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

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

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

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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.

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

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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

As I write this foreword the autumn migration is in full swing with Pink-footed Geese flying into Aberlady Bay every evening. This is always a wonderful sight and the sound of the geese flying over well into the night is very evocative as well as being a harbinger of winter. Goose Evenings at Waterston House continue to be very popular when John Harrison, the Warden at Aberlady explains how he manages to count the roosting birds with considerable accuracy and then everyone awaits the arrival of the skeins of birds coming in as the light fades. Additionally many warblers have appeared particularly Yellow-browed Warblers as well as trees full of Goldcrests!

Plate 253. James Main, September 2016.
© Doreen Main

This year's Autumn Conference on the theme of 'Scotland's Seas' was a great success with a series of excellent presentations. (pages 310–318) There was a well-attended AGM when the appointment of new Club Officials and Council Members was confirmed. I am delighted that Jeremy Wilson is now Vice-President of the Club; Andrew Thorpe is now Club Treasurer, in succession to Alan Fox, and Chris Wernham who is Head of BTO Scotland joins Council. I am also delighted that Bob McGowan and Alison Creamer have agreed to continue on Council for a further period. Alan Fox did a huge amount of work for the Club, as Treasurer, as well as guiding Council through the intricacies of the conversion to a SCIO. He was also instrumental in arranging to have solar panels fitted to the roof of Waterston House. We will miss his wise counsel. The staff from Waterston House did a great job in ensuring the Conference was well organised and ran smoothly. Thanks to Wendy, Kathryn and Jane. As ever Stephen Hunter, this year ably assisted by David Palmar, ensured that the audio-visual presentations worked well with only a few glitches.

We were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Ray Murray, just a few days before the Conference, whilst birdwatching in Peru. Ray had been a stalwart of the Club for over 40 years, contributing hugely to the running of the Club, editing its publications and doing a huge amount of atlassing work. His death will leave an enormous gap. We were also saddened to learn of the death of Duncan Watt after a period of indifferent health (page 304). Duncan had been a long-standing and very active member of Ayr Branch and was heavily involved centrally with the strategy of the Club some five years ago. We were further saddened to learn of Campbell McLellan's death just after Conference. Campbell and Vicky have been involved in the SOC for many years and have been huge supporters of the Club. Obituaries for Ray and Campbell will appear in the next issue.

On a more positive note plans are well advanced for the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference which will be held in Dunfermline on 18 March 2017. This Conference is held in conjunction with BTO Scotland and is led by SOC Fife Branch. I do hope you will be able to join us for what is shaping up to be a really splendid day.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and Good Birding in 2017!

James Main, SOC President



Plate 254 Pink-footed Geese over North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 10 April 2016. © Brian Rabbitts

Spring emigration of Pink-footed Geese on 10 April 2016

C.R. McKAY

Throughout Scotland from early April onwards, flocks of Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*, sometimes accompanied by Greylag Geese *A. anser*, can be seen heading north-west on their way to breeding grounds in Iceland and east Greenland. Thom (1986) noted that “flocks often set off at dawn in anticyclonic weather and take advantage of passes such as Drumochter ... some birds head out into the Atlantic from the Butt of Lewis and a flightline is known to cross Scotland from the Kyle of Sutherland northward...” Visible migration counts at the Butt of Lewis since 2011 have seen day counts on 11 dates of over 1,000 Pink-footed Geese heading out of the Minch north-westwards, with a maximum of 7,150 on 12 April 2015 (Tony Marr, www.trektellen.org). In Glen Isla (Angus), spring is the only time of year when the flocks follow a north-westerly bearing, flying directly up the glen then climbing high over the Caenlochan and Lochnagar plateaux at 1,000 m. It is likely that they are heading directly to Iceland, and it’s always an inspiring sight, but raises the question of how far the birds have come on a particular day, and where will they end up?

On 9 April 2016, murky weather from occluded fronts straddled Scotland north to south. But overnight the arc of bad weather moved north eastwards into the North Sea, leaving clearer skies with light south-east winds by dawn on 10 April (Figure 1) - classic conditions for geese to set off on their outward flight from Scotland. As 10 April fell on a Sunday, it meant that many observers across Scotland witnessed the ensuing movement of geese.

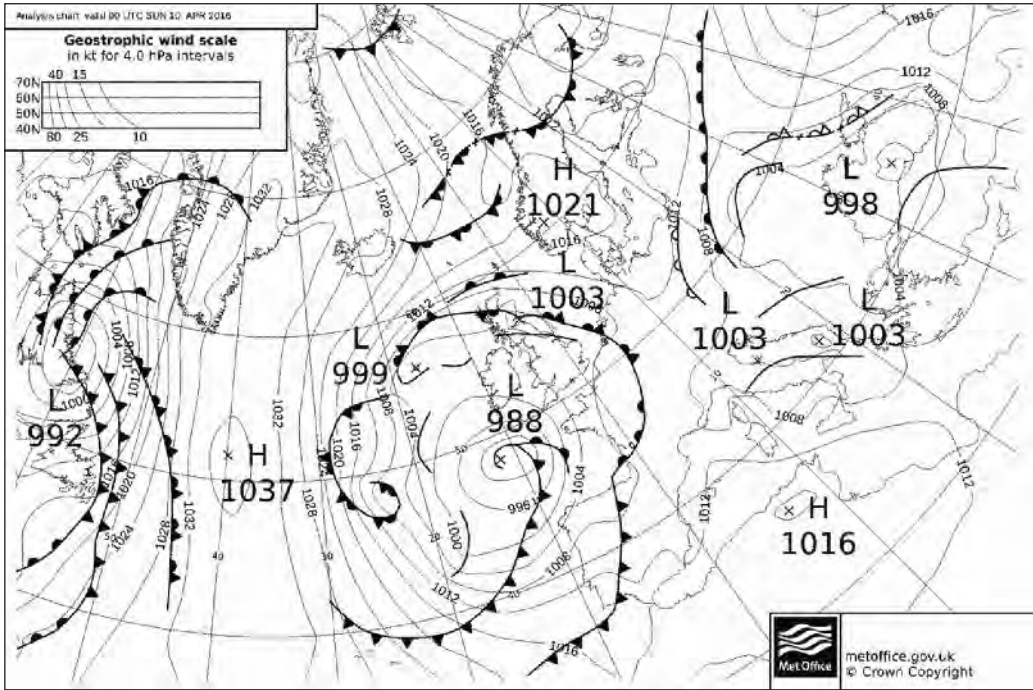
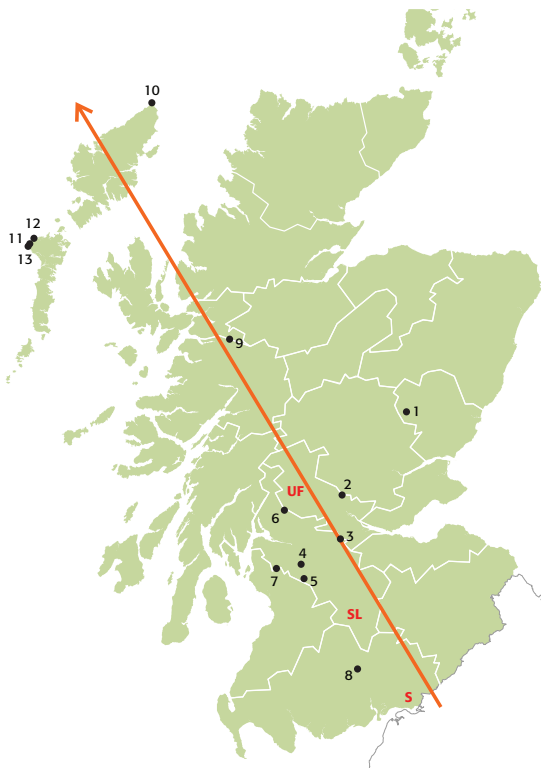


Figure 1. Synoptic chart for 00:00 hrs on 10 April 2016. This chart is derived from information supplied by the Met Office.



In Glen Isla, several flocks totalling 273 birds made their way north-west up the glen during the morning of 10 April 2016 (Figure 2). With no geographic concentrating factors operating to funnel birds into the Angus glens, it seemed likely that this was a small sample of a broad front movement. And so it proved to be, with similar passage taking place right across Scotland. Mike Bell in Dunblane (Upper Forth) saw “quite a northward movement of Pink-feet with flocks of 190, 30, 60, 140 & 55 totalling 475 birds in only 1 hour 10 minutes between 1100 & 1210 hr. I guess there could have been a lot more before 1100 hr”. Further to the west in Clyde, overflying Pink-footed Geese were

Figure 2. Sites where Pink-footed Geese were reported on 10 April 2016. Key: 1 = Glen Isla; 2 = Dunblane; 3 = Cumbernauld; 4 = Darnley C.P.; 5 = Bennan Loch; 6 = Cashel; 7 = Barr Loch; 8 = Nithsdale; 9 = South Cluanie ridge, Glen Shiel; 10 = Butt of Lewis; 11 = Balranald, North Uist; 12 = Callernish; 13 = Kyles-Paible. The orange line is an extrapolated ‘back-track’ towards potential source areas of flocks of Pink-footed Geese passing over Glen Shiel on a north-westerly bearing. Key: UF = Upper Forth; SL = South Lanarkshire; S = Solway.

noted at Cumbernauld (310), Darnley Country Park (500), Bennan Loch (280), Cashel (400) and Barr Loch (72), totalling over 1,500 birds (per Clyde SOC Grapevine). Further south, A. Bowman noted 150 passing north through Nithsdale (Dumfries & Galloway).

Whilst walking the South Cluanie ridge near Glen Shiel (Highland) at c. 900 m above sea level (Figure 2), Douglas Gilbert noted several flocks of Pink-footed Geese passing over north-west - some so high that they could only be detected by call. Could these birds have been some of the very same flocks as seen in central and southern Scotland earlier in the day? Assuming that these geese were following a north-westerly heading for Iceland, then northern Lewis (Outer Hebrides) should probably have been their last sight of land before they headed off on the 800 km flight to Iceland.



Plate 255. Glen Shiel, Highland, 10 April 2016. © Douglas Gilbert

This had certainly been the case a few days previously, when Tony Marr stationed at the Butt of Lewis saw no less than 3,320 grey geese (probably Pink-feet) headed north-west on 8 April - an impressive migration spectacle. But the western arm of the occluded front that had cleared most of Scotland overnight on 9th/10th was still lingering over the northern end of the Outer Hebrides on the 10th, and Tony recorded a blank day at the Butt of Lewis. However, this was not the case further south in the Outer Hebrides, where Brian Rabbitts documented an unusually large passage of Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* and Pink-footed Geese over North Uist, totalling over 6,625 and 1,700 respectively. His account in the Curracag wildlife news blog (www.curracag-wildlifeneews.org.uk/viewtopic.php?f=15&t=1442) reads as follows:

“There was a massive movement of geese over North Uist on 10th between 09.20 and 15.45 hours. Most were in the Balranald Nature Reserve area with others near Kyles-Paible and Callernish. Needless to say pretty difficult to get any accurate counts. There were at least 6,650 Barnacles heading N or NW (some stopping briefly but then soon moving through) and 6,625 on the ground (possible, but unlikely, that some 2,000 on the ground at Aird an Runair may have been among the 3,500 or so seen by Dave Britton in the Callernish area in the afternoon). Only 62 Greenland White-fronts were identified but Pink-feet were much in evidence with at least 1,700 >N between 10.25 and 14.38 hours. With at least 1,750 geese not identified a total in excess of 16,750 during the day. And I’m sure I missed some others. A few other species >N or >NW included 62 Whooper Swans and 30 Golden Plover.”

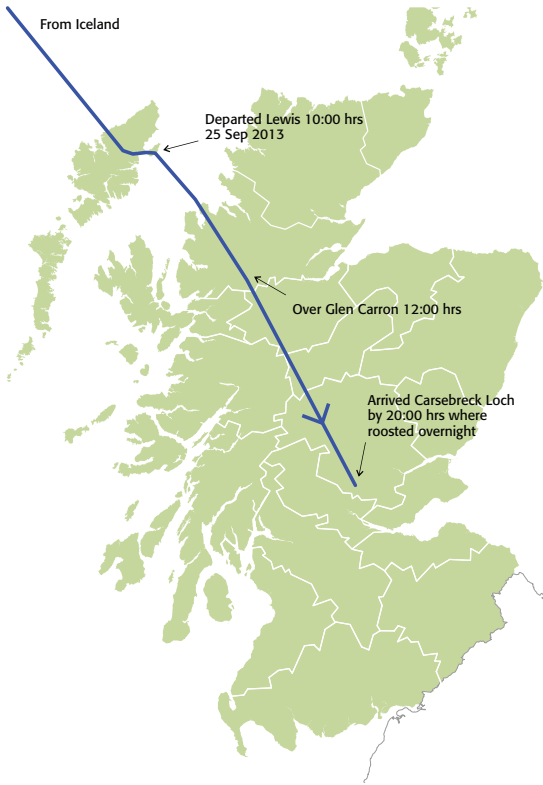


Figure 3. Track of Pink-footed Goose UCOL13 from Lewis to Carsebreck (Upper Forth) on 25 September 2013 (WWT data; see tracking.wwt.org.uk/maps/pinkfeet.php?startdate=15.09.2013&enddate=01.10.2013)

It appears that on 10 April the route of the Pink-footed Geese had diverted unusually far to the west (B. Rabbitts pers. comm.) that they had ended up joining the flight path of Iceland-bound Barnacle Geese from Islay, Argyll.

The navigational abilities of our Pink-footed Geese have been studied by Carl Mitchell of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). He GPS tagged two birds in Iceland in 2013, and was able to track the autumn migration of one bird (UCOL13) all the way from Iceland to Carsebreck Loch in Strathallan (Upper Forth), a favourite gathering place for newly arrived Pink-footed Geese (Figure 3). This bird's track through Scotland on 25 September 2013 shows how precisely the bird followed a south-east bearing - taking it unerringly to what was presumably its intended destination. The movements of all the Pink-footed Geese GPS tagged by WWT during 2013-15 can be found on their website: telemetry.wikispaces.com/pinkfeet.

