, adult *canus* have a head that is more extensively and





**Figure 2.** Upperpart grey tones of Common Gull taxa. For completeness, the grey tones of *canus* and *heinei* are shown along with those of the other two taxa. Values are on the Kodak grey scale used in many gull studies. Values shown here integrate our own assessments (skins of *canus*, *heinei* and *kamtschatschensis* housed in the Zoological Museum in Moscow) along with those published by Malling Olsen & Larsson (2003) and Howell & Dunn (2007).

heavily streaked, especially on the crown, nape and ear coverts, with any pattern on the neck often rather smudgy brown; the most well marked birds can look hooded.

There are average differences in iris and bill colour between the taxa (Table 2). Adult *canus* usually have a dark iris throughout the year (83% in our sample), but the iris can be slightly paler than the pupil in a minority (17%), especially when seen in bright sunlight. An obviously pale iris is very rare in *canus*; we have seen only a few

examples of it. The majority of adult *heinei* show a fairly pale (44%) or obviously pale (19%) iris. The palest-eyed birds can actually have yellow tones to the iris and so give the feel of a Ring-billed Gull. In winter, the bill of *canus* is usually quite dull (greenish yellow). In contrast, the whole bill of *heinei* is often brightly coloured in the winter: the tone is often strong mustard yellow to orange, quite different from most *canus*. We found no clear differences in bill pattern between adult winter *heinei* and *canus* – both typically have a complete blackish bill band.

**Table 2.** Frequencies of different wingtip and bare part features of adult Common Gulls included in this analysis. Values show the percent of sample birds showing each feature. PC = primary coverts.

Feature	Score	Pattern	% of <i>canus</i>	% of <i>heinei</i>
Length of tongue on underside of P10	1	Tongue > 1/2 of the length of the exposed/visible feather	0	0
	2	Tongue 1/3–1/2 of visible feather	2	1
	3	Tongue < 1/3 of visible feather	56	31
	4	No pale tongue	42	68
Shape of tongue on underside of P10	1	Diagonal	80	94
	2	Rectangular	20	6
Length of tongue on underside of P9	1	Tongue cutting through to mirror	0	0
	2	Tongue > 1/2 of visible feather	2	0
	3	Tongue 1/3–1/2 of visible feather	43	9
	4	Tongue < 1/3 of visible feather	55	88
	5	No pale tongue	1	3
P9 mirror	1	No mirror	0	0
	2	Mirror confined to inner web	0	1
	3	Mirror on both webs; white on outer web > black tip	95	63
	4	Mirror on both webs; white on outer web about equal to black tip	5	24
	5	Mirror on both webs; white on outer web < black tip	1	12
Extent of black on P9 (upperside)	1	Entire outer web black to primary coverts	50	92
	2	Black reaches PC only along outer edge	44	7
	3	Black falls up to 1/3 short of PC	6	1
	4	Black falls > 1/3 to 1/2 short of PC	0	0
	5	Black falls > 1/2 short of PC	0	0
Extent of black on P8 (upperside)	1	Entire outer web black to PC	0	27
	2	Black reaches PC only along outer edge	14	25
	3	Black falls up to 1/3 short of PC	80	47
	4	Black falls > 1/3 to 1/2 short of PC	6	1
	5	Black falls > 1/2 short of PC	0	0

Feature	Score	Pattern	% of <i>canus</i>	% of <i>heinei</i>
Shape of black on P8 (upperside)	1	Straight/blunt	36	64
	2	Pointed	64	36
P8 tongue length (underside)	1	Tongue > 3/4 of visible feather (about = mirror P9)	1	0
	2	Tongue > 1/2 - 3/4 of visible feather	62	22
	3	Tongue 1/3-1/2 of visible feather	35	51
	4	Tongue < 1/3 of visible feather	2	26
	5	No pale tongue	0	0
White in tongue tip of P8 (upperside)	1	No white on tongue-tip	85	99
	2	Thin white crescent on tongue-tip	12	0
	3	Broad white spot on tongue-tip	2	0
P8 mirror	1	No mirror	75	95
	2	Mirror on inner web only	22	4
	3	Mirror on both webs	3	1
White in tongue tip of P7	1	No white on tongue-tip	0	24
	2	Thin white crescent on tongue-tip	17	58
	3	Broad white spot on tongue-tip	83	18
Shape of black in P7 (upperside)	1	Straight/blunt	20	41
	2	Pointed	80	59
Length of black in P7 (upperside)	1	Short (< 1/2 length of visible feather)	6	1
	2	Medium (= 1/2 length of visible feather)	32	5
	3	Long (> 1/2 length of visible feather)	62	94
Black band across P6 (upperside)	1	Broken	2	0
	2	Complete & symmetrical	71	21
	3	Complete; not symmetrical	27	79
Extent of black on P6 (upperside)	1	Black outer edge for < 1/3 along length of feather	88	39
	2	Black outer edge for 1/3 to 1/2 along length of feather	12	30
	3	Black outer edge for 1/2 to 2/3 along length of feather	1	17
	4	Black outer edge for > 2/3 along length of feather	0	14
Black pattern on P5 (upperside)	1	No black	9	0
	2	Black spot on only one web	14	0
	3	Both webs, but broken	52	9
	4	Complete band & symmetrical	19	83
	5	Complete band; not symmetrical	6	8
Depth of black band on P5 (upperside)	1	Black on inner web > P10 black tip	43	93
	2	Black on inner web < P10 black tip	57	7
Black pattern on P4 (upperside)	1	No black	91	43
	2	Black spot on only one web	8	25
	3	Both webs, but broken	1	29
	4	Complete band & symmetrical	0	2
	5	Complete band; not symmetrical	0	1
Depth of black on P4 (upperside)	1	Black on inner web > P10 black tip	11	12
	2	Black on inner web < P10 black tip	89	88
Black pattern on P3 (upperside)	1	No black	100	96
	2	Black spot on only one web	0	4
	3	Both webs, but broken	0	0
	4	Complete band & symmetrical	0	0
	5	Complete band; not symmetrical	0	0
Iris colour	1	Dark	83	37
	2	Slightly paler than pupil	17	44
	3	Obviously paler than pupil	0	19
Blackish pigment on bill	1	Absent	2	4
	2	One mandible only	4	16
	3	Both mandibles, but broken	21	18
	4	Forms complete band	73	63

**Table 3.** Frequencies of different wingtip and bare part features on second-cycle Common Gulls included in this analysis. Values show the percent of sample birds showing each feature. PC = primary coverts.

Feature	Score	Pattern	% of <i>canus</i>	% of <i>heinei</i>
Length of tongue on underside of P10	1	Tongue > 1/2 of the length of the exposed/visible feather	0	0
	2	Tongue 1/3–1/2 of visible feather	0	0
	3	Tongue < 1/3 of visible feather	32	14
	4	No pale tongue	68	86
Shape of tongue on underside of P10	1	Diagonal	81	75
	2	Rectangular	19	25
Length of tongue on underside of P9	1	Tongue cutting through to mirror	0	0
	2	Tongue > 1/2 of visible feather	0	0
	3	Tongue 1/3–1/2 of visible feather	1	1
	4	Tongue < 1/3 of visible feather	90	83
	5	No pale tongue	9	16
P9 mirror	1	No mirror	3	32
	2	Mirror confined to inner web	16	30
	3	Mirror on both webs; white on outer web > black tip	14	8
	4	Mirror on both webs; white on outer web about equal to black tip	20	12
	5	Mirror on both webs; white on outer web < black tip	47	18
Extent of black on P9 (upperside)	1	Entire outer web black to primary coverts (PCs)	100	100
	2	Black reaches PC only along outer edge	0	0
	3	Black falls up to 1/3 short of PC	0	0
	4	Black falls > 1/3 to 1/2 short of PC	0	0
	5	Black falls > 1/2 short of PC	0	0
Extent of black on P8 (upperside)	1	Entire outer web black to PC	82	93
	2	Black reaches PC only along outer edge	16	2
	3	Black falls up to 1/3 short of PC	2	5
	4	Black falls > 1/3 to 1/2 short of PC	0	0
	5	Black falls > 1/2 short of PC	0	0
Shape of black on P8 (upperside)	1	Straight/blunt	86	98
	2	Pointed	14	2
P8 tongue length (underside)	1	Tongue > 3/4 of visible feather (about = mirror P9)	0	0
	2	Tongue > 1/2 - 3/4 of visible feather	5	3
	3	Tongue 1/3–1/2 of visible feather	16	13
	4	Tongue < 1/3 of visible feather	76	75
	5	No pale tongue	3	9
White in tongue tip of P8 (upperside)	1	No white on tongue-tip	100	100
	2	Thin white crescent on tongue-tip	0	0
	3	Broad white spot on tongue-tip	0	0
P8 mirror	1	No mirror	99	100
	2	Mirror on inner web only	1	0
	3	Mirror on both webs	0	0
White in tongue tip of P7	1	No white on tongue-tip	18	83
	2	Thin white crescent on tongue-tip	66	14
	3	Broad white spot on tongue-tip	15	3
Shape of black in P7 (upperside)	1	Straight/blunt	64	94
	2	Pointed	36	6
Length of black in P7 (upperside)	1	Short (< 1/2 length of visible feather)	0	0
	2	Medium (= 1/2 length of visible feather)	0	0
	3	Long (> 1/2 length of visible feather)	100	100
Black band across P6 (upperside)	1	Broken	0	0
	2	Complete & symmetrical	0	0
	3	Complete; not symmetrical	100	100
Extent of black on P6 (upperside)	1	Black outer edge for < 1/3 along length of feather	1	0
	2	Black outer edge for 1/3 to 1/2 along length of feather	8	3
	3	Black outer edge for 1/2 to 2/3 along length of feather	17	2
	4	Black outer edge for > 2/3 along length of feather	75	95



Feature	Score	Pattern	% of <i>canus</i>	% of <i>heinei</i>
Black pattern on P5 (upperside)	1	No black	0	0
	2	Black spot on only one web	0	0
	3	Both webs, but broken	2	0
	4	Complete band & symmetrical	47	38
	5	Complete band; not symmetrical	51	62
Depth of black band on P5 (upperside)	1	Black on inner web > P10 black tip	91	98
	2	Black on inner web < P10 black tip	9	2
Black pattern on P4 (upperside)	1	No black	31	7
	2	Black spot on only one web	44	30
	3	Both webs, but broken	22	25
	4	Complete band & symmetrical	1	16
	5	Complete band; not symmetrical	3	21
Depth of black on P4 (upperside)	1	Black on inner web > P10 black tip	0	22
	2	Black on inner web < P10 black tip	100	78
Black pattern on P3 (upperside)	1	No black	89	66
	2	Black spot on only one web	11	31
	3	Both webs, but broken	0	2
	4	Complete band & symmetrical	0	0
	5	Complete band; not symmetrical	0	0
Iris colour	1	Dark	100	85
	2	Slightly paler than pupil	0	13
	3	Obviously paler than pupil	0	2
Blackish pigment on bill	1	Absent	0	0
	2	One mandible only	0	1
	3	Both mandibles, but broken	4	1
	4	Forms complete band	96	98

*Wing tip pattern:* The frequencies of different patterns on the outer primaries of adult birds are summarised in Table 1. In general *heinei* have more black and less white in their wingtip than *canus*. There are a number of overall differences in the frequency of different scores for certain features. We will first describe average differences in the primary pattern and then present combinations that strongly indicate *heinei*.