Several good quality fixes showed UCOL13's departure from Lewis at 10:00 hrs, and its south-easterly track over the mountains of the North-west Highlands direct to Carsebreck where it arrived at an unknown time before the next 'fix' was received at 20:00 hrs. The lack of fixes between 12:00 and 20:00 hrs means that we can't be sure of the exact route that the bird followed, nor the exact time that it arrived at Carsebreck, but nevertheless, the first leg between Lewis and Glen Carron was a reasonably good bearing for a Carsebreck-bound bird to take. If we assume that our Pink-feet can navigate equally well in the opposite direction in the spring, then it is possible to 'back-track' the route of the birds seen over Glen Shiel to identify the potential source areas from which they hailed - probably leaving their roosts at dawn on the 10th (Figure 2). Depending on the speed of the birds and how long they had been flying for, potential locations include the Upper Forth valley area near Lake of Menteith, the Carstairs area in South Lanarkshire (Clyde) or the Solway Firth (Dumfries & Galloway).

The movement described here is probably typical of many days in April when the weather is favourable for goose emigration. The number involved (c.3,000 birds) is not particularly large considering the current size of the Pink-footed Goose population in the UK (over 500,000 wintering birds), and was exceeded two days later on 12 April at the Butt of Lewis alone when 6,000 grey geese (probably Pink-feet) left the Minch flying north-west (Tony Marr pers. comm.). Nevertheless, these data show how even 'casual' observations of everyday species can contribute to a better understanding of the timing and scale of migration. There is still much to learn about the movements of many species, and I would encourage all observers not to under-estimate the value of their observations, and to ensure that they are submitted to the relevant local recorder, BirdTrack (bto.org/birdtrack) and/or Trektellen (www.trektellen.org), preferably giving additional details about flight direction to maximise their value.

Reference

Thom, V.M. 1986. *Birds in Scotland*. T. & A.D. Poyser, Calton.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Douglas Gilbert for details of his Pink-footed Goose sightings; Brian Rabbits for his account of migration over North Uist; Carl Mitchell & WWT for use of tracking data for UCOL13 and for comments on the manuscript.

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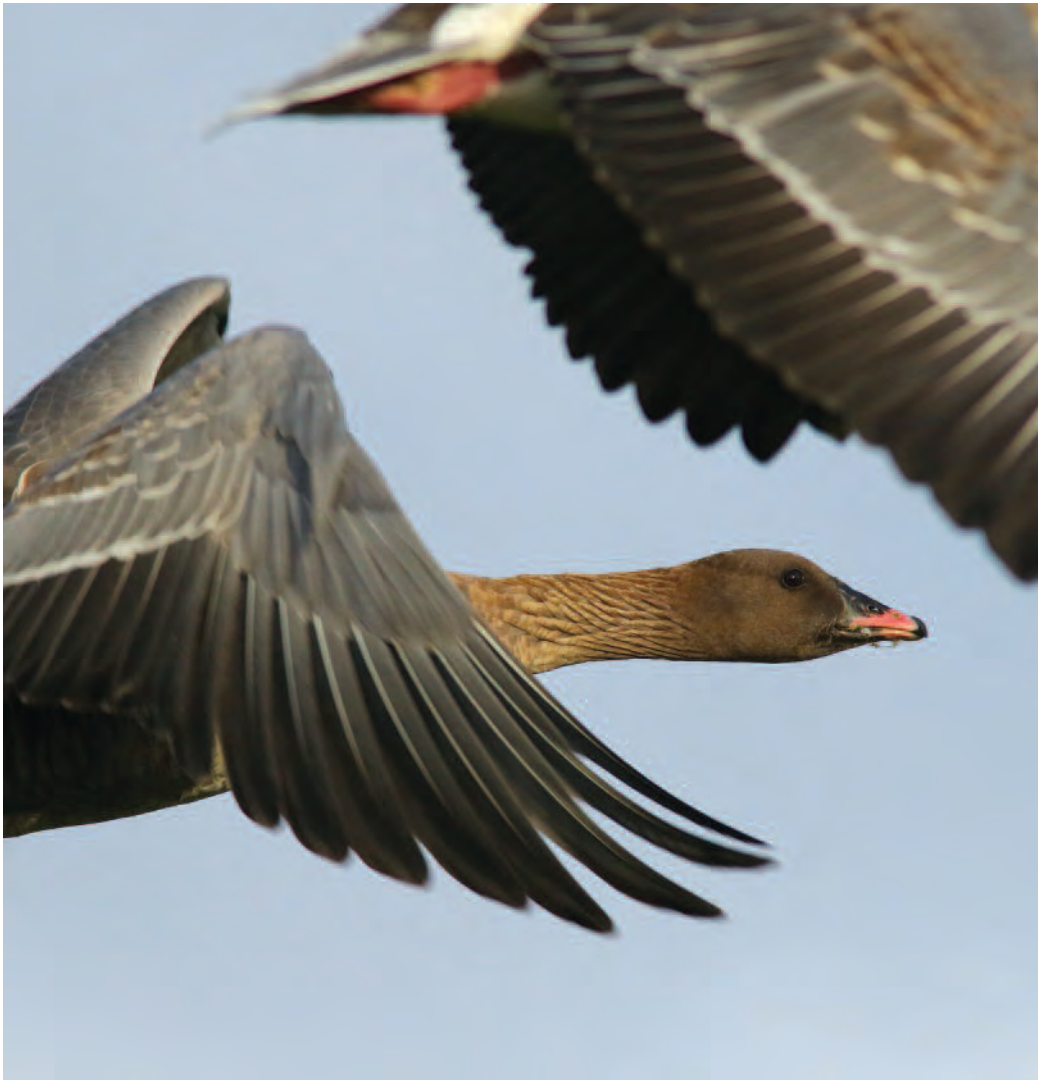


Plate 256. Pink-footed Geese taking flight, Fair Isle, October 2016. © Ian Andrews

Changes in the migration and wintering behaviour of Lapwings in Mid Deeside, North-east Scotland, 2008–16

D. JENKINS & T.H. SPARKS

In Mid Deeside, Lapwings used to leave after the breeding season and not return until late winter. Since 2008, Lapwings have migrated through Mid Deeside in autumn and now overwinter near Aboyne, with these changes in behaviour associated with rising temperatures. Birds disappeared from these wintering areas when the ground was icy or covered in snow. The origin of these wintering birds is unknown.

Introduction

This paper describes a change in behaviour of Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* in Mid Deeside, North-east Scotland. They were formerly spring/summer visitors (Cramp & Simmons 1983), but have recently begun to migrate through the area in autumn and to overwinter.

Previous accounts of Lapwings emphasise reductions in numbers and distribution throughout North-east Scotland since the mid-20th century and their present scarcity is obvious to local observers. Formerly they occurred widely in North-east Scotland, especially in lowland agricultural straths and in glens in neighbouring hills. They were found mainly on or near newly emergent crops and on short, poorly drained pasture grazed year-round by livestock. Such rough pastures for grazing stock are increasingly rare.

In spring, Lapwings were recorded in 89% of sites visited, but by 1980 reductions in the proportions of sites occupied already suggested a decline (Buckland *et al.* 1990) and this continued subsequently (M. O'Brien in Forrester *et al.* 2007, N. Penford in Francis & Cook 2011). Although such decreases were evident on lowland farms, Lapwing numbers were stable on hill farms in North-east Scotland such as at Balloch and Glen Cat and they also bred at the Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve from 2008 when arable cultivation stopped there (Figure 1; Jenkins & Watson 1999, 2005; C. Reid *in litt.*). Spring totals at Balloch varied annually, but overall there was no significant trend ($p=0.2$).

Methods

Study area

The study area was on and near flood plains in Mid Deeside around Tarland, Aboyne and Lumphanan (Figure 1). Much of this area was owned by large estates with tenant farmers. The estates employed gamekeepers who controlled predators. Corvids were nonetheless widespread and locally numerous, especially at Auchlossan (Figure 1) where up to 30 Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* were sometimes counted plus up to c.1,000 Rooks *C. frugilegus* and Jackdaws *C. monedula* in winter, with smaller numbers at other places. Farming was mixed, concentrating on cattle rearing and fattening and most farms also carried lowland sheep. Most crops were still spring-sown cereals or grass for grazing, silage and hay, but over the years these gradually changed to rape and to autumn-sown cereals as field size increased even further and stock and labour were reduced. The main changes had occurred about the 1960s with the arrival of large machines

requiring big fields which were ploughed right up to the boundaries, and with the amalgamation of small farms leading to big, largely self-contained agricultural units. All the lowland study area was cultivated except for a frequently flooded area of 10–20 ha of associated rough grazing at Auchlossan where attempts at total drainage have so far failed. Elsewhere, wetlands were drained wherever practicable and ploughed in early summer as water remnants gradually disappeared.

Site A, near Tarland (Figure 1) at western Cromar, was an artificial marsh created for wildlife from waste water, usually dry after midsummer. Site B, next to Site A, was a large (14 ha) improved grass field used for early grazing (especially cattle) and later alternatively for silage or hay. It was occasionally flooded but usually was damp, with small pools in winter/early spring. It was the site of an ancient pool on the Tarland burn, mapped by Macgillivray (1855), and was preferred by birds over apparently similar neighbouring fields. Site C was a seasonal pool at the southeast end of the Cromar plain, drained in late spring 2016; and Site D, Auchlossan, was the remains of an ancient, now drained, loch (Littlejohn 1998). Sites B and D usually held most if not all Lapwings



Figure 1. Mid Deeside, North-east Scotland showing the principal roads and waterways, and including main areas used by Lapwings (labelled A–H).

wintering on the study area and also most pairs each spring. Three riverside farms (Sites E, F and G) held Lapwings in some autumns when birds collected on suitable short grass. Site H, a roadside pool in grassland, was created a few years ago by accidental blockage of drains during roadwork. Many ducks and waders were recorded at this pool from 2014 onwards. In winter, Lapwings on the study area were found exclusively in these places so that total counts were practicable. In spring, a few pairs (<10) spread out from the study area on to farms in the immediate neighbourhood and elsewhere where they were not studied.

Bird recording

Since DJ has mobility problems, recording took place from a car. Nearly all Lapwings could be seen from a road circuit and DJ's driver walked to a few places invisible from the farm tracks. These sites were visited every few days from 2008 to 2016 except in deep snow or when approach roads were flooded. In 2008 and 2009, recording only took place at Tarland; other sites were added in 2009/10.

Lapwing flocks were seen either in or at the edge of water or in areas of short, damp grassland offering good visibility (for observer as well as for birds) and presumed good food for Lapwings though migrant and wintering birds were seldom seen feeding. Outside nesting time, most birds present were usually in one or a few locations near water. Most flocks were resting in tight packs, suggesting that they fed elsewhere, perhaps at night on newly-emergent crops away from water.

Occasionally farmers reported Lapwings nesting in grazed or mown fields away from the main lowland valleys (up to three pairs in any year at Sites E, F or G) but these breeding attempts usually failed. The farmers claimed that the eggs hatched, but the chicks were lost to predators.

Meteorological data

We used Met Office data of mean monthly temperatures for "Scotland E" (www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate/uk/summaries/datasets), while daily weather data for Aboyne and Inverbervie No.2 (on the coast 40 km south-east of Aboyne) were downloaded from TuTiempo (en.tutiempo.net/climate/united-kingdom.html).

Results

Mean monthly temperatures for early in the year are shown in Figure 2. Generally, temperatures were above the 1961–90 reference period, although December 2010 and March 2013 were noticeably colder than the subsequent warmer years. Larger numbers of Lapwings were usually seen in more recent winters (but not in 2015/16, see Table 1 and below) than in earlier years.

In winter, Lapwings disappeared from Mid Deeside when the ground was frosty. Local November–February weather records show that the average minimum temperature was lower (-0.8°C) during Lapwing absences than during presences ($+0.7^{\circ}\text{C}$) ($p=0.004$). The Lapwings may not have gone far because during their absences from Mid Deeside the average minimum temperature at a coastal weather station (Inverbervie) about 40 km from the study area was still $+1.5^{\circ}\text{C}$.

In the Mid Deeside study area, Lapwings were recorded in every winter month, though absent in ice and snow, especially in the earlier years. We visited the area in icy conditions sufficiently often to confirm that Lapwings really had departed. In cool January/February 2010 (Figure 2), only 33% of visits recorded Lapwings (maximum 18), while in the equivalent much warmer period in 2014, 96% of visits recorded Lapwings (maximum 380). Flock size was much larger in winters 2013/14 and 2014/15 than in the four previous seasons. As also recorded by Shrubbs (2007), there was usually not much change in flock size in early winter but, barring 2013 when ice and snow persisted till 9 April, numbers tended to increase in late winter. Lapwings were found in differing places throughout these winters, mostly at Sites B and D, but in 2014/15, particularly at Sites C, G and H where they fed in crops of newly-sown young grass.

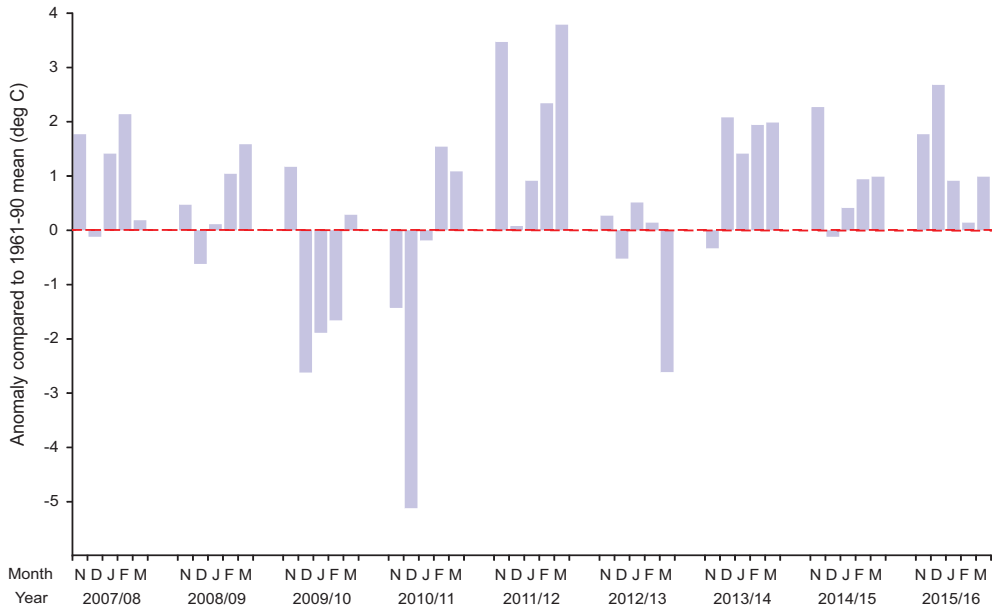


Figure 2. Mean monthly temperature data for November–March for East Scotland 2007/8–2015/6 (Source UK Met Office). Data are presented as anomalies (differences in °C) from the 1961–1990 monthly means; thus months with bars below the horizontal are colder than the long-term average for that month, and vice-versa.

Lapwings on the study area usually occurred in a single flock. So average daily counts indicate flock sizes (Table 1) and cumulative daily counts (=‘bird-days’) are used as a monthly index of numbers. Over the eight years 2009–16, the monthly index varied from zero (December 2009 and 2010) to 253 (October 2014). Highest monthly numbers varied between 50–104 in 2009, 2010 and 2012 and 213–253 in 2011, 2013 and 2014. Thus more of the later years than the earlier years had high indices.

Our data show some patterns on the lines suggested by M. O’Brien (in Forrester *et al.* 2007). In Mid Deeside, following fledging in June/July, a general absence of Lapwings in late summer/autumn was interspersed by transient flocks of various sizes. Excluding obvious late broods with 1–2 adults, most flocks were greater than 40 birds which stayed for one to a few days. In November, there were no counts greater than 100 before 2012, but thereafter an increasing number of such large flocks.

We recorded few extra (i.e. more than we expected or ‘new’) Lapwings in June, suggesting that few immigrants had so far reached Mid Deeside. However, in 2014 probable migrants were recorded at Site B in June. They were more frequent in July at Site H (roadside), particularly in 2015 on nine days between 25 July and 25 August (with no birds on another six days interspersed in the same period). These flocks contained 15–79 birds and were resting. We did not at first age them, but on four days most or all were first-year birds. Much the same was recorded in 2016 between 19 July and 9 August. Lapwings were recorded on six of eight visits, with none on two days, both in August. Flocks numbered 66–155 birds, and all but fewer than five birds in any flock were first-years. Their origin is uncertain, and we do not know why they contained so few adults. Presumably they were migrants, on their way to winter quarters, and on this interpretation migrant flocks were seen in Deeside in each late summer and autumn month through the study, except October 2010.

In the winters (December/February) of 2013/14 and 2014/15, the highest numbers of Lapwings occurred in February. Overall, the wintering population was much higher in 2014/15 than earlier. Additionally, an increase in flock sizes in recent years was apparent, though in the 2015/16 winter no Lapwings were seen until 19 birds on 21 December.

Table 1. A) Percentage of visits (total number of visits in parentheses) on which Lapwings were observed in the study area. B) Mean number of Lapwings when present. Dashes indicate no visits.

A)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2008	50 (6)	89 (9)	67 (6)	-	-	-	-	100 (4)	100 (3)	47 (17)	25 (12)	0 (7)
2009	50 (6)	67 (15)	29 (17)	86 (21)	83 (18)	75 (12)	77 (13)	53 (17)	15 (13)	40 (15)	14 (7)	0 (1)
2010	43 (7)	20 (5)	92 (12)	82 (17)	56 (16)	31 (13)	72 (18)	73 (15)	23 (13)	30 (10)	12 (8)	-
2011	100 (2)	100 (4)	100 (10)	100 (9)	80 (5)	25 (4)	58 (12)	64 (14)	65 (20)	67 (15)	45 (11)	29 (7)
2012	56 (9)	64 (14)	89 (19)	100 (7)	93 (14)	83 (6)	64 (14)	23 (13)	46 (13)	64 (14)	57 (14)	17 (12)
2013	50 (4)	80 (5)	90 (10)	100 (12)	100 (8)	83 (6)	86 (7)	80 (10)	60 (15)	37 (19)	67 (9)	33 (12)
2014	93 (15)	100 (11)	100 (10)	100 (7)	100 (8)	100 (6)	33 (9)	27 (11)	38 (8)	100 (1)	100 (8)	50 (8)
2015	50 (8)	75 (4)	100 (10)	100 (8)	100 (8)	100 (7)	50 (8)	47 (19)	54 (13)	50 (10)	25 (8)	33 (9)
2016	71 (7)	100 (8)	100 (8)	100 (9)	100 (10)	100 (8)	100 (8)	78 (9)	38 (8)	56 (9)	-	-
B)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2008	17	97	104	-	-	-	-	78	50	52	5	0
2009	13	74	45	4	10	7	33	51	70	87	40	0
2010	9	9	14	11	10	11	501	36	29	33	20	-
2011	28	35	56	23	4	2	46	240	80	71	30	21
2012	15	70	62	25	19	8	4	22	35	85	90	16
2013	25	40	25	16	17	5	27	72	116	215	150	88
2014	93	198	117	20	11	19	63	26	55	80	214	100
2015	84	106	55	22	11	4	9	45	86	78	60	30
2016	107	56	38	16	15	17	64	37	21	108	-	-

Discussion

Transients and a new winter flock

Lapwings were seen or reported surprisingly seldom from places outwith our study area. New places included fields at the edge of moorland on the National Nature Reserve at Dinnet which were cultivated up to 2008 and then put down to permanent pasture and soon occupied by breeding Lapwings. Nine pairs fledged at least six chicks in 2016 (C. Reid *in litt.*). Small numbers of migrant Lapwings were also reported occasionally near Loch Davan in this reserve. Another new site, used increasingly frequently after 2014, was the newly created Site H at which birds occurred close to the road, enabling us to age them.

Most of these stopping places were used temporarily as resting places, and feeding birds were seldom seen nearby. Besides Dinnet, exceptions were the riverside farms near Haugh (Site F) in 2014 where newly-sown/emergent grass provided unusually good feeding in one late autumn/winter. Up to 80 feeding birds were counted by farmers in September–December 2014 and c. 40 in January–March 2015. This site was not used subsequently when the grass was well-rooted and suitable food was presumably no longer available.

In addition, an apparently new Lapwing site was discovered in autumn–winter 2014 at Beltie, near Torphins (Figure 1). Earlier, Lapwings had been thought to use this area occasionally, but were not known to be regular there. In 2014, the flock numbered 50–70 from 28 June to 10 November, 35–40 in December, 17 or fewer in January 2015 and none later. Clearly, despite a reduced total population and changing migrating and wintering behaviour, Lapwings in Mid Deeside are not confined to the traditional gathering/breeding places on flood plains but are liable to be found wherever conditions are suitable. The implication is that most places are unsuitable for them.

Lapwing movements

Most Lapwings left Mid Deeside in bad winter weather. Departures also occurred at other times (for example in drought or floods in spring) leading to absences sometimes for a day or two, sometimes for weeks or even months. Shrub (2007) quoted one case in which Lapwings left their breeding area from May to October at a time of severe drought and this was paralleled at Tarland and Coull in 2011, probably for the same reason. As a result of this behaviour, counts of Lapwings in Mid Deeside showed

frequent fluctuations. Lapwing numbers were higher in recent mild Januarys than previously, scores or hundreds of Lapwings appearing as soon as frosts lifted (e.g. no birds recorded on 5 January 2014, minimum temperature -3.9°C , but 190 birds two days later, minimum temperature 6.2°C). These comparisons confirm the ability of Lapwings to respond to milder winters but raise the questions of where the incoming birds originated, as well as where they went during frosts and other absences. The only clues so far come from sightings in 2014. On the study area, counts reached 337–380 on 13 and 17 February and 405 on 8 March, but fell to only 110 birds on 24 February, 146 on 4 March, and 178 on 12 March. On 1 March, c. 130 migrant Lapwings (present in the morning, gone in the afternoon) were seen briefly in two separate flocks in upper Glen Gairn (NJ 294008) to the west of the study area, and on 23 March 200 Lapwings were found at NJ 285088 (data from I. Hastie and H.I. Scott). Possibly these birds and the others at Cromar were parts of the same population, with groups leaving the main wintering area to prospect and perhaps nest in the hills. In this case, birds on hill and lowland may be considered as a single self-perpetuating unit breeding sustainably in the hills and wintering on the lowlands. Weather movements may be to nearby coasts from which birds can return rapidly following a thaw. This idea could be tested by ringing either breeding or wintering birds. Ringing studies in progress include a Lapwing recorded in North-east Scotland in August to November 2013, originally ringed as a pullus in Norway in the preceding spring (R. Duncan *in litt.*). Continental birds may be involved in Deeside, in addition to our proposed self-sustaining unit.

Acknowledgements

DJ was helped by many people over the years, particularly by farmers allowing access and in towing him out when his car was stuck, and by his driver A. McDonald who walked to places invisible from DJ's car. Local birders, especially H. Addlesee, and scientists (M.P. Harris, H. Kruuk, S.C.F. Palmer and S. Wanless) also helped with counting birds and with early drafts and I. Newton (with late drafts). M. Albon, G. Mcknight (with computers) and D. Ellis (with the map) helped later. Comments by the editor and a referee on an earlier draft were particularly helpful.

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Plate 257. Eilean Nan Ròn, Highland, August 2016. © Bob Harris

Barn Owl feeding on Storm Petrels

The Scottish population of Barn Owls *Tyto alba* has been growing steadily since the 1980s. *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) reported the most northern breeding at two sites in Caithness in 1999 and 2000. Individuals have now reached the north Sutherland coast and breeding is known to have occurred at several sites (Abigail Rhodes *pers. comm.*).

Eilean Nan Ròn, an uninhabited island of 138 ha, lies just over 1 km off the Sutherland coast at Skerray. Uninhabited since 1938, the nine stone houses still visible are in varying stages of decay with the island home now only to wildlife and a small flock of sheep. Since the 1960s, a group of ringers has been visiting the island concentrating, in the latter years, on capturing and recapturing Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* (hereafter petrels) of which there is a substantial breeding colony. Annually in excess of 2,000 individuals are caught.

In 2014, there was suspicion that, in addition to the occasional Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, a Barn Owl was present on the island, although this was never confirmed. In 2015, while searching the buildings for other nesting birds, a Barn Owl was flushed. Examination of the buildings revealed a collection of pellets indicating that this individual had been roosting regularly for at least 4–5 weeks. A sample of the pellets was subsequently removed for analysis. In 2016, an adult was found to be present sitting

on a nest containing three eggs, and additional pellets were again collected for investigation.

From 2015, 35 pellets (dry weight $6.9 \text{ g} \pm 2 \text{ g}$) were subjected to rudimentary analysis which consisted of a simple skull frequency count (petrel or mammal). No attempt has been made for further mammal identification or biomass conversion. Of these pellets six (17%) contained at least one petrel skull (range 1–3) with the rest containing only mammal remains of 2–5 skulls. Only one pellet contained remains of both petrel and mammal. No ringed storm petrel remains were found.

In 2016 twelve pellets were investigated. These were slightly heavier, $12.2 \text{ g} \pm 1.8 \text{ g}$, being analysed before final dry weight had been achieved. Dissection of these pellets revealed petrel skulls in 75% of pellets (average of two per pellet) with only two having purely mammal remains and, again, only one with a mix of both. Six of the nine pellets containing petrel remains also had BTO rings. Five of the rings had been fitted to petrels on Eilean Nan Ròn in 2005, 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2015 respectively, whilst one was from a petrel ringed elsewhere (details awaited). Their breeding status is unknown.

A brief analysis of ten pellets each from three sites on the nearby mainland revealed remains of a ringed petrel from Nan Ròn in only one pellet (Abigail Rhodes *pers. comm.*).

Barn Owls have been recorded taking Storm Petrels for food (Mante & Debize 2012, Guerra *et al.* 2014) and, indeed, crossing sea channels in order to hunt (Guerra *et al.* 2014). Owls will exploit other sources of food when their more usual mammals are in short supply so it is not particularly surprising that Barn Owls are taking Storm Petrels for food. What should be monitored, however, is that a few individuals have the potential to destroy entire colonies of island Storm Petrels as recorded in the Balearic Islands, Spain (Mante & Debize 2012).

Acknowledgements

To the Duke of Sutherland's Estate for continued access to Nan Ròn, the Baché, Shearwood and McShane Ringing Partnership for introducing us to the island and its petrels, to Jean Maclean for boat passage every year, to ringers Kenny McNiffe and Tony Ormond and to all other individuals who have accompanied us over the years.

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Obituaries

Duncan Watt (1949–2016)



Plate 258. Duncan Watt, March 2009. © Liz Leyden

The Land o' Burns lost a charismatic, warm, empathetic personality on Sunday 28 August 2016. The son of a local GP, he was educated in local schools and for most of his 67 years, Duncan lived in Dalry, with brief sorties as far as Glasgow, to qualify in art and design, and to London and Milan for work. Later he became the flamboyant, perceptive, enthralling art teacher, imbuing the pupils with a lifelong respect for observation and nature. Teaching was a large part of his life, caring for his pupils' and students' development be they young, mature or geriatric, whether in music, science, nature, art or medicine, and helping financially if need be. Social media buzzed with respect for him and one former pupil flew up from Bristol to participate in his funeral.