- **Black on Primary 5 (P5).** Frequently *canus* lacks black altogether on this feather, or the black is confined to the outer web (9 and 14% respectively); none of our sample *heinei* lacked black or had black only on the outer web of this feather. Most *heinei* have a complete black band on P5 (92%) but as an appreciable number of *canus* show such a band (25%), on its own this is not diagnostic.
- **Black on P4.** Present on both webs in 32% of *heinei* but only 1% of *canus*.
- **P9 mirror.** Generally smaller in *heinei*: in 36% of *heinei* the part of the white mirror on the outer web extends for a similar or shorter length than the black at the tip of the feather, whereas such small mirrors occur in only 6% of *canus*.
- **P8 mirror.** A mirror on this feather is present much less frequently in *heinei* (5%) than *canus* (25%).
- **P8 black.** On 27% of *heinei* the black on this feather reaches the primary coverts across the full width of the outer web, whereas this pattern was not recorded in any of our full adult *canus* (i.e. the black always falls short of the primary coverts or just reaches on the outer edge).
- **P8 tongue.** The tongue on this feather is very short (less than one third of the exposed feather) on 26% of *heinei* but only 2% of *canus* (i.e. on *canus* the tongue is typically longer)
- **P6 black.** The black extending up the outer web of P6 is typically longer on *heinei* than *canus*
- **P7 tongue-tip.** The white area separating the grey from the black in P7 (i.e. the tongue tip) is typically smaller and more crescent shaped in *heinei* and is regularly absent altogether; in *canus* it is most often larger and more rounded (pearl-shaped)

The frequency statistics (Table 1.) indicate that each taxon has a typical pattern on each feather. However, they also indicate that in almost all cases the pattern typical of one taxon is occasionally shown by the other one. This means that none of the features on their own are truly diagnostic, and so have to be used in combination.

Adult birds belonging to either of the following three categories of features are very likely *heinei*:

- A** There is no white tongue-tip on P7;  
**B** If a white tongue-tip is present, it should be clearly thin and crescent-shaped, like the tip of a fingernail. In addition, at least one of the following features should also be present:
- black on P8 reaches the primary coverts across the full width of the outer web;
  - the black wedge on outer web of P6 covers more than ½ of the length of the feather
- C** Some birds with less black on P8 and P6 (but still with little white on P7) may still be identifiable if they show the following combination of features:
- the white mirror on P9 is smaller than the black tip, or at most equal in size, and
  - P5 shows a complete black band (across both webs), and
  - the pale tongue on P8 is shorter than ½ of the feather length.

A bird scoring positively for A, B or C should also be checked for additional **supportive features** that will help confirm but are not essential to the identification. These features are the presence of black on P4, a pale eye and a white head set off against a neat boa of neck streaks, along with upperparts looking a fraction darker than *canus*. In addition, the tongues on the underside of the primaries may be a little shorter than *canus*, and perhaps less obvious due to a slightly darker grey tone (paler and more silvery in *canus*). On the folded wings, white primary tips of *heinei* tend to be slightly smaller than *canus*, but the difference is subtle and not easy to use, especially not from late winter onwards when worn *canus* make things more difficult. Nonetheless, large white primary tips (almost

as large as the black space between them) is a useful indicator of *canus* rather than *heinei*.

### Second-cycle birds

In general, *heinei* have more extensive blackish markings in their wings than *canus*, but there is considerable variation within each taxon so multiple features have to be used simultaneously to separate the two. *Heinei* frequently show extensive dark areas in the tertials but such a pattern is also found sometimes in *canus* (e.g. 18% of a sample of 116 second-cycle *canus* from North-east Scotland) so this alone is not useful. *Heinei* regularly show dark in the tail (30%) whereas this is scarce in *canus* (3% of birds). While the presence of black in the tail is useful but not on its own indicative of *heinei*, it is notable that many have such extensive black that a tail band, rather like that seen in a Ring-billed Gull of this age, is formed; in *canus* the black, if present at all, is usually just a few isolated spots. Probably more useful still is the presence of blackish marks in the secondaries. None of our sample of *canus* showed dark here, with all showing an adult like pattern of grey feathers with white tips. In contrast, 12% of *heinei* showed some blackish marks in the secondaries, some even so extensively that they formed a clear secondary bar. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that a larger sample of *canus* might reveal a few birds with blackish marks on the secondaries.

Like adults, second-cycle *heinei* generally show more extensive blackish and less white in the wingtip than *canus*. The summary statistics (Table 2) indicate that there are few aspects of the primary pattern and bare parts that differ consistently enough between the two taxa to be diagnostic. The three most useful ones are:

- **P9 mirror.** This mirror is regularly absent in *heinei* (32%), but rarely so in *canus* (3%).
- **P4 black.** A complete black band across this feather is rare in *canus* (4%), but frequent in *heinei* (37%).
- **Iris.** No second-cycle *canus* were found with pale eyes, whereas 15% of the *heinei* in our sample had an iris that was paler than the pupil.

Our analysis of features in combination indicates that field identification of second-cycle birds should be based on the following rules:

- A bird with black marks on both the outer and inner webs of P4 (either as isolated spots or as a complete black band), the mirror on P9 absent or confined to the inner web, no white tongue-tip on P7 and a blunt tip to the black wedge on outer web of P7 can be identified as *heinei* if head pattern and bill colour also indicate this taxon.
- If the white mirror on P9 extends onto the outer web, second-cycle birds can still be identified as *heinei* if they show a complete black band across both webs of P4 and no white tongue-tip on P7 and their head pattern and bill colour also indicate this taxon.

- A second-cycle bird with no black on P4 should not be identified as *heinei* (i.e. it is most likely a *canus*).
- A second-cycle bird with black only on the outer web of P4, a white tongue tip on P7 and with a pointed black wedge on the outer web of P7 should not be identified as *heinei* (i.e. it is most likely a *canus*).

In addition, the exact pattern of any black on the inner primaries (P1–4) is worth noting. In *canus* the black pattern tapers out by P4 and certainly P3; in these feathers black is rarely anything more than a black spot on the outer web and in many individuals it is absent altogether. In second-cycle *heinei* black is more frequently present across both webs of these feathers either as a complete band or two isolated spots,

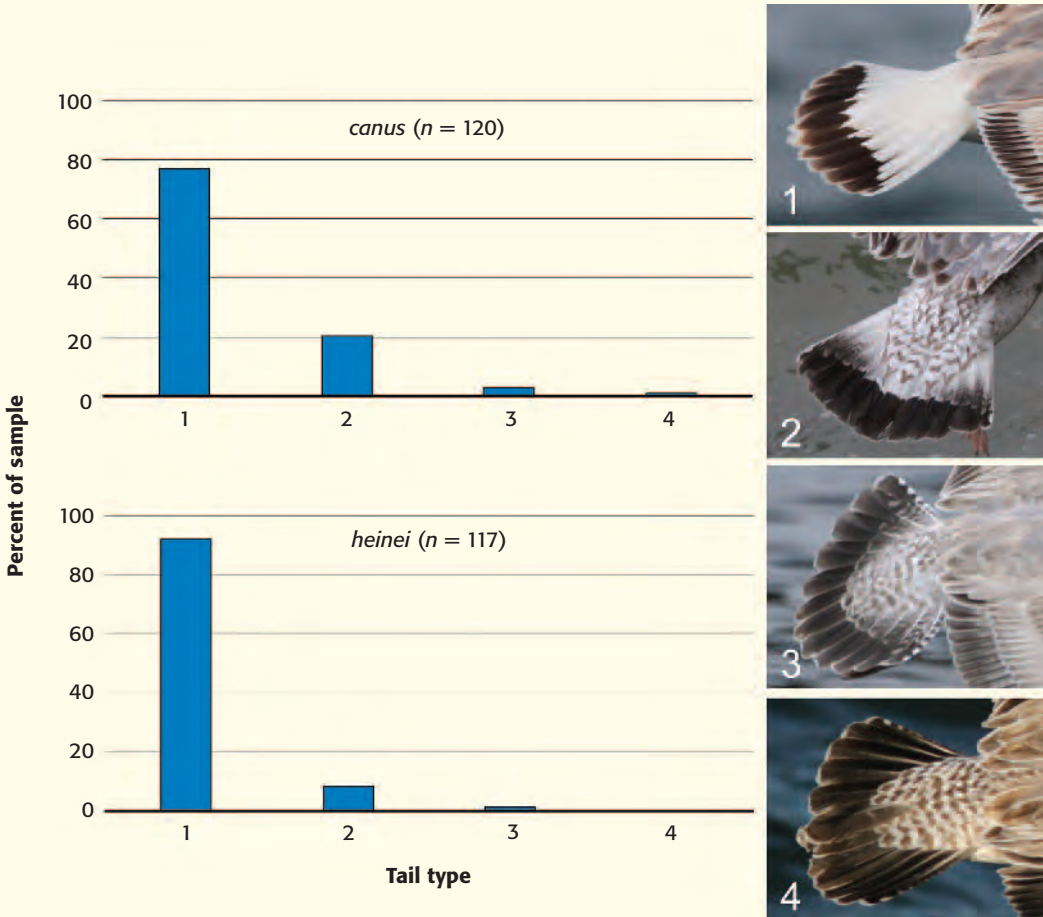


Figure 3. Tail patterns of first-cycle *canus* and *heinei* Common Gulls. The values show the frequency (percent of sampled birds) of different types of pattern on the upperside of the tail.



but in particular additional black can be present running parallel with the shaft (along the leading edge or close to the shaft) as a line or smudge; on some *heinei* this black is also present on P2.