Duncan was well versed in many fields, including the life and works of Burns for whom he often proposed the immortal memory. He cared about the natural world and worked hard to inspire others. When leading local birdwatching groups, for the RSPB or Glasgow University, he is remembered for his affable style, his ability to identify birds and for his

extensive knowledge and folklore. However, we can all make mistakes! His call of Spotted Crake, a big tick for Ayrshire, proved to be a young Moorhen behaving mysteriously. Duncan's eye for shape, form and movement in nature was in fact superb.

As a young lad, he was inspired by meeting George Waterston in 1961 at Project Osprey at Loch Garten. There he filmed the nest on 8 mm film. The Osprey became a feature of his paintings and jewellery in silver and gold, often with a fish. One of his evocative works is displayed in the RSPB visitor centre at Loch Garten. White-tailed Eagle and Capercaillie fired his imagination and have been woven together with Celtic symbolism and Nordic runes into decorative forms. But the climax of his painting career was in capturing in gold paint the spirit of the displaying male Hen Harrier above Muirshiel Country Park in East Renfrewshire.

Duncan was a visionary but sometimes less than practical. Quote Liz, and she should know after 36 years of closely bonded married life: "When Duncan has an idea he thinks it has become reality." On the committee of SOC Ayrshire since 1992, with a period as chairman, another as secretary and then representative on Council, he was the mind behind many activities. On occasion, however, a plaintive call would come from a speaker: "Am I really coming tomorrow?" Duncan had overlooked confirming. An excellent national day conference for BTO and SOC conformed to Duncan's vision; fortunately his helpers realised that the venue was only provisionally booked.

Yet we all have much for which to thank Duncan's inventive mind, even if others may have developed the concept. Nationally he was behind the idea of a Creative Executive at SOC. His ideas were exciting but not always practical or feasible. Some, however, are alive and well: the place of displays of art at conferences and in Waterston House; the appointment and role

of a Development Officer; the uses of legacy funds; and, importantly, the links between SOC, the Isle of May Observatory and the Young Birders' Training Course.

Duncan was an ardent conservationist. He had a vigorous role in the North Ayrshire RSPB Members' Group. A founder member and leader for 13 years, he steered them into participation in many conservation issues including the Garnock Valley Futurescape and the organisation of the Bioblitz event at the County's Eglinton Country Park. He shared a spell of leadership of the local branch of the Young Ornithologists' Club. He and Liz were members of the Glasgow Birdwatchers' Club; he contributed to the Arran Wildlife Festival.

For a while he worked in the Olivetti studio in Milan; at the National Engineering Laboratory; in London for a firm designing street furniture and outdoor street advertising; and for Roche. When finishing at the School of Art, he took a commission from a firm to design an iconic style of bottle to rival the conventional cylinder. This he did with typical insight and was offered cash or commission. His tutor advised him to take the cash as his design was impractical and had no future. Just remember that when you next pick up a hand-fitting detergent or other spray bottle now in use worldwide!

Thirty-six years ago he married a young teacher of religious education, a close bond of the dreamer and the realist, the artist and the photographer. They took their vows in a garden in sight of Tinto Hill. Together, they travelled the world, she with her camera and he with his sketchbooks. He embraced cultures and philosophies as he travelled.

Always more interested in 'local patch' birding than twitching, Duncan embraced BirdTrack for several local areas, sometimes noting that you have to put in many hours of common bird sightings for occasional surprises. But even the days which were quiet for species often yielded sightings of interesting bird behaviour, which he called 'eventing'. Latterly, Duncan and Liz worked to turn their overgrown garden into a bee-friendly wildlife zone, with a disproportionately large pond which it is hoped will be

used by many species as it matures. A despondent hedgehog, recovered by Hessilhead Wildlife Rescue Centre, rejoiced to be released by Duncan on national TV into the garden's rich natural habitat. It was not alone.

*Blackbird bathes, splashing,
at the north-west shore of the Pond.
Bright ripples spread.*

(Haiku by Duncan Watt)

One day Duncan enthralled a large audience at an open meeting organised by SOC Ayrshire, appearing in Celtic attire, revealing how the animation in his sketchbooks of Eland, Impala and Wildebeest in Africa compared with the vitality and observation of cave painting artists from 30 to 40 thousand years ago, who clearly were no primitives in viewing nature. It was a matter of survival for them; perhaps for us too!

Duncan had a flair and style of his own, a rebel to convention and conformity, with an active inventive brain. His art came from his eye seeing surely whether in the heat of the African plain or the moorland of Scotland. His sketchbooks were the foundation of successful exhibitions near and far including in the Netherlands, Belgium and France. His imaginative composition, *Artist, Oryx, Light* was exhibited at the Glasgow Art Club's show at the House of an Art Lover and in Japan.

When he received his diagnosis, in the early hours of a June morning in Solihull, he asked "Did I make a difference?" "Of course you did, Duncan!", Liz replied. They finally parted in a woodland burial site above RSPB Lochwinnoch.

He was due this year to receive an SOC award for long and loyal service. Until a few days before his death, he was hoping to go to Conference to receive it in person.

"Hakuna matata!" as Duncan often said. ["No worries!"]

Henry Martin, Susan Montgomerie, Liz Leyden and friends

[Some of Duncan's artwork can be seen on his website, www.spectrus.co.uk]

Hugh Boyd (1925–2016)



Plate 259. Hugh Boyd with Greylag Geese, Scotland, 1963.
© Malcolm Ogilvie

Hugh James Boyd was a pioneer of waterbird science and conservation who published nearly 200 papers, notably on Arctic breeding geese and waders, introduced vital monitoring schemes and was in the forefront of moves to improve international cooperation on wetland conservation. He was born in Bristol on 12 May 1925 and studied Zoology, Microbiology and Chemistry at the University of Bristol. His ornithological career began in 1948 as warden of Lundy Bird Observatory. In 1949, he became the first resident wildlife biologist at the Severn Wildfowl Trust (now the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust), which had been established at Slimbridge on the Severn estuary. In the next 20 years, the team of scientists at Slimbridge would win an international reputation for their work.

Boyd's major task was to establish a waterfowl monitoring and ringing programme to provide the scientific basis for a national conservation effort. During this work, he undertook detailed studies of the biology and behaviour of waterfowl, particularly White-fronted Geese,

and helped to establish techniques which ornithologists now take for granted, such as systematic counts. By 1960 monitoring programmes on ducks, geese and swans had been established. The plight of the goose population was illustrated by Boyd's estimate in 1960 that there were just 100,000 individuals from 10 populations of seven species in Britain.

Boyd's work informed subsequent programmes to protect species populations, create protected areas, and conserve critical wetland sites throughout the United Kingdom. From 1956 Boyd represented Britain on the International Wildfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (now Wetlands International), where he was one of the originators of what became the Ramsar Convention. He had a good connection with Scotland, starting the annual grey goose counts back in the 1950s, as well as writing seminal papers on the Pink-footed Goose. He was also seconded for two years to NCC Scotland, working on geese and the Loch Leven ducks, before being head-hunted by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS).

In 1967, he left Britain for Canada to become Research Supervisor of Migratory Birds in Eastern and Arctic Canada. Later, he became director of the CWS's migratory birds branch, then senior policy adviser. Modest, softly spoken, but rigorous in his approach to research, Boyd fostered a strong scientific ethos at the CWS. Under his influence, the CWS developed long-term research and conservation programmes not only for ducks and geese, but for seabirds, shorebirds and songbirds. He would lighten the atmosphere of many scientific seminars with his wry humour: in one discussion of multi-national conservation measures along migration routes, he brought the participants back to reality saying: "I think we should study where the birds actually fly, rather than telling them where to go." He was in the vanguard of those considering the impacts of climate change in the Arctic, and oversaw the development of the La Perouse Bay Snow Goose research project, initiated in 1968, which became one of the longest and most productive field studies of a bird population in the world.

He officially retired in 1991, but within weeks was appointed Scientist Emeritus by the CWS. He continued to research and to publish until 1997. He celebrated his 80th birthday by visiting Iceland to continue his lifelong studies of the breeding habits of Arctic geese.

In 1992, Boyd was made a research associate of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and in 1996 was awarded the first Peter Scott Medal

for his exceptional contributions to wildfowl and wetland conservation on two continents. In 1997, he won the Society of Canadian Ornithologists' Doris Huestis Speirs Award for outstanding contributions to Canadian ornithology. He was a Member of the Order of Canada. He is survived by his wife, Gillian, and by their three sons.

Malcolm Ogilvie

Richard Evans (1964–2016)

A scholar of eagle place names and expert adviser on complex developments impacting on birds, Richard uniquely contributed to nature conservation. The national White-tailed Eagle reintroduction programme and our understanding of the history of the British Isles' eagle distribution owe much to Richard's ingenious work. Tragically, his life was cut short following a cardiac arrest whilst cycling to work.

From the Welsh border town of Abergavenny in South Wales, Richard read English at University College, Durham. Contributing vigorously to student revelries, Richard (nicknamed "Hamlet") and fellow student Duncan Orr-Ewing indulged in birding, travelling and many other lively exploits. On graduating in 1986, Richard joined an expedition to North West Ecuador to survey rainforest birds as part of a work programme to designate an 'Important Bird Area', now one of 12,000 key global conservation areas. We only discovered at the Memorial Service celebrating his life that Richard was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society on the strength of his report on this work - something proudly proclaimed by his father.

Richard joined the RSPB in 1988 as a Research Assistant, working with Roy Dennis based at Munloch, north of Inverness. He surveyed Moray Firth seaducks in the winter and Caithness seabirds in the summer as part of North Sea oil industry related monitoring, later contributing to scientific publications from both studies. In 1994 his big break came when appointed Red Kite Officer to take responsibility

for Scotland's first reintroduction project on the species on the Black Isle, locating nesting birds following completion of releases. A year later, Richard moved to Mull as the RSPB Conservation Officer, working with Roger Broad, and over the ensuing eight years endeavoured to secure the White-tailed Eagle population there. When he arrived the national population numbered just over 20 pairs, but when he left it was double that, with the largest population on Mull. Richard led efforts to guard nests sites and guide tourists eager to see the birds, and early discussions with farmers over how to resolve debates over losses of lambs to eagles. This experience of the eagles was to prove vital later.



Plate 260. Richard Evans. © RSPB

He moved to Edinburgh in 2002, having met his wife-to-be, Solveigh, an isotope geochemist who had researched the geology and tectonics of the Lochdon area of Mull. Working first as RSPB's Sites Policy Officer and, from 2009, as Senior Conservation Policy Officer, Richard played a central role in the conservation of protected areas in Scotland.

Uniquely, Richard honed three skills, becoming an adept computer analyst of large datasets, an expert adviser on EU and UK environmental case law, and a toponymist - an expert on place names.

As a co-opted member of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) teams at Public Inquiries objecting to large wind farm and industrial developments, Richard's gift for spotting flaws in data and scientific and legal arguments became legendary. Hours of cross-examination of the opposing side would be punctuated by the provision of helpful slips to SNH's counsel pointing to critical legal judgements or inconsistencies which holed the developer's case. And, of course, there were Shakespearean intonations offering encouragement: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" was a favourite, and when a smart alec got ahead of himself, he would whisper, sometimes too audibly: "A fool thinks himself to be wise, but a wise man knows himself to be a fool".

During a sabbatical foray to the National Library of Scotland, Richard made what proved to be an ingenious discovery. He realised that it should be possible to adduce the former British and Irish ranges and population sizes of White-tailed Eagles and Golden Eagles through pouring over historical maps giving often obscure Germanic and Celtic references to locations bearing their names (Erne, Ørn, Eryr, Urley, Iolar, Iolair and Fhírr-eoin were all scoured for in OS gazetteers and the Placenames Database of Ireland). In 2012, he published a scholarly paper with Phil Whitfield and Lorcan O'Toole which traced the changing distribution of these raptors over three millennia. They were able to show that around 1,500 years ago both eagles were widespread, occupying many lowland parts, with possibly up to 1,400 pairs of White-tailed Eagles and 1,500 pairs of Golden Eagles in the British Isles. The paper was 'commended as

outstanding' by the Watson Raptor Science Panel, which awards an annual prize for the best paper on raptors published in Europe.

Early in 2016, Richard worked up a major report on the current status and prospects for White-tailed Eagles in Scotland. This built on his research publications on the demography of 'released' and 'wild-bred' eagles, and on comparisons with Golden Eagles. The growth of the population has given rise to intense discussions between government agencies, conservationists and farmers over how any losses of lambs can be reduced. Richard represented RSPB on the stakeholder group formed to resolve these issues, and commanded great respect for his expert knowledge of the birds as well as an ability to see many sides of an argument.

Increasingly, given his combined legal and scientific expertise, Richard advised on the more contentious and complex development issues. He worked with the forestry and conservation sectors to help devise new guidance on woodland management measures which will benefit raptors. He was a founder member of the Scottish Windfarm Bird Steering Group, working with the renewables industry to develop the evidence base on bird populations and wind farms. Most recently, Richard was immersed in supporting the beginnings of the Heritage Lottery funded project to boost South Scotland's Golden Eagle population. An initiator and proponent of this ambitious work, he was guiding the project team to sites where eagles held dominion centuries ago.

Richard's journey from a graduate in English to an authority on eagles and development planning is inspirational. His kindness, modesty, tactical versatility, diligence, entertaining and unconventional ways, pride in his Celtic Welsh roots (especially when the Welsh rugby team were in their full pomp), and deep love for Solveigh and Aneirin were prominent. Scotland's ornithologists have lost an indomitable hero, who had so much still to give.

Richard is survived by Solveigh, son Aneirin, sister Charlotte, and parents Mary and John.

Stuart Housden, Duncan Orr-Ewing and Des Thompson

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Bearded Tit, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg © Nick Picozzi

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Plate 261. Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry, September 2016. © Jimmy Maxwell

SOC Conference 2016, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

It was September woodland greens all the way this year for 155 delegates travelling to Pitlochry a month earlier than usual and missing the real autumn colours. However, the greying skies were soon forgotten in the spacious luxury of the Atholl Palace Hotel, with a comfortable ambience where old friends could meet and one could settle in for the coming weekend's programme. After the evening meal, Acting President James Main welcomed everyone in the ample Conference Chamber. He mentioned a few organisational points and then, in more sombre mood, related to everyone the sad news of the very recent death of Ray Murray (Borders) and also, a short time before that, of Duncan Watt (Ayrshire). A very moving tribute for Ray had been sent from his great friend Mark Holling and this was read out. Duncan was also known to everyone, we remember his warmth, wit and very individual character. Both will be greatly missed and further tributes will follow in due course.

James finished by outlining the general "Scotland's Marine Wildlife" theme of the weekend and introduced the first speaker.



Plate 262. Ruedi Nager. © Jimmy Maxwell

Spying on Scottish seabirds at their dinner table - Ruedi Nager

Ruedi's talk was on the diet of seabirds, mainly Herring Gulls, and the methods used by him and his team to find out what they were actually eating. Birds need to eat for survival and reproduction and we need to know what they are eating to define management strategies. He told us that the birds "have terrible table manners and are incredibly unhelpful". To find out what they are eating, he and his team have had to adopt a number of strategies.

First of all we can get stomach samples from shot birds. This is good as it is fresh, but rather “detrimental to the birds”. (His talk was peppered by these shafts of humour). This technique uncovered a worrying amount of plastic materials ingested by the birds. We can also look for visible evidence, i.e. what the birds are bringing in. This works well for species such as auks and the birds can be photographed coming in. Species such as Puffins can be mist-netted and will drop the fish they are carrying, however other species such as gulls can then grab the fish before they can be collected. This technique has shown a change in the proportion of sandeels brought in at the Isle of May and in Fair Isle. Shags have increased the proportion of sandeels in their diet over the years, a finding shown on Canna since 2010.

Examination of pellets produced by Herring Gulls has shown that the contribution from the marine environment is not very high. They get more food elsewhere but a good supply of marine food ensures the population does better. Using DNA extracted from seabird droppings can allow a reconstruction of birds’ diet. Further, stable isotopes such as carbon from prey pass unchanged into the bird’s tissues. This can be extracted from feather samples in museum specimens and thus we can look at diet back in time. This technique has shown that Herring Gulls were never actually great fish catchers. It was pointed out that there is good correspondence between feather analysis and data from pellets.

Much use has been made of GPS tags fitted to seabirds. A recording device was fitted to the wall

of a fish and chip shop in Troon. This showed that five different Herring Gulls, tagged at three separate colonies were scavenging at this shop. Tagging has also shown that while gull colonies have exclusive breeding ranges, their ranges overlap in winter. Immature Gannets were fitted with GPS tags but this time the signals were cleverly sent to the mobile phone network. The birds were found to be very mobile. The maximum distance recorded was 15,594 km. One third of the birds visited two colonies other than their natal one, perhaps scouting out possible breeding territories for the future.

In summary, Ruedi and his team have learned a lot about the diet of seabirds but, as he said, there is still much we do not know.

Alistair Duncan

As usual, the Friday evening was a chance to enjoy the annual birdy quiz, this year conducted by David Jardine and Andrew Stevenson. The audience groups were invited to sort out an assorted collection of ornithological facts, associations and the teasing identifications even included some intriguing water reflections. Unusually this time there was no team well ahead of the rest and several groups were vying for first place. All good fun and a relaxing start to the weekend due to the efforts of David and Andrew.

On **Saturday** delegates could choose from a generous selection of walks: Moulin Moor for Black Grouse with David Jarrett (BTO); Loch Faskally and Tummel Valley with Ben Darvill (BTO); Craigower Hill with Simon Pawsey (Speyside Wildlife); Loch of the Lowes with



Plate 263. Birding at Loch Faskally, Pitlochry, Perth & Kinross, September 2016. © David Palmer

David Merrie (SOC Tayside) or visit other venues, such as Black Spout Wood behind the hotel or take up the kind invitation by Wendy Mattingley to visit her wonderful gardens at Cluny House.

In the afternoon, the lectures continued.

Stemming the tide: Scottish marine policy and seabirds - Alex Kinninmonth

Alex told us about his work for the RSPB in the area of Marine Policy. He emphasised the importance of scientific evidence to enable him and others to lobby the government for the protection of some seabirds. Scotland is internationally recognised as important for the number and species of sea birds. They have been monitored since 1986. Scotland has 95% of the EU's Great Skuas, 67% of the Northern Gannets, and 65% of the Kittiwakes. They are an indicator of marine life in general and unfortunately there has been a dramatic decline in their numbers.

The key threats are climate change, lack of food and development at sea. Climate change in particular is threatening the delicate balance of the food chain. The number of sandeels, an important food source, is on the decline and birds have to travel longer distances to find food. This can be critical when they have young to feed. It is also distressing to hear of plastics being ingested by the birds.



Plate 264. Keith Cowieson chats with Alex Kinninmonth. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

Scotland has thirty marine areas which are protected and more sites have been identified. The research using modern methods has been valuable to ascertain where the seabirds feed and therefore require protection.

Alex talked about the Aichi Targets and EU laws including the Marine Strategy, Framework Directive and the Common Fisheries Policy. If Scotland leaves the EU it is unclear what the implications will be for marine protection.

Gillian Herbert

The Shiant seabird recovery project - Laura Bambini

The three main islands and outliers of the Shiant group hold important seabird colonies with about 10% of the UK's Puffins and 7% of our Razorbills, along with thousands of Fulmars. However, Black Rats were thriving after reaching the islands in the 19th century, and were thought to be restricting the breeding success of the Puffins. Old records show that Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels used to nest in the Shiant Islands and their loss is also likely to have been caused by the rats.

In 2013, a feasibility study was carried out by RSPB and SNH to assess the possible benefits and cost of eradication of the rats. Because seabirds generally have a slow breeding rate, one consideration was that there would need to be suitable sources of returning birds for lost species, at a time when populations are generally reducing because of climate change. It was decided to proceed and pre-eradication surveys were carried out in 2015 to provide a data baseline.

In the winter of 2015/16, a team from New Zealand, aided by many volunteers, set out 1,183 bait stations across the islands. Carrying out the work in winter avoided disturbance to breeding birds, but didn't make life easy for the expert climbers required to set out the stations on the very steep slopes and cliffs in many places. Bait-take ceased after six rounds, but replenishment continued until the 15th round in April 2016 to ensure complete elimination of rats; this was confirmed by 'rodent hotels' with a variety of tempting foods - no visitors! The islands will be monitored until 2018 before being officially declared rat-free.



Plate 265. Stephen Hunter checks a detail with Laura Bambini. © Jimmy Maxwell

Laura finished by stressing the importance of careful biosecurity for future visitors to the Shiant Islands and many other Scottish islands, if stowaway rodents are to be excluded. Finally, she thanked the Nicolson family for their support during these operations.

Roger Hissett

Then coffee and a chance to visit the Exhibition Lounge with the usual organisations' stands, Joanna Thomson's jewellery, David Palmar's bird photography and paintings by Keith Brockie. Wader Quest and Jenny Sturgeon Music were new additions along with the popular binocular display from Viking Optical Ltd.

The status of Scotland's marine mammal populations - Debbie Russell

Debbie began by outlining where the most commonly encountered cetaceans live in relation to the continental shelf. In protecting these animals, she gave a summary of the legislation around cetaceans, from the European Habitats Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species, to the agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Sea. She

reported that regular assessments of distribution and abundance were needed and noted the importance of bycatch.

Cetacean surveys are carried out by air and boat-based transects, and she showed maps of the distribution of Harbour Porpoise and Minke Whale; there has been little change in abundance between 1994 and 2005. Protected areas have been designated for Harbour Porpoise, Risso's Dolphin and Bottlenose Dolphin.



Plate 266. David Palmar with Debbie Russell. © Jimmy Maxwell

Harbour Seals are counted by aerial survey and are decreasing in most areas of Scotland except on the west coast. Research is being carried out into this decline, funded by the Scottish Government.

Possible threats to marine mammals included noise disturbance from military activity, shipping, oil and gas decommissioning and windfarm construction. Displacement during construction activities may be partially offset by increased foraging opportunities around man-made structures. Future threats include tidal turbines, e.g. in the Pentland Firth, and windfarm developments, where sound from piling may cause auditory damage and displacement of Harbour Seals of up to 20 km.

Grey Seals are counted by multiple photographic flights every year or two to assess pup production. On the whole they are increasing, but seal populations may be affected by changes in prey availability, predation, toxins, bycatch and anthropogenic disturbance.

David Palmer

Impact of offshore renewables on Scotland's seabirds - Liz Humphreys

Liz stated that, historically, seabird populations have suffered pressures; those at present on Scotland's seabirds include overfishing (especially of sandeels), pollution events, extreme winter storms and bycatches by fishing boats (the current recovery in Gannet numbers may be due to the cessation of harvesting the birds for food). In addition, climate change at unprecedented rates, has a large impact.



Plate 267. Liz Humphreys. © Jimmy Maxwell

The imperative for cleaner energy has stimulated the development of tidal, wave and wind power, the latter being the most developed. Negative impacts on the birds include collisions with the turbine blades, the barrier effect of wind farms on flight paths, and their displacement from affected habitats. Some birds, however, are attracted to roost on windfarms or seek food around the artificial reefs created.

These effects are difficult to measure, but advances in modelling help predict the collision risk to various species. Inputs to the models include the turbine specifications, the bird's characteristics and its avoidance rates when confronted by turbines. Research using boat-based and aerial surveys of birds near windfarms, supported by statistical techniques, is helping to develop more accurate models. One key outcome from all this work has been to change windfarm boundaries, thus reducing the impact on birds. In future, we need long term demographic data on bird populations and more research to further refine the modelling. More fundamentally, we can aim to reduce our total energy consumption.

Hilary Maxfield

The 80th Annual General Meeting

Following the recent resignation of Ian Thomson as SOC President, which was for personal reasons, James Main has been fulfilling the post as Acting President. He opened proceedings by dealing with the 79th AGM minutes. There were no corrections and no matters arising. Copies of the Annual Report were available at the SOC stand and it was duly accepted by the delegates.

In the Annual Accounts, Alan Fox, Honorary Treasurer, referred to the Accounts Summary, assuring members that the Club remains in a healthy financial position. Although legacies for the year were low, membership was at its highest ever level and profits at Waterston House were good. He thanked Jean Torrance, SOC Book-keeping Clerk, for all her supportive work especially in this first year of the Club's conversion to an SCIO. Thanks were also accorded to Sandy Scotland for his work as Independent Examiner - he is willing to continue in this position. There were no questions concerning the Accounts.

The election of Council Members saw Chris Wernham (Head of BTO Scotland) elected to generally voiced good wishes - she will join existing members Bob McGowan and Alison Creamer on Council. The election of Office Bearers followed, with three changes: James Main will continue, now as President, Jeremy Wilson will be the new Vice President and Andrew Thorpe will take over as Honorary Treasurer. All were warmly applauded as their posts were approved by the membership. David Heeley agreed to continue in the vital position of Honorary Secretary. Existing members Bob McGowan and Alison Creamer were due to stand down this year by rotation, but both agreed to stay on.

James Main made special mention of the strong contribution to the Club by retiring Honorary Treasurer, Alan Fox, commenting on his sound, assiduous advice throughout the recent transitions in the Club's status. The AGM was then drawn to a close with the date for the next meeting given as 21 October 2017.

Annual Conference Dinner and Dance

This was a very relaxed occasion with very good food and excellent service. The after dinner speech was given by Chris Wernham, fresh from her recent election to Council. In a light and often humorous manner she paid serious tribute to all the people in her life who had helped, guided and inspired her and also commented that this kind of generosity of spirit was typical of the SOC and was fundamental to its joint collaborations with the BTO.

The dance was once again led by the local Alba Ceilidh Band who played and taught the dancers many of the old favourites; a very enjoyable evening.

Sunday opened with the first of four lectures.

Forty years of auks on the Isle of May - Sarah Wanless and Mike Harris

We were privileged to get an insight into one of the most intense and productive long term studies of auks which began in the early 1970s on the Isle of May. The aim was to detect and identify changes over a long period and crucially to forecast the impact of various environmental factors. Fieldwork methods such as colour-ringing



Plate 268. Sarah Wanless and Mike Harris.
© Jimmy Maxwell

chicks and adults using mist nets to force food drops and latterly fitting geolocators were outlined.

Sarah highlighted some of the surprises which had emerged from the constant monitoring. In bad seasons for example they detected changes in the Guillemot colony structure. As parents increased forays for food, chicks were left unattended resulting in food-stealing and attacks on the vulnerable youngsters from 'neighbours from hell'. Astonishingly they measured 50,000 fish and found that there was a dramatic fall in the size of sandeels and their calorific content which meant chicks were being fed on a low fat diet. Basically, the fish as well as the birds were short of food. This was compounded by the explosion of pipefish at the time which was providing 'rubbish food' as Sarah put it.

The huge effort in colour-ringing 9,000 chicks meant they were able to follow birds from birth to death enabling them to study lifetime breeding success. The sample revealed that half did not even fledge a chick. They are still following the progress of 29 birds. Attempts to study the birds outside the breeding season was revolutionised when geolocators came into use. The May Guillemots were found to winter south-east of the colony with new data showing that they spend time out in the central North Sea. One bird clocked up 6,000 km. Puffins were found to migrate out of the North Sea into the Atlantic. Future climatic scenarios paint a sad picture of Guillemots, Puffins and Razorbills being forced to shift north by the end of the century and that possibly the Isle of May will become unsuitable for these birds.

What came over in this very well presented talk was the enormous value of long term studies of seabird species in providing a true picture of what is happening and the impressive dedication and skills of both Mike and Sarah and their team of fieldworkers.