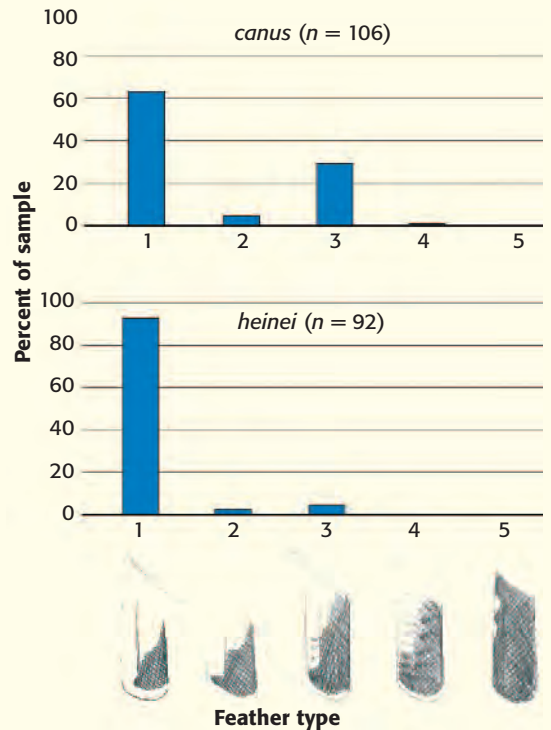
Second-cycle *heinei* regularly have more extensive dark markings along the leading edge of the wing and a brown cast to the remaining coverts. The overall effect (on some but far from all *heinei*) is therefore of a much more extensively dark and immature-looking upperwing. This effect is heightened on those *heinei* which have dark in the secondaries and tail. Such birds, assuming they also show the diagnostic features listed above, can be identified with confidence. The pattern of head streaking described for adults of the two taxa also applies to second-cycle birds, so *heinei* often has less extensive head streaking (i.e. confined to the hindneck). Similarly, the bill of some second-cycle *heinei* is already rather bright.

### First-cycle birds

The general plumage patterns of first-cycle *heinei* and *canus* are similar, but many *heinei* are whiter and more clean-looking overall. They are typically less well marked on the head, body, tail and underwing. The general impression can therefore be striking on the most typical birds, but precise details of the features that give this impression need to be recorded to support firm identification.

*Canus* has a white ground colour to the head and body, with a rather variable amount of streaks and scales overlain. The norm is for streaks around the ear coverts, crown and neck, extending down onto the flanks and often a few spots or streaks on the belly. Many birds have some spots or crescents on the undertail coverts. There is considerable variation: while some are very extensively streaked and scaled, paler birds lack or have extremely limited flank streaking and show an unmarked belly, or have just a few isolated marks.

*Heinei* is typically much whiter and hence more clean looking on its head and body, with many unmarked except for a 'boa' of sharp, fine streaks around the rear neck. In this regard they can be reminiscent of a first-cycle Caspian Gull. A frequent pattern is for a rather extensive boa,



**Figure 4.** Pattern on the outer-most tail feather of first-cycle *canus* and *heinei* Common Gulls. The values show the frequency (percent of sampled birds) of different types of pattern on the outer most tail feather.

extending round as a half-collar, which contrasts with a striking white head. We have not seen *canus* with such a pattern. Many *heinei* completely lack flank markings and we saw no birds in the wintering range with extensive dark on their belly. The whiteness of *heinei* might be the first thing that draws attention to a typical bird. However, some *heinei* are rather more marked, with streaks over the head and around the breast sides and down the flanks. Such birds begin to match paler *canus*.

The vast majority (>90%) of *heinei* that we studied in the wintering range had a completely unmarked vent and undertail coverts; the remainder had just a few isolated fine pencil streaks and only one had extensive dark feather centres.

The underwing of many *heinei* appears gleaming white as a result of virtually unmarked underwing coverts and axillaries. These are the

most striking and distinctive birds. Most, however, have small dark tips to their underwing coverts and axillaries which contrast starkly with the white ground colour. Similarly, the secondaries may look contrastingly blackish from the underside, and together with rather dark inner primaries may form a broad dark trailing edge to the wing that contrasts markedly with the white underwing coverts and underparts. Darker *heinei* have more extensive brown tips to the underwing coverts which create alternating bands of pale and dark running along the wing, but such birds are less frequent. Barring or stippling on the axillaries is rare in *heinei* (just one in our sample). In general, *canus* has duller looking underwings as a result of deeper/broader dark feather tips,

with many looking banded or barred. Quite surprising were a few *heinei* with uniformly brown underwings contrasting with gleaming white underparts and head; we have seen nothing like this among *canus*.

The patterns on the tail and uppertail coverts provide some additional critical clues for identification (Figures 3–5). The majority of *canus* and *heinei* in our sample had Type 1 or 2 tails, but Type 1 is more frequent in *heinei*. Most *heinei* combined a Type 1 tail with little or no dark on the outer tail feather (Type 1 outer tail feather pattern was found in 90% of birds) and either no or very few dark spots on the uppertail coverts (Type 1 was the modal category for uppertail coverts). Only 4% of *heinei* had any vermiculation or

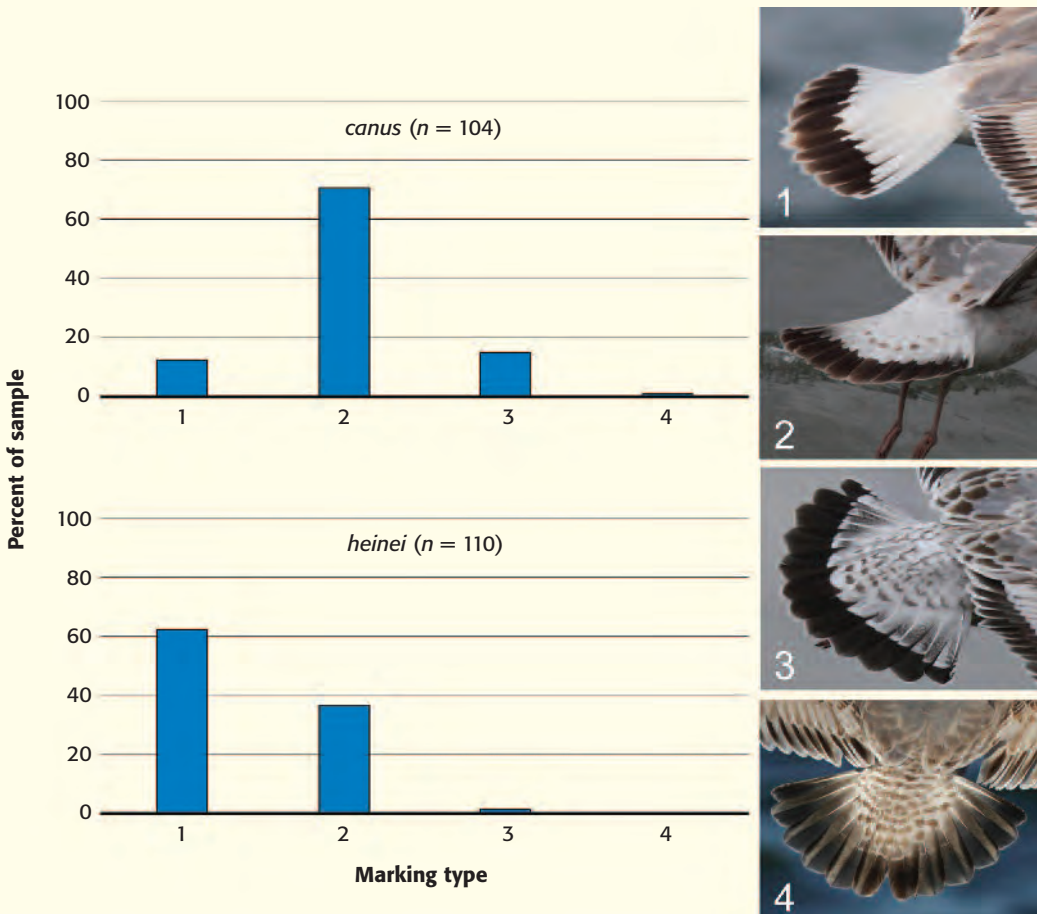


Figure 5. Extent of dark markings on the upper tail coverts of first-cycle *canus* and *heinei* Common Gulls. The values show the frequency (percent of sampled birds) of different degrees of spotting/barring on rump and uppertail coverts.



**Plate 79.** Adult *heinei* Common Gull, Poti, Georgia, 30 January 2014. © Peter Adriaens. We travelled to Georgia to study *heinei* on the wintering grounds, as well as to the Zoological Museum of Moscow to examine skins of *canus* and *heinei* collected on respective breeding grounds. Georgia proved to be a superb place for *heinei*, but also many other gulls. This *heinei* is surrounded by Black-headed Gulls which we estimated to number in their millions at this particular location.

barring on the outer web of the outer tail feather, while this is frequent in *canus* (around 40% have Type 2, 3 or 4 outer feather patterns). Most *canus* have a degree of spotting or light barring on the uppertail coverts (Type 2) and it is not hard to find *canus* with rather extensive barring (i.e. Type 3) here. Thus, overall, the *heinei* to look for are those with unmarked uppertail coverts, clean outer tail feathers and an upper tail with a simple dark band, without any stippling.

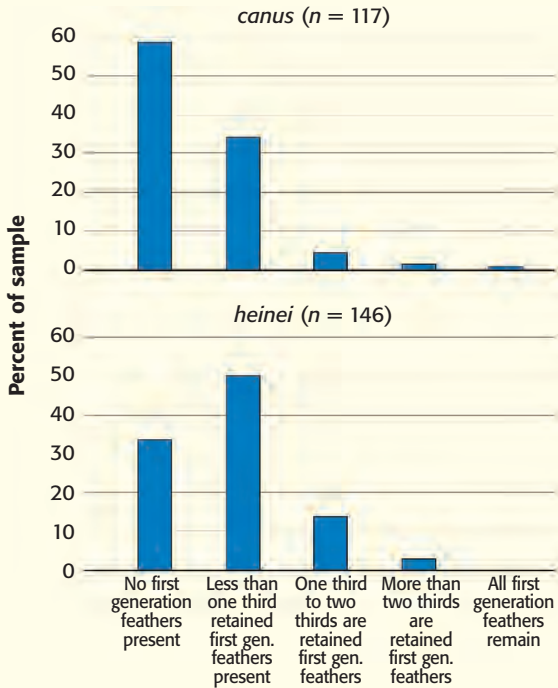
Type 1 uppertails include birds which have black lines extending basally from within the tail band. These lines vary in length; on some birds they are extremely short (and hence hardly visible at all) and on others very long, extending for a length equivalent to the depth of the tail band. We have found no consistent differences in the length of these lines between *canus* and *heinei*. The depth of the tail band also varies within each so is of no value in identification.

Malling Olsen & Larsson (2003) argue that the greater coverts of *heinei* "average darker, deeper brownish tinged" (than *canus*), and that the lesser coverts "are darker brown than in *canus*, creating a stronger dark leading edge to the inner wing" (p.74). Certainly many *heinei* have

rather dark upperwings, including very dark greater coverts, and this can result in a starkly contrasting bird because of the clean white head and body. However, many have pale grey greater coverts and others sandy ones, while *canus* has greater coverts which can range from pale, silvery grey to very dark brown. Thus, the greater covert colour is of no real use for field identification of these two taxa.

The retention of a full set of juvenile scapulars has been suggested as a way to detect first-cycle *heinei* in Europe in winter. Figure 6 shows the results of an assessment of the extent of post-juvenile scapular moult of the two taxa. Two main points are evident from this figure. (i) Within each taxon there is considerable variation in the extent of the moult, with each one spanning four or five of the categories. (ii) There is no indication that *heinei* often retain all of their first generation scapulars after October; indeed, none fell within this category whereas a small number (1%) of *canus* did. By increasing sample size it is possible that we might have found some *heinei* with all juvenile scapulars, but it is nonetheless evident that the extent of the post-juvenile moult is not a sound basis for separating first-cycle *heinei* and *canus*.





**Figure 6.** Extent of the post-juvenile moult of first-cycle *canus* and *heinei* Common Gulls. Individual birds were assigned to one of the categories, as a function of the extent of their moult. Categories were broad/simple, such that it was not necessary to count feathers, but simply assess the overall extent of moult.

First-cycle *canus* have a dirty flesh or sometimes blue-grey basal portion to their bill, while *heinei* often have very bright bills; several from Georgia had a rather yellow or orange tone. Hence bill colour may be useful for field identification, when used to support the plumage features highlighted above.

**Discussion and conclusions**

The reported existence of intergradation between *canus* and *heinei* (Malling Olsen & Larsson 2003) and the presence of birds with mixed or intermediate characters mean that observers have to be critical with identification of suspected out of range birds. Only birds showing diagnostic combinations of features should be identified, and ideally should also have supporting features.

The distinctive appearance of many adult and second-cycle *heinei* came as something of a surprise to us, given that previous literature suggested that field identification is not possible. The pale eye, for instance, was very obvious and prevalent but has not been mentioned previously. Similarly, many first-cycle birds proved to be rather distinctive. Interestingly though, their distinctiveness was for reasons opposite of those suggested by existing literature. Malling Olsen &

**Plate 80.** First-cycle *heinei* Common Gull, Istanbul, Turkey, 3 January 2014. © Chris Gibbins. It came as a surprise to us that, contrary to suggestions in the literature, first-cycle *heinei* are generally paler than *canus*; many, like this one, are strikingly white in fact. The white body and underwing, with just a subtle boia of streaks around the neck, make them look rather beautiful, and give an impression not unlike a first-cycle Caspian Gull. Note also the contrastingly black secondaries.



Larsson (2003) describe first-cycle *heinei* as having more well marked tails and uppertail coverts than *canus*, a description that puts them closer to *L. c. kamtschatschensis* in overall appearance. However, our field and museum studies indicate that first-cycle *heinei* are actually paler than *canus*, in terms of tail markings, extent of head and body streaking and underwing. Thus, observers should not be looking for heavily marked birds, but very white ones. We cannot explain why previous literature has suggested they are dark.

### Identification and status in Scotland

Ringing recoveries have demonstrated that birds from the breeding range of *heinei* occur in Europe in winter (Bengtsson & Pedersen 1998). While our geographic location means that *heinei* is likely to be less frequent in Scotland than on the European mainland, we should still expect some to reach us. Despite considerable effort in recent years, we have yet to find a bird which fully matches all of our criteria; we have seen one or two good candidates but our photographs unfortunately failed to capture certain features in the detail necessary for confident identification. Like larger gulls, it is very important that birders are rigorous and critical in application of the criteria, such that birds failing to tick all the necessary boxes are left unidentified. What the true status of *heinei* in Scotland is something that only time will tell. The first record is out there waiting to be found, and we hope that this paper helps birders to find it.

### Acknowledgements

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*Chris Gibbins, 2 The Steadings,  
Drums, Aberdeenshire AB41 6AS.  
Email: c.gibbins@abd.n.ac.uk*

*Peter Adriaens, Volmolenstraat 9,  
9000 Gent, Belgium.  
Email: p\_adriaens@yahoo.com*

# Aspects of autumn migration in 2015

C.R. McKay

The aim of this report is to bring together sightings from across Scotland to highlight interesting aspects of autumn 2015. It draws upon records submitted via BirdTrack, BirdGuides, Trektellen, local birding grapevines and bird observatory blogs.

The '>' character is used to indicate direction of movement e.g. '100 >S' = '100 birds flying south'.

## Siskins and Redpolls heading south-south-east

'Autumn migration' got off to an early start in June with an unlikely species – the Siskin. The winter of 2014/15 saw a huge cone crop in coniferous forests across Scotland, particularly in spruce plantations. Forest finches benefitted from this bumper harvest, with Siskins and Redpolls being notably absent from bird feeders across the country because their natural food was so abundant. In the forests of Moray



Plate 81. Juvenile Siskin on Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Sherriffmuir, Upper Forth, 2 September 2015. © Anne Cotton



Plate 82. Lesser Redpoll, Billinge, Merseyside, 11 November 2015. © Pete Alker

Alastair Young recorded huge numbers of Redpolls through the winter of 2014/15, with a maximum of 2,200 at Ordiequiesh in February 2015. But in the spring the cones open and the seed is shed to the forest floor and becomes largely unavailable to the birds, forcing Redpolls and Siskins to seek out other food sources, and ultimately leaving their breeding areas. This emigration was first evident on visible migration watches at Inverkeithing (Fife) on 23 June when 23 Siskins flew south, followed by 76 in only half an hour on 3 July, along with 43 Crossbills; flocks of overflying Siskins and Crossbills were evident at Aberlady (Lothian) throughout June and July. These movements were reflected further down the

east coast of Britain, with sites such as Spurn Point (East Yorkshire) recording some of their highest ever July Siskin counts ([www.trektellen.org](http://www.trektellen.org)), probably including Scottish birds.

There was a lull in movement in August as the birds underwent their annual feather moult. At this time large flocks were seen feeding away from forests: a single hayfield in Glenisla (Angus & Dundee) held a mixed flock of 150+ Redpoll and 100+ Siskin feeding on the seeds of grasses, whilst flocks of juvenile Siskins were seen feeding on thistles in weedy fields at Sherriffmuir (Upper Forth). By early September Siskins were on the move again, with 241 >SW at East Haven



(Angus & Dundee) and 91 >S at Ferryhill (Fife) on 6th, and 100+ >S at Ardeer Pt (Ayrshire) on 8th. Ringing recoveries showed the urgency of these movements: a Siskin ringed at Kilry (Angus & Dundee) on 8 September was controlled 357 km SSE in West Yorkshire 12 days later, whilst another ringed at Peebles (Borders) on 20 Sep was controlled at Thetford (Norfolk) only 6 days later having travelled 442 km SSE (73.7 km/day).

The Redpolls moved on a little later in the year, and their movement through the country was a little more leisurely. At East Haven (Angus & Dundee) three of the top 10 UK Lesser Redpoll vismig counts of the autumn followed, including 219 >SW on 19 September, 555 >SW on 26 September and 258 >SW on 8 October, exceeding counts made at top UK migration sites such as Spurn and Sandwich Bay Bird Observatories, which nevertheless recorded high numbers of Redpolls on the move. Two Redpolls ringed at Glenisla (Angus & Dundee) in late Aug/early September were controlled by ringers in Suffolk and Sussex during October, three from Highland Region in northern England on 8–10 October, and a bird from Moray took its time before arriving at Spurn on 15 November. The quickest movement was a bird ringed in Aberdeenshire on 28 September that made it to Leighton Moss (Lancashire) c.350 km south in only 17 days – maybe it was flying with a flock of Siskins!

These counts and recoveries point to a mass exodus of Redpolls and Siskins from Scotland to their favoured wintering areas in south-east England and the Low Countries. However, as I write in December there are still some Redpolls in the Angus glens, perhaps from further north in Scotland, as suggested by a first-year female controlled in Glenisla

in December originally ringed in summer 2015 near Lairg (Sutherland).

### Sparrowhawks at the Mull of Galloway

*It's not often we can talk about Sparrowhawk 'migration' in Scotland, but observations at the Mull of Galloway this autumn showed that movement of these birds can be detected at Scotland's own Falsterbo – albeit on a more modest scale!*

The first of October 2015 saw an impressive movement of raptors at the southernmost tip of Scotland - the Mull of Galloway (Dumfries & Galloway) – 21 Sparrowhawks, seven Buzzards, three Kestrels, and one Hen Harrier all headed out to sea in two hours around mid-day. This was the best raptor passage that the author has ever seen in the UK, and the Sparrowhawk count was particularly impressive, being one of the highest ever in the UK recorded on the Trektellen migration database.