Gordon Riddle

Capturing our Coast: citizen science in the marine environment - Hannah Grist

Hannah began by offering several definitions of citizen science, but essentially that it is scientific work undertaken by members of the public for whom it is not their main job. It has its origins in the 'gentlemen naturalists' of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Gilbert White, before science had become established as a viable profession in its own right. Initially the domain of mostly wealthy men undertaking work in their spare time (with notable exceptions such as the renowned palaeontologist Mary Anning), it was not until recent decades that citizen science has boomed. The rise of the internet has enabled far higher numbers of people to get involved, whether from their computer (such as online games that help with modelling protein folding) or in the field, such as the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. This work can have tremendous value - Hannah gave the example of a primary school class whose research on bees and flower colours led to an academic paper published by the Royal Society.

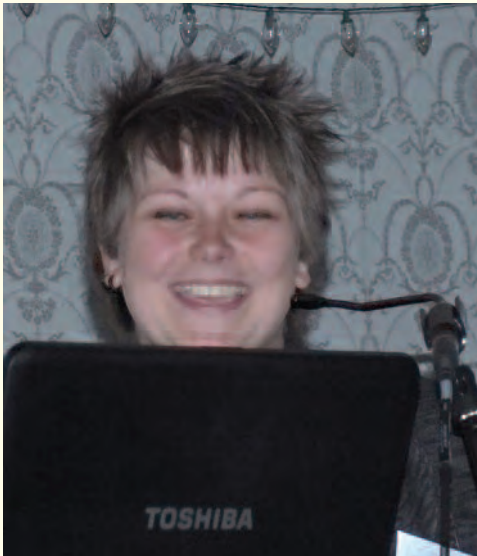


Plate 269. Hannah Grist. © Jimmy Maxwell

Capturing Our Coast is a project led in Scotland by the Scottish Association for Marine Science. Hannah pointed out that the ocean is estimated to contain over 1 million species, 75% of which are undiscovered. However, ubiquitous species such as the Common Limpet are under-recorded and the lack of these data limits our ability to monitor environmental changes over time. The project includes both general surveys for a small number of species as well as more targeted surveys, to increase the number and geographic spread of biological records from intertidal habitats. While only starting in January 2016, 3,000 volunteers have registered so far, and over 1,000 have been trained, undertaking 250 surveys. To follow this exciting new project, please see @capturingRCoast on Twitter or visit www.capturingourcoast.co.uk

John McTague

From source to sea: linking nature and landscape with music - Jenny Sturgeon

Jenny introduced her talk by discussing the close relationship between her longstanding interests in traditional folk music and the natural world, the latter always having been a source of inspiration to singer/songwriters. As an example, she cited a lyric from Robert Burns which mentioned around 12 bird species relating to landscapes. She also revealed that particular birds were often linked to specific human emotions. It was interesting to hear that seabirds are generally associated with loneliness and heartache in traditional music, whereas 'darker scenes' are often linked to crows.

Jenny contrasted impressive landscapes such as St Kilda and Abernethy, pointing out how these landscapes are affected by changing weather. In Scotland, rain storms can be followed quickly by sunshine and rainbows. On a different scale, it is possible to smell individual plants and observe birds' nests and eggs. Jenny spoke of her particular passion for coasts and seabirds, with the thrill of "catching the eye of a Gannet as it flies past". Birds are generally accessible; not only are they beautiful to watch, but we are also able to hear them and smell them. These impressions help to inform melodies in her compositions.

It was a treat listening to Jenny perform four songs from her current album, accompanied by



Plate 270. Jenny Sturgeon. © Jimmy Maxwell

either guitar or shruti box. The inspirational sources ranged from a melancholy seabird, the spring migration at Fair Isle with sunlit waves on the shore, the changing light across rooftops of Aberdeen towards the harbour, to the associations of birds on island Puffin colonies.

This was a stimulating talk with a difference. Perhaps it was the first at an SOC conference to have the audience singing in accompaniment; we may hope that it is not the last.

Bob McGowan

Changes in offshore fisheries and impacts on seabirds - Euan Dunn

Euan has the title of Principal Policy Officer - Marine in his employment with RSPB. As he began his talk it soon became clear that his experience on policy development and advocacy on the interactions between fishery activity and marine birds had been gathered, argued and disseminated at the highest international levels. His advice was widely respected with regard to fisheries with low environmental impact, in management of Marine Protected Areas, reduction in seabird bycatch and the impact of climate change on marine food chains.

He was born in Aberdeen of a family who had owned fishing boats for three generations, from

the small coal-fired trawlers to the monster deep-sea boats equipped with radar and fish shoal echolocation equipment. He went on to describe the reduction in the number of men and boats in the fleet during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and the banning of cod fishing. His examples of longline fishing and the slaughter of albatrosses off South Africa and Fulmars around our coasts, followed by the use of bird-scare streamer lines in 2014, reducing fatalities by up to 90+%, were most enlightening.



Plate 271. Jeremy Wilson with Euan Dunn. © Jimmy Maxwell

His later involvement in the legal sphere has been hugely important with DEFRA, politicians and fishermen being persuaded to accept the use of GPS technology to map bird catch and track boats in fishing hot spots. He has been involved with Brussels technocrats for more than twelve years to get enforceable legislation on bycatch mitigation measures, discard bans, landing regulations, and the sandeel fishing ban in sensitive bird feeding areas (for example, to prevent the reduction in Kittiwake numbers off the east of Scotland). He considered the 2013 reform of commercial fishery policy a great step forward. As a final update, he felt that Brexit would be of little use to fishermen as claims to our own territorial waters would simply prolong our problems with countries having adjacent waters.

This was an altogether deep and far-ranging report on our fishing industry from an acknowledged expert which was a very positive addition to the theme of the conference - it successfully rounded off the weekend's presentations.

Roger Gooch

President James Main now began to sum up the conference proceedings. One of his very pleasant duties was to present SOC Branch Awards. This year these well-deserved accolades

were earned by Alistair Duncan (North-east Scotland Branch) and Norman Elkins (Fife Branch). Alistair received his award and Norman's award will be presented to him elsewhere. Many congratulations to both.

The raffle was pre-drawn to save time and Wendy Hicks announced all the lucky winners. This year the amount raised was just over £500.

The 200 Club was next with this month's winners announced. As usual, Daphne Peirse-Duncombe was accorded much praise and gratitude for her efforts in this money-making venture. The Club has now benefitted by around £80,000 since the scheme began.

James finished by thanking all the raffle prize contributors, exhibition stand owners and of course all the staff and helpers who enabled the conference to run so smoothly, including Stephen Hunter and David Palmar who ably ironed out any blips in the visual and audio presentations. Swarovski also deserved grateful thanks for their very generous sponsorship of our event. He then drew the conference to a close wishing everyone a safe and pleasant journey home in the brightening weather.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 272. James Main presents Alistair Duncan (right) with his award. © Jimmy Maxwell

NEWS AND NOTICES

New members

Borders: Mr M. Pitt, **Central Scotland:** Mr A. Lemon, Mr I. McPherson, **Clyde:** Miss B. Bell, Dr M. Leach, Miss J. Muir, **England, Wales & NI:** Ms S. Byron, Miss J. Chase, Mr S. Eaves, Mr & Mrs T. Holmes, Mrs A. Loxham, Mr B. McKinlay, Miss E. Robertson, Mrs F. Robson, Mr & Mrs J.L. Swallow, Mr R. Taylor, Ms C. Thomas, Mr D. Vranjes, **Fife:** Mr B. Smith, **Lothian:** Mr T. Bower, Dr A. Chopra, Mr & Mrs D. Clarke, Mr B. Driver, Mr K. Duncan, Mr R. Hume & family, Mr A. Huyton & Ms S. Clark, Dr C. Jones, Mr K. Maule, Mr M. Newell, Dr & Mrs G. Newlands, Miss L. Purbrick, Mr G. Routledge, Ms M.B. Sawe, Mr M. Schwenschuster, Mrs M. Suess, **North-East Scotland:** Mr I. Alderdice, Mr & Mrs G. Berry, Miss L. Smith, Mr M. Tuck, **Overseas:** Dr T. Kelly, Dr A. Leveen, **Scotland - no branch:** Mrs R. Barton, Mr J.A. Dacre, Mr G. Robertson, **Tayside:** Mrs J. Gordon, Mr & Mrs I. McKenzie, Mr P. McKinnon.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **August:** 1st £30 G.J. Wren, 2nd £20 Miss Horsburgh, 3rd £10 R.S. Smith. **September:** 1st £150 Muriel Draper, 2nd £75 Joan Cooper, 3rd £50 Leslie Creamer, 4th £30 Mrs W. Bryson, 5th £20 Malcolm Ross, 6th £10 Mrs Caldwell. **October:** 1st £30 Prof. Jenkins, 2nd £20 Mrs A. Inglis, 3rd £10 Dr E. Renwick.

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

Waterston House Art exhibitions

Chris Rose: Saturday 19 November 2016 to Wednesday 11 January 2017

Group Twelve (textile artists) 'Organic Lines': Saturday 14 January to Wednesday 15 February

Carol Barrett 'Brush with the Wild': Saturday 18 February to Wednesday 5 April 2017



Plate 274. Chilled Black Rhino. © Carol Barrett



Plate 273. Little Egret at Aberlady. © Chris Rose

Announcement

It is with great sadness that we announce the deaths of two Club stalwarts, both from the Borders. Tragically, Ray Murray died whilst birding in Peru on 17 September and Campbell McLellan passed away soon after attending our Annual Conference. Obituaries are being prepared for our next issue.

Conferences

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Saturday 18 March 2017, Carnegie Conference Centre, Dunfermline, Fife (Programme and booking form enclosed with this issue)

SOC Annual Conference and AGM, 20–22 October 2017, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

SOC Branch Award

At a recent meeting of Fife SOC branch, Norman Elkins received his Branch Award from Chairman Paul Taylor. Many congratulations Norman.

Branch updates - corrections

We apologise that the branch secretaries' and recorders' details published on the back page of the last issue, *Scottish Birds* 36(3), was not the most up-to-date. Please see back page of this issue for updates.

Correction

Andrew Thorpe, the Recorder for the North Sea Bird Club has pointed out that the date of the Black-billed Cuckoo on the Maureen platform should be 1989 (not 1953) (*Scottish Birds* 36(3): 276). Also, on page 268, the 1983 record of Green Warbler on the Isles of Scilly was on St Mary's, not Bryher.

Birds of Wigtownshire

Jack Gordon's *Birds of Wigtownshire* (1890–1935) has been published at last! A book about the birds of Wigtownshire that was begun by Jack Gordon more than 120 years ago has now been published. Jack was a prominent and well-connected ornithologist, entomologist, field sportsman and world renowned egg-collector. The book costs £15 and has a limited print run. To be sure of obtaining a copy, payment can be arranged by contacting Chris Rollie by email (chrisjrollie@icloud.com) or by telephone (01644 430103). The book will make an ideal



Plate 275. Norman Elkins receiving his Branch Award from Paul Taylor, St Andrews, Fife, October 2016. © Elizabeth Irwin

Christmas present for anyone interested in birds, field sports and Wigtownshire.

Fair Isle Annual Report for 2014

The Fair Isle Bird Observatory is pleased to announce the publication of its annual report for 2014. The adoption of a larger page size (170x245 mm) and the introduction of colour throughout the 184-page report allow us to showcase some of the multitude of superb quality images that are now being taken on the Isle.



Reports are sent to 'Friends of Fair Isle' as part of their annual subscription, and are also available to others from the Observatory. Copies are available at a price of £12 each (including UK P&P) and can be ordered online at www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk/shop_books.html. Please consider becoming a 'Friend' and receive future issues as soon as they are published.

Who are our SOC Office Bearers?

Following the recent Club AGM, some of the personnel in these posts have changed. The following short notes with photographs should help members keep track of the main figures in our organisation.

President - James Main

I am a retired banker with a long term interest in birds. Doreen and I joined the SOC in the mid-1970s and, prior to moving to London in 1986, we took part in the Winter Atlas survey in the Lammermuir Hills. As members of the RSPB, we were involved with our local Group in Croydon where we funded the winter feeding of Tree Sparrows. For a number of summers we were also involved with the Peregrine Falcon watch at Tate Modern, London. In Scotland, we joined the Lothian Branch Committee which I have chaired for the past seven years until 2016. As such I have been involved with Council over that period. I look forward to the next two years and I hope to visit branches in due course. Please invite me to any event you think you would like me to attend.



Plate 276. James Main. © Doreen Main

Vice President - Jeremy Wilson

My connections with Scottish ornithology began with a PhD on the social behaviour of Great Tits (1986–89) and a postdoctoral fellowship on the dispersal of Dippers (1990–91), both at Edinburgh University. After working at the BTO, Oxford University and RSPB researching farmland bird declines, I returned to Edinburgh as RSPB Scotland's Head of Conservation Science in 2001, a post I still hold. I remain an active bird ringer, birder and moth recorder, and have been a SOC member for 30 years. I am a member of Scottish Natural Heritage's Scientific Advisory Committee, and hold an Honorary Chair at the University of Stirling.



Plate 277. Jeremy Wilson. © Ellen Wilson

Honorary Secretary - David Heeley

I took on the post of Honorary Secretary in 2014 having been Vice Chair and Committee member for Fife Branch. I became more seriously interested in birding relatively recently having retired from a career in academia in 2012. I always enjoy local branch outings and weekend trips away and am an enthusiastic, but regrettably inept, bird photographer.



Plate 278. David Heeley. © Erica Heeley

Honorary Treasurer - Andrew Thorpe

I joined the SOC shortly after moving to Aberdeen in 1986. Representing North-east Scotland, I served three years on Council at the time when the main issue was the planning of the move to Waterston House. I was Recorder for North-east Scotland for 15 years and am still Recorder for the North Sea Bird Club. On moving to East Lothian in 2015, I decided to get actively involved with the SOC again, and 'foolishly' mentioned to Wendy that I had a degree in Economics - that resulted in my being elected as SOC Treasurer at the AGM in September 2016!