It's not rocket science to work out that the geography of the Mull of Galloway should make it good for picking up migrating birds, and it has some past form with migrant raptors - a smattering of records of Osprey, Honey-buzzard and Marsh Harrier, as well as the seemingly ever-present Sparrowhawk and Merlin that can be seen on most autumn visits. Typically, you might have half a dozen sightings of each during a morning without knowing whether these are repeat sightings of the same individual or a turnover of migrants passing through.

But a chance encounter at about 11:00 on 1 October with a ringtail Hen Harrier heading out to sea soon followed by a flock (!) of four Sparrowhawks doing the same showed that watching from the very tip of the headland can be productive. My visible migration

watches at the Mull generally start at dawn and finish about 11:00 - as the passage of migrating larks, pipits and finches dries up. But late morning is when raptor movement gets going – given the right weather conditions. For the Mull easterly winds are required to push birds onto the west side of Scotland, with the raptors following the headland eastwards as they approach their final jumping off point.

All but one of the hawks went through between 11:00 and 13:00, and there was no doubt that these birds were real movers – the birds (the majority in small groups of 2–4) circled briefly and gained height over the cliff tops at the very tip of the Mull before heading out to sea together till out of sight. Interestingly, all the birds seen at close range had full crops – suggesting they had eaten well before heading off into the unknown. There was no shortage of Meadow Pipits on the headland for hungry hawks.

Other raptors on the day included a total of 21 Buzzards which came down to the head, looking impressively large as they circled low above the lighthouse before making the big decision 'should I stay or should I go?'. Most formed small kettles of birds over the headland (up to seven strong) before U-turning backed down the headland, but eight carried on out to sea without turning back. A single Kestrel also went out, as two others had done earlier in the day. Other raptors heading out over the next few days included Merlin, another Hen Harrier and Red Kite.

The movement of Sparrowhawks probably represented dispersal of young Scottish birds rather than true migration, but was still exciting to watch. In his study of Sparrowhawks in the Forest of Ae (Dumfries & Galloway), Ian Newton (*The Sparrowhawk* 1986)

found that most young birds dispersed less than 50 km before settling to breed, and there was no suggestion of seasonally directed movements - birds settled at all points of the compass from where they were reared. Presumably then the birds at the Mull hailed mostly from south and west Scotland. Perhaps the 2015 breeding season was particularly productive? There were certainly plenty of Redpolls and Siskins about in the plantations for Sparrowhawks to feed on.

This Sparrowhawk story may not be linked to a large passage further north and east in September, but this highlights an equally noteworthy record count. A total of 220 were recorded on Utsira (Norway) on 11 September, followed by ten on Fair Isle on 12th - the highest ever Fair Isle count since records began in the 1950s.

### Sooty Shearwater

The favourite bird of many seawatchers, Sooty Shearwater numbers typically peak in Scottish waters in September. But September 2015 proved disappointing, with only 291 bird-days at North Ronaldsay (the best Scottish site for this species), and only 14 bird-days recorded by



Plate 83. Sooty Shearwaters, Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 1 November 2015. © John Kemp

John Kemp at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (Outer Hebrides), one of the most systematically seawatched sites in Scotland.

Numbers picked up in October, peaking at North Ronaldsay on 3 October with 158 >W (their highest count of the year), and with a much healthier monthly total of 291 bird days at Rubha Ardvule. At the latter, the best count of the autumn came as late as 29 October with 228 >S – both a site record and a very late date. Movement continued through November on an exceptional scale for that month, although the

momentum was now focussed in the west of Scotland. There was a marked ‘push’ early in the month with 92 >SW at the Butt of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 8 November, followed on the 9th by a massive 510 >SW in 5 hours at Griminish, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) and 135 >S at Rubha Ardvule.

John Kemp has spent over 1,200 hours seawatching at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) since 2005, during which time he has logged a total of 1,589 Sooties, with annual totals usually in the range of 30–150 birds. The scale of the 2015

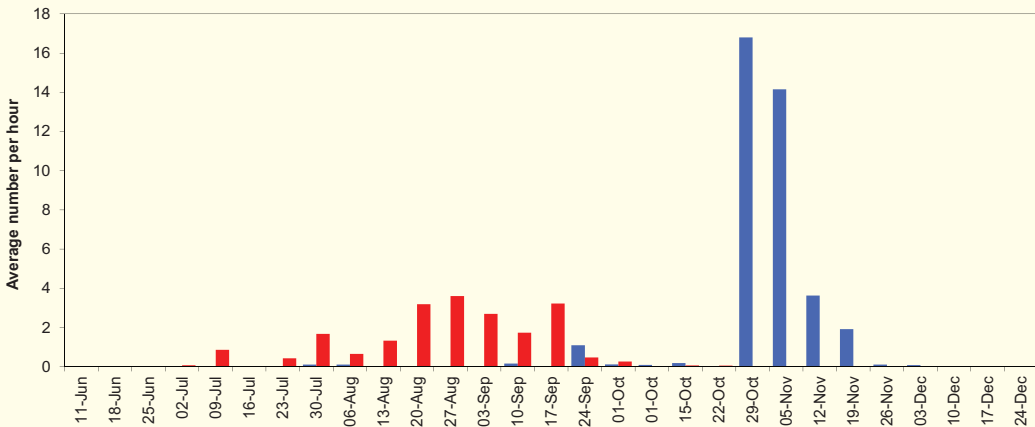


Figure 1. Comparison of Sooty Shearwater numbers at Rubha Ardvule in 2015 (blue) vs. 2007, 2011, 2013 and 2014 (red) (the autumns with more than 40 hours observation time). © John Kemp/Trektellen

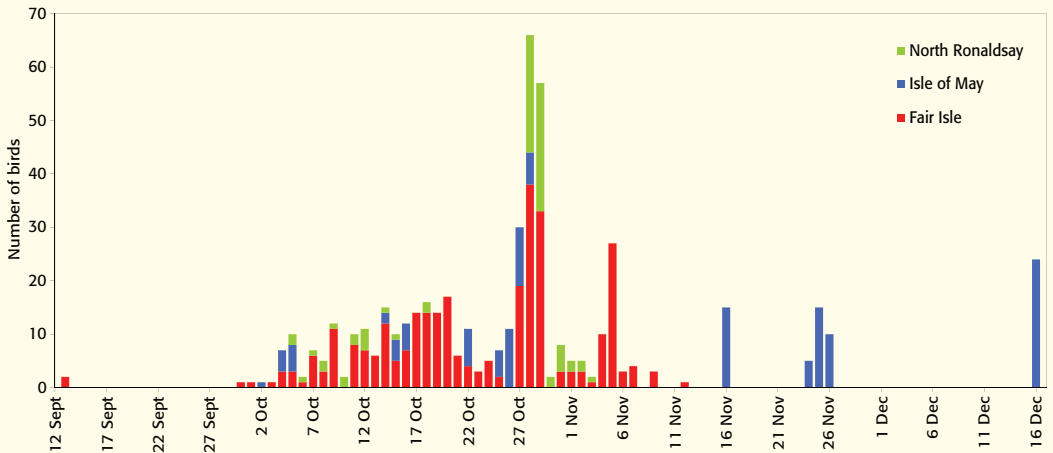


Figure 2. Short-eared Owl day totals at Scottish bird observatories, September to December 2015.

movement is shown by the fact that John recorded more birds this autumn than in the four previous best-watched autumns put together (Figure 1). It is never easy to interpret the movements of this enigmatic bird from the Southern Hemisphere. It will be interesting to see in future years whether the pattern shown in 2015 was a one off, or a sign of changing conditions in the North Atlantic.

North Ronaldsay (more than twice the previous record, and including the fantastic sight of groups of eight and nine together) and 11 remaining on the Isle of May. One can only speculate as to how many Short-eareds came in across the whole of Scotland at this time. The birds moved on as quickly as they

had appeared (Figure 2), although there appeared to be fresh arrivals through November. The biggest surprise came on the Isle of May when a visit on 17 December revealed 24 birds - doubtless feasting on a 'plague' of the island's very own large variety of House Mouse *Mus domesticus*.

Plate 84. Short-eared Owl, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 6 November 2015.  
© George Gay

### Goldcrest and Yellow-browed Warbler

Autumn 2015 was a record year for both species at the observatories and along the coast. This will be the subject of a more detailed analysis in a future edition of *Scottish Birds*.

### Flocks of Short-eared Owls

Along with the Goldcrests and Yellow-browed Warblers, large numbers of Short-eared Owls were recorded through the country. Birds began to appear at the observatories from early October onwards, and were ever-present thereafter. But a huge arrival (for this species) occurred with south-easterly winds on 27 October with the appearance of 11 birds at the Isle of May. Numbers peaked over the next three days with record counts all round – 38 at Fair Isle (most sheltering on the west cliffs), 24 at





## Fieldfares and Redwings in with a bang

The same south-easterly winds that pushed the owls into the Northern Isles accounted for a massive displacement of Redwings, Fieldfares and Blackbirds into northern Scotland. Again, the Isle of May was first to pick up on this, with 858 Fieldfare arriving on 27 October along with a staggering 4,539 Redwings! On 28th and 29th cold fronts pushed wet weather across the North Sea, forming a formidable migration barrier. To avoid this, the birds rode the south-easterly wind into the north-eastern sector of Scotland and the Northern Isles – classic fall conditions.

On 27 October, Dave Parnaby the Fair Isle warden wrote on their website *"a bit of a disappointing day, with far fewer birds than we might have hoped for, although falls further down the coast give us hope for tomorrow as the SE winds may bring stuff further up the country..."* He wasn't to be disappointed, with a huge fall on 28th, including 2,169 Fieldfares and 330 Blackbirds. The story was much the same at North Ronaldsay, where 2,125 Fieldfares

filtered through south. Interestingly, Redwings featured less than at the Isle of May with 'only' 1,752 on Fair Isle, and 1,114 at North Ronaldsay. Perhaps they were more adept at pushing their way through the frontal weather into mainland Scotland.

Like the owls mentioned earlier, these thrushes soon moved on, and a huge movement of Fieldfares was seen at inland sites on the 29th, stretching from the Erskine Bridge and Lanarkshire (Clyde) in the west, through Central Scotland, Auchterarder (Perth & Kinross) to Lintrathen (Angus & Dundee) and Ferryhill (Fife) in the east. The extraordinary thing about this movement was that it was in a southerly or south-south easterly direction. This contrasts with most inland movements which are of birds heading broadly west or south west through the country after arrival on the east coast. At Lintrathen (Angus) not only was this the largest movement (3,732) recorded there in ten year's of vismig watches, but also the first ever in a southerly direction! Even larger numbers were seen by Graham Sparshott at Ferryhill (Fife)

where an incredible 5,576 passed south over the Firth of Forth in only 1 hour 30 minutes. Mike Bell's comment was typical *"Yes I had Fieldfares too, mine were on a S-SSE track at Braco and Blackford (Perth) appearing to head over the Ochils which is most unusual, they usually come SW down the valley."*

There can be little doubt that this was a mass re-orientation of birds that had been drifted well to the north of their intended destination, which was presumably southern Scotland/northern England and perhaps even central England - the southerly movement was recorded at vismig sites as far south as Lancashire and Yorkshire over the next three days, peaking on 31 October with a day total of 32,000 moving birds.

## Acknowledgements

Much of this information was gleaned from online sources, mostly from Scottish birding newsgroups, the Trektellen migration website/database [www.trektellen.org](http://www.trektellen.org) and BirdGuides. Thanks also to bird observatories, seawatchers and ringers for supplying information and photographs: Kevin Woodbridge (North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory); Stuart Rivers (Isle of May Bird Observatory); Alistair Young, Nigel Richards & Bob Swann (all Highland Ringing Group); Stuart Craig (Borders Ringing Group); Raymond Duncan (Grampian Ringing Group); North Lancs Ringing Group; John Kemp, Brian Rabbitts, Graham Sparshott, Anne Cotton, Iain Gibson, George Gay, Peter Alker and Mike Bell.

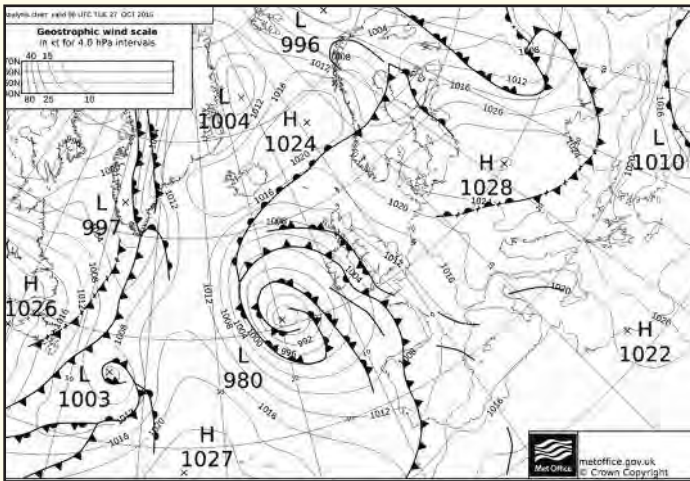


Figure 3. Pressure chart for 00:00 on 27 October 2015. The fronts over the Irish Sea tracked north-eastwards across the North Sea over the next two days, blocking Scandinavian migrants bound for Britain. The south-easterly winds ahead of the fronts pushed birds towards the Northern Isles. Crown Copyright 2016, the Met Office

# Scottish Bird Sightings

## 1 October to 31 December 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 - Sht; Upper Forth - UF.

Early October saw a continued easterly airflow except in the west where southerlies predominated. A couple of westerly weather systems arrived in the latter half of October, and November was mild but notably wet and windy. December was the warmest on record, but brought more high winds from the west and exceptional rainfall.

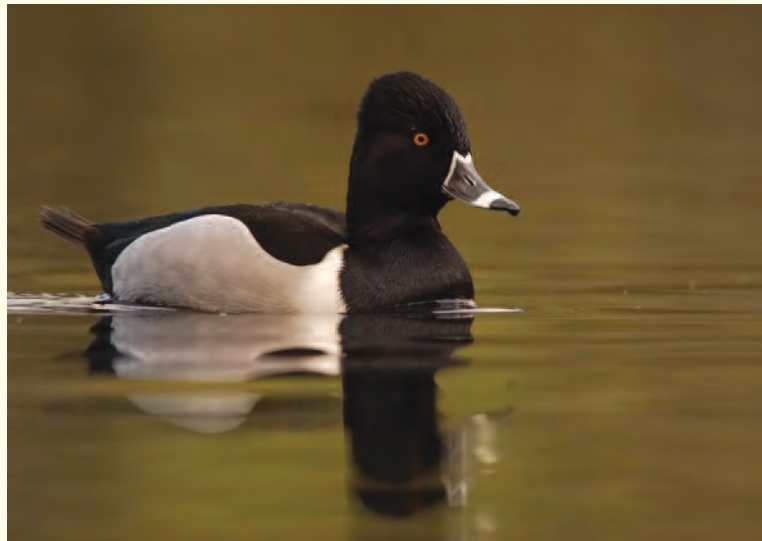
**Snow Goose:** one was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 4th and 7–16 October; a white-morph flew over Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 6 October and was on-site there on and off from 7 October to 9 November; a blue-phase bird was at Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 12 October and at Braehead of Lunan (A&D) on 17–18th, before moving to Stormont Loch, (P&K) on 25 October. One was at Loch Eye (High) on 11 November, at Nigg Bay (High) on 16th and back at Loch Eye on 21st; a white-phase bird was at Skinflats (UF) on 14th, and a blue-phase bird at Loch of

Strathbeg RSPB Reserve on 14th, and nearby at Loch of Skene (NES) on 19th. One was at Beaully (High) on 20th, with it or another at Balintore (High) on 29 November to 1 December and again at Beaully on 17 December. A blue-morph/intermediate adult and three juveniles were at Loch of Skene (NES) on 28 November, and at Kemnay (NES) on 27 December. **Ross's Goose:** one was at Skinflats (UF) on 14 November, with probably the same at Carstairs (Clyde) on 12–14 December. **Todd's Canada Goose:** two were on Islay (Arg) from 18 October, mostly around Loch Gruinart and Loch Gorm. **Richardson's Cackling Goose:** one was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 2 October; and up to two on Islay (Arg) from 19 October; with three on 1 November and one to 22 November at least. One was at

Loch of Skene (NES) on 19 November. **Ridgeway's Cackling Goose:** one was at West Freugh Airfield (D&G) from 3 November to 5 December at least.

**American Wigeon:** birds were seen on Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Argyll, Highland, North-east Scotland and Perth & Kinross. **Green-winged Teal:** drakes were on Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Outer Hebrides, Argyll, Clyde, Dumfries & Galloway, Perth & Kinross and Angus & Dundee. Two were at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve, Loch Leven (P&K) and also Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg).

**Canvasback:** a drake was reported near Carloway, Lewis (OH) on 25 October. **Ring-necked Duck:** single drakes were at The Cuilc, Pitlochry (P&K) from 31 October into 2016, at Loch of



**Plate 85.** Ring-necked Duck, The Cuilc, Pitlochry, Perth & Kinross, December 2015. © Andrew Russell

Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 7 November; a first-winter drake at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 20 November to 22 December; one at Loch of Skail, Mainland (Ork) on 24 November to 31 December, and one at Milton Loch (Clyde) on 18–30 December. **Lesser Scaup:** a first-winter drake was at South Nesting, Mainland (Shet) on 12 November and then at Loch of Benston, Mainland on 15–22nd; a female was at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 16th; a drake was at Loch Leven (P&K) on 25 November, and one was again at South Nesting (Shet) on 4th and 8 December. **King Eider:** a drake

was again off Nairn (M&N) on 16–27 December, and the returning female was off Ruddons Point (Fife) from 27 December. **Surf Scoter:** the drake was still off Ferny Ness/Gosford Bay (Loth) to 18 October; one was in Lunan Bay (A&D) on 8–14 October; one at Musselburgh/Joppa (Loth) from 29 October into 2016; a first-winter was off Gullane (Loth) on 1 November. A juvenile was off Cleatt, Barra (OH) on 13 November; a drake was at Tankerness, Mainland (Ork) on 21–25 November, and one was in Largo Bay (Fife) from 22 November into 2016.

**White-billed Diver:** one was off Hilton of Delnies, near Nairn (M&N) on 4 October; one flew south past Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 28 October; one was in Bluemull Sound, Yell/Unst (Shet) on 6 November, and the regular bird off St. Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay (Ork) was reported again on 31 December. **Balearic Shearwater:** late singles were off Sanday (Ork) on 1 October and Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 5 October. **Bittern:** one lingered at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) to 10 October, and one was seen intermittently at Loch of Kinordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 10 October to 8 December. **Little Egret:** much under-recorded, but singles made it as far north as Stenness Loch, Mainland (Ork) on 8–15 October; Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 11–17 October, and Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 9 November, and as far west as Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 19 October; Daliburgh, South Uist on 3 November, and Ormiclate, South Uist on 7 November. Four at Morton Lochs, Tentsmuir (Fife) on 14 November was the highest count reported. **Great White Egret:** one was at Loch of Skene (NES) on 30 October; one was at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 1–15 November; one was at Loch na Obe, Barra (OH) from about 10 November to 6 December, seen from Bruernish, Ardevenish and Bolnabodach, and was at Eoligarry, Barra on 8 December; one flew south past the Elliot Burn, Arbroath (A&D) on 22 November, and one was at the Biel Burn, Dunbar (Loth) on 28 December. **Night-heron:** an adult was reported at Trinafour (P&K) on 28 December. **Cattle Egret:** one was at Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 16–26 October. **Glossy Ibis:** five were on Fair Isle on 2–4 October, with three still to 15th - the second island record. One was at Kilwinning (Ayr) on 21–29 October; one on Papa Westray



Plate 86. Glossy Ibis, Upper Sotland, Unst, Shetland, December 2015. © Robbie Brookes



(Ork) on 23 October; one at Burracraig, Unst (Shet) on 19–20 December, and one at Ormiclate, South Uist (OH) on 31 December.