Plate 279. Andrew Thorpe. © Lesley Thorpe



Plate 280. BioHaven in the lee of the island, Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, April 2016. © *Jim Coyle*

Breeding success and a potential first for Scotland

J. COYLE

A pair of Great Crested Grebes has successfully nested on an artificial floating island on Hogganfield Loch in Glasgow, producing one young. The islands, known as BioHavens, were installed by the Friends of Glasgow's Local Nature Reserves in April 2016 and it is the first time that BioHavens have been used by breeding grebes in Scotland. Published research suggests that it may also be the first time that grebes have used any sort of 'artificial' floating island north of the border (Burgess & Hirons 1992).

The 'Friends' embarked on this ambitious project, aimed at installing five floating islands (BioHavens) on Hogganfield Loch, in 2015. BioHavens were chosen as research showed that they outperform all other floating islands with respect to durability and longevity. They have integral buoyancy, 'naturalise' over time, and have a design life of over 20 years. The islands are proven in the field with 5,000 installations globally and over a decade's worth of research and monitoring data on water quality and ecology.

It was hoped that the islands would help achieve a number of beneficial outcomes for wetland birds at Hogganfield Loch including creating:

- i) nesting opportunities that would not be susceptible to wave action and flooding. More specifically, they hoped that they would be used by Great Crested Grebes despite research indicating that this hadn't happened before in Scotland; and
- ii) safe roosting and preening opportunities.



Plate 281. BioHaven with five species loafing, Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, August 2016. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

The proposal received the support of officers in Glasgow City Council, the Seven Lochs Project, MyPark Scotland and the RSPB, as well as local councillors and members of the public. After much effort, they obtained funds from EB Scotland Ltd (landfill credits), Glasgow Natural History Society and crowd funding via MyPark Scotland towards the cost of the BioHavens, their installation and maintenance as well as water quality monitoring. Five BioHavens were purchased from a company called Frog Environmental and on 6 April 2016, the islands were planted up by volunteers and launched and installed by Frog Environmental staff.

Monitoring showed that the islands were proving popular with Pochard, Tufted Duck Gadwall, Coot, Black-headed Gull, Grey Heron, Mute Swan and Greylag Goose for loafing, preening and roosting. There was also a report of a Great Crested Grebe sitting on one of the islands. Careful observation soon confirmed that a pair was in fact nesting and an adult bird was photographed with at least two eggs on 18 July 2016. Further visits showed an adult bird sitting tight despite other birds visiting and resting on the island. These visits were tolerated, apart from when some birds were deemed to get too close and the sitting bird chased them off.

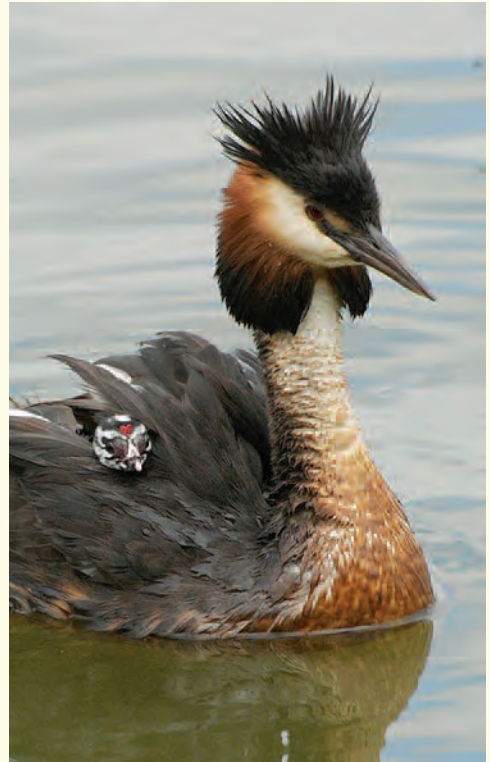


Plate 283. Adult Great Crested Grebe carrying small chick, Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, June 2016. © Lang Stewart



Plate 282. Great Crested Grebe on the nest with Tufted Duck young, Hogganfield Loch, Clyde, August 2016. © Jim Coyle

On 15 August 2016, one small chick hatched and thereafter the youngster has been seen riding on the back of one of the adults. It was never expected that the islands would be used by breeding birds this year. For them to be used by a pair of Great Crested Grebes within a few months of their installation is unbelievable and the Group is extremely proud of this achievement. The islands have proved to be popular with visitors to the park, have raised the profile of the Friends Group and the Local Nature Reserve and, most importantly, have proved popular with the birds.

Reference

Burgess, N.D. & Hirons, G.J.M. 1992. Creation and management of artificial nesting sites for wetland birds. *Journal of Environmental Management* 34: 285–295.

Jim Coyle, Chairman of The Friends of Glasgow's Local Nature Reserves



Plate 284. Adult Water Rail, Red Moss of Netherley, North-east Scotland, 8 July 2016. © Nick Littlewood & Rose Toney

Monitoring breeding Water Rails with camera traps

N. LITTLEWOOD & R. TONEY

Camera traps are becoming ever more popular for monitoring wildlife. They are generally optimised for capturing images and videos of large and medium sized animals, but we have been adapting camera traps for a couple of years to use for monitoring small mammals, with considerable success. The technique involves attaching a camera trap to one end of a 40 cm-long tunnel with a wooden base and sides and a clear plastic roof. A close-focus filter is attached over the camera trap lens with blu-tac so that the camera focusses at around 25–35 cm. The box is baited with bird seed and dried mealworms.

During summer 2016, up to three camera trap boxes, each using a Bushnell Trophy Cam, model 119477, were deployed at the Scottish



Plate 285. A 'small mammal' camera trap box *in situ*, Red Moss of Netherley. © Nick Littlewood



Plate 286. Around two-thirds-grown Water Rail chick, Red Moss of Netherley, 21 July 2016. © Nick Littlewood & Rose Toney



Plate 287. Near full-grown Water Rail chick, Red Moss of Netherley, 28 July 2016. © Nick Littlewood & Rose Toney

Wildlife Trust's Red Moss of Netherley reserve, near Aberdeen, primarily to obtain images of Water Shrews. During this time, Water Rails also became frequent box visitors. Initially, just adults were seen and then, from early July, chicks appeared, following the adult birds. The chicks remained outside the box entrance during the early stages, as adults fed on the mealworms inside but, as the chicks grew, they too entered the boxes to feed on mealworms. Visits by young Water Rails remained frequent through to mid-September at least, by which time they were fully grown. The three camera trap boxes were moved around occasionally within the main waterlogged fen area of the reserve and it is thought that the images obtained were from at least two breeding pairs and their chicks.

Prior to 2016, Water Rails were heard periodically, and occasionally glimpsed, at Red Moss of Netherley. We thought it likely that they bred at the site though concrete evidence was lacking prior to deployment of the camera trap boxes. This is a typical situation at Water Rail sites. The UK population is not known with any degree of accuracy but the 2010–14 mean of 1,312 territories reported to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (Holling *et al.* 2016) must represent a minimum figure whilst the breeding population in North-east Scotland alone has been estimated at 125 to 175 pairs (A. Young in Francis & Cook 2011). However,

given the species' secretive nature, in 2014 just 130 pairs were actually confirmed to be breeding in the UK (Holling *et al.* 2016).

As well as providing a means of confirming breeding by Water Rails, this technique may have merit for monitoring breeding by other secretive wetland birds, such as Spotted Crake or even Baillon's Crake, where their presence has already been established by hearing calls. Francis & Smith (2015) showed that the audio function of camera traps can be used for establishing the presence of singing Spotted Crakes. The technique described here may be suitable for following up such detections in attempts to confirm successful breeding.

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Plate 288. Three Twite, Barns Ness, Lothian, 5 November 2011. © Ian Andrews

IDENTIFICATION SPOT: Linnet and Twite

I.J. ANDREWS

Linnet and Twite are small, seeding-eating finches which occur widely in Scotland through the year. For those of us who live away from the Highlands and Islands, the best chance of seeing Twite is along the coast in winter. This short article gives some hints as to how to separate them from their closest relative, the Linnet, at this season. In winter, both species are rather nondescript. Summer male Linnets are unmistakable and won't be covered.

Most guide books say that the Twite is similar in size and shape to a Linnet. However, its head is smaller and the bill is neat and noticeably stubbier. These, together with a small eye, give the Twite a more petite look. If the Linnet is 'dumpy' then the Twite is 'slimmer.' Twite also has a distinctly longer tail with a deeper fork.

Twite often give their presence away by their distinctive calls. They give a variety of calls, including twittering noises that are similar to Linnet's except that they are significantly more nasal and harsh. A buzzing, upward inflected 'zhwee-ee' call is distinctive of Twite and is a good one to familiarise yourselves with. Flocks of Twite are very tight-knit, either sitting close together along fence wires or bouncing along in lively flocks, always uttering their twanging calls.

Habitat can also be a good indicator. Twite tend to be found mostly in saltmarshes and coastal dunes and fields, whilst Linnet is much the more likely species to be found inland, except on the upland margins where Twite may gather in hay fields or stubble fields in the autumn.



Plate 289. Twite (left) with four Linnets, Musselburgh, 27 December 2015. © *Ian Andrews*. This individual is noticeably smaller than the adjacent Linnets. The yellow bill and buff throat and face are clear, as is the overall darker, more streaked appearance.



Plate 290. Twite, Fair Isle, 13 October 2013. © *Ian Andrews*. In flight, Twite are darker than Linnets with less white in the wings and tail. Spring males have a striking pink rump, but this individual is a female or immature.



Plate 291. Twite, Barns Ness, Lothian, 5 November 2011. © *Ian Andrews*. Twite have less white in the wings than Linnets.



Plate 292. Twite, Fair Isle, 23 September 2014. © *Ian Andrews*



Plate 293. Twite, Musselburgh, Lothian, 30 November 2010. © *Ian Andrews*. With the light reflecting off snow, this bird looks unusually pale, but shows off the throat and bill colouration.



Plate 294. Twite (third from left) with Linnets, Musselburgh, 27 December 2015. © Ian Andrews. The male Linnets (far left and towards the right) show greyish heads, chestnut on the wings coverts and a hint of pink on the sides of the breast. The others are plainer, but still the Twite stands out as being darker with an unstreaked buff throat.

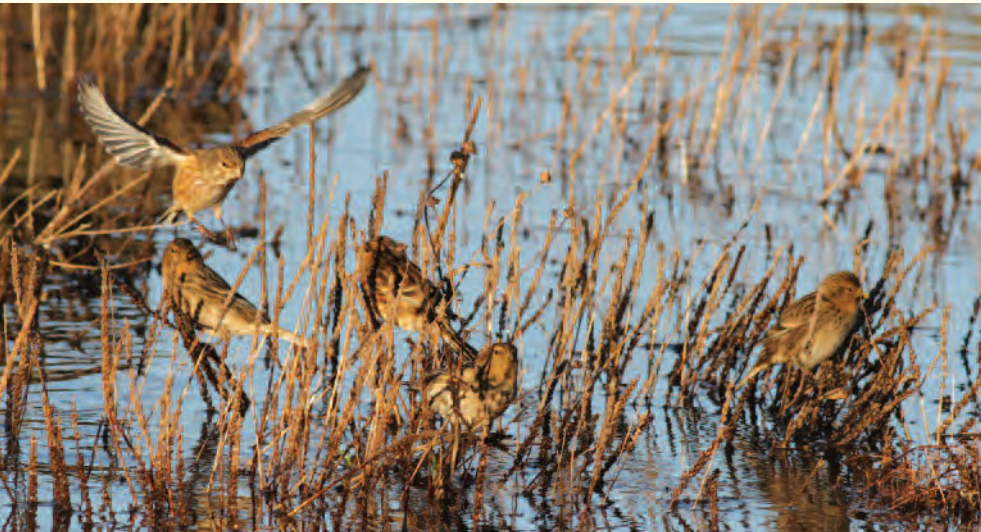


Plate 295. Linnets (landing) with Twite, Musselburgh, 27 December 2015. © Ian Andrews. Some pink on the sides of the Linnets' breast is evident and the pale spot on the ear coverts below the eye is also clear.

There are several features that clinch the identification of Twite in winter: (a) a yellowish bill, (b) an unstreaked warm mustard-coloured throat and face (also described as a rich buff or orangey), (c) lack of contrast between the head and upperparts and (d) lack of pink on the breast and chestnut in the wings. In comparison, a winter Linnets will have a grey bill, a paler, streaked throat and a greyish head that contrasts with a brown back (more so in males). Even in

winter, male Linnets show some signs of pink in the breast and the wing coverts are chestnut coloured (Plate 294). Linnets also have a subtle pale spot just below the eye on otherwise plain ear coverts (Plate 289). In Twite, the ear coverts are darker. In fact, the whole bird is generally darker than Linnets.

Ian Andrews, Musselburgh
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Plate 296. Montage of a hunting Short-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian, 15 November 2015. © Ian Andrews

FIELD NOTE: Owls galore at Musselburgh

D. ALLAN

2015 proved to be an exceptional year for owls at Musselburgh lagoons, Lothian. During autumn/winter 2015 up to 14 Short-eared Owls were recorded using the site. Many birdwatchers and visitors to the site witnessed the spectacular sight of these birds hunting and roosting, often at close quarters during their stay. The spectacle not only enthralled birdwatchers, but also the general public. What was less well known, however, was the presence of the much more nocturnal species, the Long-eared Owl.

May

Following up on a report of an owl seen on the previous two evenings, I decided to check the area on 20 May. At around 21:00 hrs, I spotted a bird flying across some rough grassland - it was a Long-eared Owl. The following night I saw the bird again, this time carrying prey. On the 24th, I waited at what I thought was a good vantage point from 20:00 hrs. After about an hour I spotted the bird hunting and a few minutes later it carried prey in the same direction as before. I was to witness this several times that evening, so had a rough idea where to look for a suspected nest.