**Northern Harrier:** the male lingered on North Ronaldsay from September to 2 November, and seen again on 11th and from 17 November into 2016; with it or another at Loch Watten (Caith) on 15 November. **Pallid Harrier:** one was at Northdale, Unst from September to 2 October. Single juveniles were seen at Tarbat Ness (High) on 4 October; at Loch of Stenness, Mainland (Ork) on 9th and 11 October; flying north over the Isle of May on 10 October and south on 12th. One was at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 14 October. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was at West Sandwick, Yell (Shet) on 8 October; one at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 30 October. One was seen intermittently at Lochindorb (High) on 12–20 November; one at Frakkafeld, Mainland (Shet) on 14 November; one at Sullom Voe, Mainland (Shet) from 10 December into 2016, with possibly the same bird at Brae, Mainland (Shet) on 15th and Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 27 December. **Gyr Falcon:** a white-morph was found dead at Forss, near Scrabster (Caith) in mid-November and one (live) was at Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 19 November. An immature white-morph was at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 6 December, with probably the same bird at Hougharry, North Uist on 21st and then Balranald and Baleshare, both North Uist (OH) from 22 December into 2016. **Crane:** two were at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 2 October; one flew over Balormie, Lossiemouth (M&N) on 2 November; one was at Reiss, near Wick (Caith) from 14 November to 15 December at least, and one was at Loch of Wester (High) on 20 November.

**American Golden Plover:** one was at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 5–14 October; a juvenile at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 10th and 16 October; a juvenile was at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 10 October and one from 21 October to 10 November, and a juvenile was at Torness (Loth) intermittently from 3–9 November. **Temminck's Stint:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10–11 October. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 18th and 30 October to 1 November, and one was at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 12–14 November until most likely taken by a Sparrowhawk. **Baird's Sandpiper:** the juvenile at Hough Bay, Tiree (Arg) lingered to 2 October. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** one was at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 14–17 October, and one at Finstown, Mainland (Ork) on 31 October. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October, with two there on 3 October. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** one (presumably this species) was on Sanday (Ork) on 2 October. **Grey Phalarope:** one was off Sanday (Ork) on 1 October; two off Upper Vaul, Tiree (Arg) on 12th; one off Aird, Tiree on 22 October and one was near Ullapool (High) on 31 October. One flew past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 9 November, with another there on 11th; one off Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 16–17th; one past Troon (Ays) on 16th, and one off Saltcoats (Ays) on 18th; one from Machrihanish, Kintyre (Arg) on 19th; one off Irvine (Ays) on 24 November to 1 December; two Stevenston (Ays) on 2–4 December, with one still to 11th; one was off Port Seton (Loth) on 26 December, and one at Peninerine, South Uist on 31 December.

**Pomarine Skua:** seen in moderate numbers in October from Shetland south to Lothian in

the North Sea and to Islay (Arg) on the Atlantic coast. Most totals were of five or less, but higher counts were nine past Brevig, Barra (OH) on 26th and nine off Embo on 29th. Around 40 noted in November, with records from Orkney south to Borders and to Tiree (Arg) in the west, mostly ones and twos. In December, up to three were seen at scattered locations. **Long-tailed Skua:** a few in early October and none thereafter, with one in Staffin Bay, Skye (High) on 4th; two off Brora (High) and one off Saline (Fife) on 5th, and one from Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 7 October.

**Sabine's Gull:** an adult was east of Staffin Bay, Skye (High) on 4 October and two juveniles off Aird, Tiree (Arg) on 22 October.

**Mediterranean Gull:** away from the Firth of Forth and Ayrshire hot-spots there was one at Weisdale, Mainland (Shet) on 2 October; two adults off Graemeshall, Mainland (Ork) on 3rd; an adult at Wester Sand, Mainland (Ork) on 28–29th; a second-winter at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 29 October; an adult at Graemeshall again on 4–5 November, and an adult at Brora (High) on 28 November. **Ring-billed Gull:** the returning adult was reported intermittently at Dingwall (High) from September into 2016, and a presumed returning adult was at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) from 29 December. **Bonaparte's Gull:** one was at the Lossie Estuary, (M&N) on 4–15 October - the second for the recording area. An elusive adult was near Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 9th, 15th and 19 December - the second for the archipelago. **Yellow-legged Gull:** a second-winter was at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 25 October, and an adult roosted at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) several times from 22 November to 29 December.

**Iceland Gull:** at least 13 were noted in October, all on the Northern and Western Isles, except

for a juvenile at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 5th, and all singles except for two seen from a rig 60 miles north of Orkney on 26th. Around 55 were reported in November with mostly singles in the north and west, south to Dunbar (Loth) and Machrihanish (Arg), with higher counts of three at Loch of Hillwell (Shet) on 4th, and three at Oban (Arg) on 19th. Over 75 were seen in December, again mostly in the north, but with more further south to Lothian and Ayrshire, and highest counts of two - on Fair Isle on 8th & 10th; at Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 10th; at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 13th and 28th; on the Isle of Gigha (Arg) on 19th; at Mallaig (High) on 21st, and at Kyles Paible, North Uist (OH) at the end of December. **Kumlien's Gull:** a second-winter was at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 4 November, with it or another at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 13 November. A juvenile flew north past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 20 Nov; a juvenile was on Fair Isle on 28 November, with a third-winter there on 29th, and an adult was at Peterhead (NES) on 19 December. **Glaucous Gull:** around 17 were reported in October, 25 in November and over 30 in December, predominantly in the north and west, but also south to Lunan Bay (A&D) and Saltcoats (Ayr), with several inland in Highland. Virtually all were singles, but higher counts included two on Sanday (Ork) on 1 October, two on Fair Isle on 18 October; two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 November; two at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 19 November, and two were at Scurival, Barra (OH) on 10 December.

**Little Auk:** first were singles off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 23rd and Fair Isle and Tarbat Ness (High) on 26 October with three past Donmouth (NES) also on 26th, and small numbers trickled in over the next few days. Over

650 were reported in November with peak counts of 155 heading north past St Abb's Head (Bord) on both 21st and 22nd, and 93 passed Barns Ness (Loth) on 28th. Over 1,700 were reported in December, with highest counts at the start and end of the month - 208 passed Barns Ness on 2nd; 216 flew SW past Crail (Fife) on 5th; 592 were off St Abb's Head on 6th, and 170 passed Chanonry Point (High) on 31st. **Rufous Turtle Dove:** a first-year (race *meena*) was at Scalloway, Mainland (Shet) on 25 November to 18 December. **Mourning Dove:** one was in Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) from 26 December into 2016. **Hoopoe:** one was on the Isle of May on 6–12 October, one at Sandside, Mainland (Ork) on 10–11 October, and one at Griminish, North Uist (OH) at the end of October. **Wryneck:** one was at Ocracquoy, Mainland (Shet) on 8 October. **Little Swift:** one was at Thorntonloch (Loth) on 31 December.

**Red-backed Shrike:** one remained at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) to 5 October; singles were on Out Skerries (Shet) on 4–5 October; at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 6 October; on Westray (Ork) on 8 October; at Ollaberry, Mainland (Shet) on 9–11 October, and at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 2 November. **Great Grey Shrike:** first of the autumn was one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 5–7 October, with up to 12 more on Shetland, three on Fair Isle and eight on Orkney by the end of October. Elsewhere in October, singles were on the Isle of May on 18–20th; at Dalmally (Arg) from 20–26th; at Langholm (D&G) on 22–30th and one at Rattray Head (NES) on 28 October. In November, three were on Shetland; at least three on Fair Isle and three on Orkney; one again at Langholm on 7 November; one at Loch of Lintrathen (A&D) on 15 November, with presumed same

again on 13 December; one at Helmsdale (High) on 20 November, and one near Stirling (UF) on 22 November. **Firecrest:** an exceptional October influx of at least 25 birds started with one at Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 6 October. Five were in Shetland, singles on Fair Isle, North Ronaldsay (Ork) and Barra (OH) and all others on the east coast including four in Angus; most were singles but there were three on the Isle of May on 11–12th and two at Mains of Usan (A&D) on 12th. In November sightings shifted south and west with one at Knock, Mull (Arg) on 1st; two at Ullapool (High) on 2nd to 19 December and one or other present into 2016, and singles at Alness (High) on 2 November, at Fife Ness Muir (Fife) on 5–6th, at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 8th, at Cupar (Fife) on 15th and on Eigg (High) on 20 November. **Woodlark:** singles were on Sanday (Ork) on 5–7 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12th, and at Durigarth, Mainland (Shet) on 30 October.

**Arctic Warbler:** one lingered at Weisdale, Mainland (Shet) to 2 October. **Pallas's Warbler:** one was at Balmedie (NES) on 29 October. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** very large numbers persisted, especially on the Northern Isles where well over 250 lingered from September. Another pulse of arrivals occurred on 4 October and around 100 were still on Shetland in mid-October including 11 on Whalsay and 12 at Vidlin, Mainland on 8th, and 12 on Foula on 9th. October peak counts elsewhere were 55 on Fair Isle on 5th; 17 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5th and 11 on South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8th; three at Nigg Bay, Aberdeen (NES) on 8th; two at Montrose (A&D) on 6–8th; and six at Balcomie, Fife Ness (Fife) on 8th; 10 on the Isle of May on 4th; five at Dunbar (Loth) on 6th; eight at St. Abb's

Head (Bord) on 6th, and four at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 20th. In early November there were three on Shetland, one on Fair Isle, one on North Ronaldsay (Ork), five on the Outer Hebrides and the last was one at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 8 November. **Radde's Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 14–19 October. **Dusky Warbler:** singles were at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 5 October; on Fair Isle on 11 October; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 11–19th; at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 13–14th; at Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 17–19th; at Isbister, Mainland (Shet) on 25th; at Burrarfirth, Unst (Shet) on 30 October, and at Clibberswick, Unst on 5–6 November. **Barred Warbler:** in October at least 20 were on Shetland - all in the first two weeks, with three on Fair Isle, nine on Orkney and seven on the Outer Hebrides in October. Elsewhere singles were at Collieston (NES) on 7 October; at Kingsbarns (Fife) on 11th; at Skateraw (Loth) on 13–18th; at Durness (High) and at Balcomie, Fife Ness (Fife) on 18th, and at Dunbar (Loth) on 20 October. One was at Torness (Loth) on 1 November, with possibly the same at Thorntonloch (Loth) from 26 November to 13 December - the latest find date for the species in Scotland and the first present in December. **Subalpine Warbler:** the elusive 'Eastern' lingered at Mossbank, Mainland (Shet) to 13 October. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 19 October. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 5 October and one on Fair Isle on 12 October. **Paddyfield Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 8 October. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one lingered at Toab, Mainland (Shet) to 4 October, and one at Hestingott, Mainland (Shet) to 2nd. One was at Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 12th, and one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 13–16 October.



**Plate 87.** Barred Warbler, Torness, Lothian, December 2015. © Mike Thrower

**Waxwing:** In November singles were at Lerwick and Quendale, both Mainland (Shet) on 5th; on Fair Isle on 6th and 8 Nov; one at Cunnibgsburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 7th; two in Lerwick on 9th; seven were at Banchory (NES) on 10th; 15 in Edinburgh (Loth) on 12th; two near Bowmore, Islay (Arg) on 13th. Three at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 18th; one at South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 20–24th; two Dunbar (Loth) on 24th; two at Musselburgh (Loth) and one at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 25th; two at Sighthill, Edinburgh (Loth) on 26th; one at Evie, Mainland (Ork) and six at Kincorth (NES) on 28 November. About 90 recorded in December, from Whalsay (Shet) to Lothian, with higher counts of 10 in Aberdeen (NES) and at Longniddry (Loth) on 3rd; eight in Elgin (M&N) on 14th; 30 in Edinburgh (Loth) on 17th, and five in Inverness (High) on 18th. The only west coast record in December was of seven at Bowmore (Arg) on 22nd. **Rose-coloured Starling:** the adult lingered near Machir Bay/Loch Gorm, Islay (Arg) to 15 October. **White's Thrush:** one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 20 October, and one at Gulberwick, Mainland (Shet) on 23–24 October. **Swainson's Thrush:** one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 4 October. **Siberian Thrush:** a male was on Fair Isle on 5 October.

**Siberian Rubythroat:** a female was on Fair Isle on 20 October. **Bluethroat:** the male lingered at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) to 6 October, and singles remained on Out Skerries (Shet) and on Sanday (Ork) to 3 October. New singles were at Bixter and Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October; on Fair Isle on 4th; and Burrarfirth, Unst (Shet) on 6th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7–12th; on Fair Isle on 8–12th, with two there on 13th; singles at Haroldswick, Unst and on Foula (both Shet) on 10th; at Cullivoe, Yell (Shet), at Quendale and at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 13th; one was still on Fair Isle on 14–19th; one at Burravoe, Yell (Shet) on 15th; and singles at Quendale, Mainland and at Gulberwick, Mainland (Shet) on 15–17th, one at Haroldswick, Unst on 18th; one at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 20 October and one at Quendale on 4 November. **Red-flanked Bluetail:** one was at Noup Head, Westray (Ork) on 5 October; one on Fair Isle on 11th; one at Sandside Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 12th, and one at Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 16 October. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** one lingered at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) to 2 October; one was at Hestingott, Mainland (Shet) on 1–4 October; one at Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 2–3rd; one at Bigton, Mainland (Shet) on 3–4th; singles at Maywick, Mainland (Shet) and on Westray (Ork) on



4th; on Fair Isle on 4th with two there on 5th, and one at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 5th. Singles were on Barra (OH) on 7th and 12th; at Loch of Benston, Mainland (Shet) on 8th; on Foula (Shet) on 10th; and on North Ronaldsay (Ork), at North Loch Eyenort, South Uist (OH) and on the Isle of May on 12th; two on Fair Isle on 13 October, with one still on 14–15th; one at Scalloway, Mainland (Shet) on 15th; one on North Ronaldsay and one on the Isle of May on 15th; one at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 18–20 October, and one at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) on 20 October. **Pied Wheatear:** a female was at Valyie, Unst (Shet) on 14 October. **Siberian Stonechat:** one was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 12–15 October.

**Richard's Pipit:** singles remained on Whalsay (Shet) and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1 October. New arrivals were virtually all on the Northern Isles with over 20 on Shetland, around 17 on Fair Isle, including five on 5th and 6 on 14th, and at least four on North Ronaldsay (Ork) in October. One was still on Fair Isle on 1 November; one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 7 November; one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 15 November, and one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 11 December. Elsewhere one was on the Isle of May on 5 October; one at Torness (Loth) on 6th; two at Barns Ness (Loth) on 10 October, and one Aberlady (Loth) on 3 November. **Blyth's Pipit:** one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 15 October. **Red-throated Pipit:** singles were at Lerwick and Scatness, both Mainland (Shet) and on Fair Isle on 3 October; on the Isle of May on 6 October, and at St. Abb's Head (Bord) on 11 October. **Olive-backed Pipit:** singles were at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 2–8 October; at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) and Fair Isle on 5 October, with at least one

there on 8th; at Vidlin, Mainland (Shet) on 8th; at Tresta, Mainland (Shet) on 8–11th; at Norwick, Unst on 9–11th; at Toab, Mainland on 10th; on Foula (Shet) on 10–12th; with two at Quendale on 11th and one still on 13th. Singles were on the Isle of May on 11th and at Baltasound, Unst and on North Ronaldsay on 12th. One was on Fair Isle on 12th, two on 13–15th, and one still on 17th joined by a new arrival that day, with another there on 19–30th. One was at Gulberwick (Shet) on 14th; one at Quendale (Shet) on 15th; one at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 18 October, and another was on Fair Isle on 3–8 November. **Pechora Pipit:** one at Melby, Mainland (Shet) lingered from September to 13 October, with singles on Foula (Shet) on 10th and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13 October.

**Two-barred Crossbill:** two males were at an undisclosed site in Caithness on 10 December.

**Common Rosefinch:** singles were at Easter Skeld, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October, at Halligarth and Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 5–11 October; on Out Skerries (Shet) on 5th; on Fetlar (Shet) on 8th, and on Fair Isle on 8–12 October. **Snow Bunting:** largest numbers were on the Northern and Western Isles with high counts of 200 at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 1 October; 605 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5th, 250 at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 6 October, and 265 on Fair Isle on 5 November. Highest counts elsewhere were 10 at Ardnave, Islay (Arg) on 22 October, 20 on Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh (Loth) on 27 October, 40 at Out Head, St. Andrews (Fife) on 12 November, eight at Chanonry Point (High) on 16 November, 80 at Nairn (M&N) on 13 December, and 30 at Belhaven Bay, Dunbar (Loth) on 30 December. **Lapland Bunting:** only low single-figure numbers were reported, mostly from the Northern and Western Isles, with

higher counts of four at the Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 4th, eight on North Ronaldsay on 5th and four on Fair Isle on 19th. Elsewhere, one was on the Isle of May on 4–5 October, with two on 6th; one at Balephetrish, Tiree (Arg) on 11th; one at Torness (Loth) on 18 October, singles at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 24th, and at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 24–26th; one at Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 29 October and two at Troup Head (NES) on 1 November.

**Ortolan Bunting:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 2 October, and one on Fair Isle from 16 October to 7 November. **Chestnut Bunting:** a juvenile was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 19–29 October - a (potential) first for Britain.

**Rustic Bunting:** one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 5 October; one at Sandside Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 10th, and one at Camb, Yell (Shet) on 13 October. **Little Bunting:** one was still on Out Skerries (Shet) to 2 October; singles were on Fair Isle on 1st and 4 October; one at Hagdale, Unst (Shet) on 4 October, and one at Baltasound, Unst on 4th and 7–8th; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5–8th; one Fetlar on 8th; one at Norwick, Unst on 9–11th, with three there on 12–13th; singles at Eswick, Mainland and on Foula (both Shet) and one at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 10th; one on Fair Isle on 11th, three on 12th, two on 13th, four on 14th, three on 15th and one on 16–20th; one at Toab, Mainland (Shet) on 12th; one Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 13–15th; one Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 23rd; one on Fair Isle on 25–26th; one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 29 October, and one at Burrafirth, Unst on 7 November. **Wilson's Warbler:** one was at Port Nis, Isle of Lewis (OH) on 13–17 October - the first Scottish record.

## SOC Branch Secretaries

**Ayrshire:** Anne Dick  
Rowanmyle House, Tarbolton, Mauchline KA5 5LU.  
Tel: 01292 541981  
Email: a\_m\_dick@btinternet.com

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

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

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

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

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

**Fife:** Caroline Gordon  
25 Mackie Crescent, Markinch, Glenrothes KY7 6BB.  
Tel: 01592 750230  
Email: sweetbank101@gmail.com

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

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

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

**North-East Scotland:** John Wills  
Bilbo, Monymusk, Inverurie AB51 7HA.  
Tel: 01467 651 296  
Email: grampian.secretary@the-soc.org.uk

**Orkney:** Post vacant

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

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

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

## SOC Local Recorders

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

**Argyll:** Jim Dickson  
01546 603967  
meg@jdickson5.plus.com

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

Assistant recorder: Angus Hogg  
dcgos@globalnet.co.uk

**Borders:** Ray Murray  
01721 730677  
bordersrecorder@gmail.com

**Caithness:** Sinclair Manson  
01847 892379  
sinclairmanson@btinternet.com

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

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

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

**Fair Isle:** David Parnaby  
01595 760258  
fibo@btconnect.com

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

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

Assistant recorder: Neil Bielby  
n.bielby@sky.com

**Highland:** Peter Gordon  
01479 821339  
gordon890@btinternet.com

**Isle of May:** Iain English  
01698 891788  
i.english@talk21.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# PhotoSPOT

**Plate 88.** During the early afternoon of 15 October 2015, while visiting Victoria Park in Glasgow's west end, I noticed a Little Grebe on the pond.

Luckily for me the bird was favouring a shaded area where just a single ray of sunlight directly illuminated the bird and helped create the dark background which set the grebe off beautifully.

Since it's an old boating pond, the low concrete surround enabled me to get down low, almost eye-to-eye with the bird and the 'icing on the cake'... well a beak-full of Stickleback finished the composition perfectly!

**Equipment used:** Canon 70D, Canon EF100–400mm f4.5–5.6 L lens, Aperture Priority, ISO 800, shutter 1/640, aperture f7.1.

**Steven Mcgrath, 3 Scotsburn Road, Glasgow G21 3HU.**  
**Email: [steven6075@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:steven6075@hotmail.co.uk)**



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