On 25 May, a cautious search of the likely area soon revealed the nest - two feathers projecting upwards in an old crow's nest c. 5–6 m up a conifer. At first, I couldn't quite make them out, but when they moved, I realised I was looking at the tips of a Long-eared Owl's ear tufts. After

watching for a few minutes the bird raised its head high enough to see the orange eyes and then I spotted a slight movement of white fluff beside the bird - it had a chick. Checking from a distance over the next few days, I could confirm that there were three chicks. On the 28th, the chicks started calling and by the 31st they had started to move a short distance from the nest.

June–July

By 2 June, the birds were moving right out to the end of the branches and by the 5th all chicks appeared to be away from the nest, although still in the vicinity. On the 6th, I found a fourth chick 40 m from the nest; this bird was much more developed than the three downy chicks and must have been old enough to leave the nest several days before the others. It was so well developed that I even wondered if it could have come from another nest - but I can't see how that was feasible. Over the next few days the birds moved even further from the nest and by the 15th two chicks at least were flying. On the 20th, the chicks moved along the woodlands calling more each night and on the 21st the adults delayed bringing in food until later than usual which resulted in the birds calling almost continuously. It appeared that the adults were trying to draw the birds towards the area where they were hunting. On the 22nd, all chicks appeared to be flying and on the 23rd they had moved even further in the direction of the grassland; they had become a lot more active and were calling constantly in the evening.



Plate 297. Juvenile Long-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian, 6 June 2015. © Dave Allan

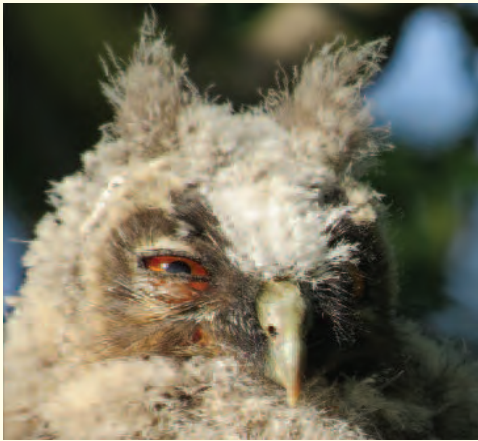


Plate 298. Juvenile Long-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian, 10 June 2015. © Dave Allan



Plate 299. Juvenile Long-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian, 22 June 2015 (this bird could fly). © Dave Allan



Plate 300. Adult Long-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian, 9 February 2016. © Dave Allan

The following morning, the 24th, there was no sign of the birds and it wasn't until the evening that I managed to locate them calling in a copse some distance away in what was the regular hunting area of the adults. I visited regularly until 10 July, when the birds were becoming less vocal and less likely to attract attention and be disturbed.

September

I didn't visit the area again until 3 September, but soon located three Long-eared Owls using the same copse where they had roosted in July. Over the next few visits, I saw birds in a couple of different copses, but it was impossible to get an accurate count for fear of disturbing them.

On 29 September, I decided to try a different strategy to find out just how many birds there were. I arrived at the edge of the woodland just before sunset ... and waited; it worked a treat, c. 30 minutes after sunset the birds flew out over my head. They flew out over a period of some 12 minutes and I managed a count of six in the twilight. Presumably, this was the family.

October to January 2016

On 1 October, I did the same thing and to my astonishment nine birds came out and flew over to the copse. Continued monitoring revealed increasing numbers during the following weeks with counts of nine, 11 and then 12 on 3 November. On 4 November, there was a ground mist and the birds came out in what was good light and in quick succession. To my utter amazement 14 Long-eared Owls left the roost -

this was to be the peak number I recorded. Interestingly, while I had been waiting for the owls to appear that evening, I heard a considerable commotion from where the owls were roosting and counted 22 Blackbirds flying out of the copse.

The numbers recorded reduced dramatically over the next few days, possibly as a result of Guy Fawkes Night fireworks on the 5th, as there were signs of spent fireworks around the roosting area next day. Fortunately, it seems that birds had just moved to a different group of trees nearby. Here it was even more difficult to get an exact count of numbers, but with persistence I did manage counts of up to 12 into mid-December. Up to six were still around into January 2016.

Habitats (breeding and roosting)

The pair nested in a mixed woodland of coniferous and deciduous trees, choosing an old crow's nest high in a pine tree. When the young birds left the nest they moved away to where it was quieter and the woodland more dense. As the birds started to fledge they moved along the woodland towards where the adults were hunting. They also became more and more vocal and the adults appeared to be drawing them out of the breeding area and onto the feeding site.

Three different woodland copses were used as roosts, all deciduous and some 18 years old. The first woodland used by the juveniles was probably the quietest, the second contained dense scrub and was difficult to access. The third woodland became the roost when the other copses had lost their leaves and the owls roosted deep in a large bramble patch within the woodland.

Roost sites for Short-eared Owls

Initially, the night roost site for Short-eared Owls was the undeveloped ash lagoon near the river mouth, where they roosted tucked in behind the died-off Ribbed Melilot tussocks. The birds were often disturbed during the day and would move to adjacent rough grassland or even, on occasion, adjacent plantations. Latterly, they relocated to the other end of the site; maybe due to a shortage of prey and them covering new hunting grounds.

Feeding

When feeding their young, the adult Long-eared Owls hunted over the rough grasslands. The adults were sometimes seen out and about as 'early' as 19:40 hrs during June/July, though more often it was 20:30 hrs onwards and the birds were often seen in excellent light.

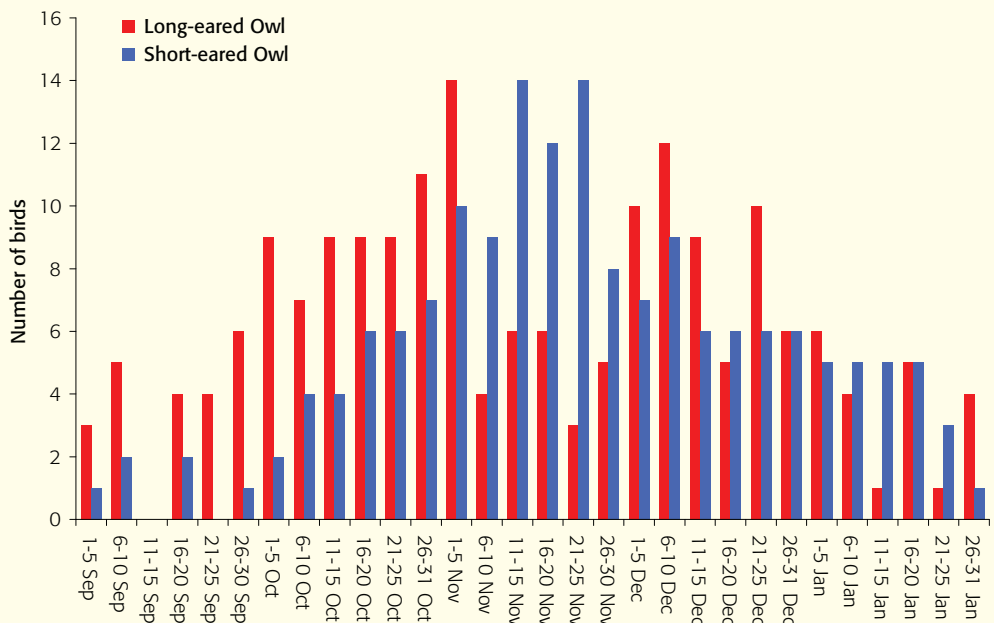


Figure 1. Numbers of Long-eared and Short-eared Owls at Musselburgh, Lothian, September 2015 to January 2016.

During the dark evenings of autumn and winter, the birds didn't leave the roost until after sunset. The times ranged from 22 minutes to 47 minutes after sunset. They usually came out of the roost over a period of 10–15 minutes.

Short-eared Owl hunting activity appeared to die down by the time the Long-eared Owls left their roost, or perhaps they avoided that particular area at that time. In any event, there were only very few occasions when their paths crossed.



Plate 301. Kestrel robbing a vole from a Short-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian, 27 December 2015. © Ian Andrews

No pellets were collected, but when seen with prey, the owls were always carrying small mammals, and voles appeared to be the principal prey item. One would imagine there must have been a huge explosion of vole/mammal numbers during 2015 to sustain the number of predators utilising the site during the year; indeed, Bank Voles were frequently seen scuttling across paths during the year.

Kestrels and interaction with the owls

Kestrels bred nearby and frequently hunted and roosted on the site at the same time as the owls. Being in direct competition with the owls for prey, several birdwatchers witnessed Kestrel mobbing and even successfully robbing Short-eared Owls of their prey (Plate 301).

Identification

Both Long-eared and Short-eared Owls were seen after sunset when the eye colour, facial pattern or tufts could not be seen. Surprisingly, the identification of the two species was easy even in this very poor light. In these conditions, the more barred wing tips and fine barring on tail of the Long-eared Owl could be distinguished from the heavier barring on the tail and dark wing



Plate 302. Short-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian, 3 November 2015. © Dennis Morrison



Plate 303. Short-eared Owls, Musselburgh, Lothian, 15 November 2015. © Ian Andrews

tips of the Short-eared Owl. Generally, the Short-eared Owl appeared paler, but it was the white trailing edge of the wing on Short-eared Owl that really stood out compared to the concolourous trailing edge of the Long-eared Owl. The Long-eared Owl also has a different appearance in flight, with shorter wings which looked slightly arched compared to the Short-eared Owl.

Disturbance of the Long-eared Owls

A number of minor incidents occurred, mainly due to curiosity after the young started calling, when visitors or children ventured into the woodlands. Thankfully, an explanation of breeding birds was usually sufficient to make people continue on their way.

However, this is not always the case and on at least two occasions (in 2009 and 2016) Long-eared Owls observed at Musselburgh in the early breeding season disappeared after they were reported online. The reports had resulted in people entering the woodlands the following morning to look for them. It is particularly important not to disturb birds when they are prospecting for suitable nest sites or in the early stages of breeding. In fact, it should go without saying that they shouldn't be disturbed at all.

Previous records of owls at Musselburgh

The previous peak count of Short-eared Owls at Musselburgh was eight in 1988 and 2000. Long-eared Owls have been seen on several occasions: one on 3 December 1989; up to four roosting in 1998/99; one on 5 December 2004; a young juvenile on 5 August 2007; and two birds on the scrapes during 17 March to 30 April 2009.

Dead Short-eared Owls

It is worth noting that four dead Short-eared Owls were reported mainly during the latter part of the winter. The cause of death remains unknown. Suggestions of starvation have been made, but one would think they would move if there was insufficient food at the site. Certainly one bird I found had been partially eaten, and foxes are commonly seen around the site.

Summary

2015 proved to be an astonishing year for owls at Musselburgh and during November 28 owls were recorded: 14 Long-eared Owls and 14 Short-eared Owls. It seems remarkable that such a small area could sustain such a large number of owls particularly since Long-eared Owls had bred during the year. It is likely that the Short-eared Owls were continental birds, with good numbers also recorded on the Isle of May in late 2015 (with an island record-breaking 24 on 17 December). It is probable that many of the wintering Long-eared Owls were also continental birds, but we will never know for sure.

It is also amazing that with so many birdwatchers, photographers and other visitors, the Long-eared Owls went largely undetected despite being present for the greater part of the year. Certainly the nesting site was situated within several yards of where people passed regularly and yet birds chose to nest in such a location. It does make one wonder just how many Long-eared Owl nests and roosts go undetected elsewhere.

Dave Allan, Edinburgh.



Plate 304. Robin, Aboyne, North-east Scotland, February 2016. © Harry Scott

Robins beyond the Christmas card

S. DA PRATO

This issue of *Scottish Birds* is likely to arrive through SOC members' letterboxes at the same time as some Christmas cards. And there is a good chance that some of the cards will feature a Robin. Even for non-birders the Robin is widely seen as a symbol of Christmas often perched on a sprig of red-berried holly. Many recipients of these cards will pay more attention to who sent them - often with a last minute rush to reciprocate if that individual has dropped of the annual list! - than to thinking why a small songbird has become so symbolic of midwinter festivities.

The distinctive breast of both sexes contributed to the European Robin's original name of Red-breast. In the 15th century, when it became popular to give human names to familiar species, the bird came to be known as Robin Redbreast, which was eventually shortened to Robin; a diminutive of Robert. Postmen - they were all men then - used to be called 'robins' because of their red tunics and one reason why the Robin is associated with Christmas cards is because these were delivered by the red-coated postmen 'robins'.

There are other, older and deeper, explanations. According to one Celtic tradition, Lugh is the sun god who dies as the nights get longer; a traditional feast in his honour was held on Lughnasadh or Lammas day on the first of August, a day marked in the old Celtic

pictographic calendar with a bow-and-arrow shape. As Lugh was the god representing the red sun, his name would have been Coch Rhi Ben, anglicised to Cock Robin - a leftover from the belief that souls became birds after death. This idea is one explanation behind the nursery rhyme, better thought of as an old folk story, *Who Killed Cock Robin*, in which the sparrow kills him with his bow and arrow, the sparrow here representing Bran, the opposite of Lugh and the god of winter. The ritual sacrifice of a king figure appears in much early folklore. Since pre-Christian times, people have also been superstitious about the Wren. It was a sacred bird which flew higher than any other bird by sitting on the back of an eagle, and which could be hunted only on one day, in midwinter. The ceremony of hunting the Wren on 26 December lasted at least into the 19th century. Stories about the Robin and the Wren may have come to Britain as early as the Bronze Age. They are linked together in the oldest of nursery rhymes, *The Marriage of Cock Robin and Jenny Wren*, and its sequel, *Who Killed Cock Robin?* In at least one version the marriage of the Robin ends in tragedy as the Cuckoo attacks the Wren and the Robin is killed by mistake when Cock Robin is shot dead by a sparrow, the birds organise his funeral; depending on the version, the Owl will dig his grave, the Rook will read the service, the Kite will carry him to the grave, and the Dove will be the chief mourner.

Both tales are adaptations of ancient traditions and they were then adapted to fit events of later times. A stained glass window depicting a Robin killed by an arrow was present in the 15th century at Buckland Rectory (Gloucestershire). The earliest known English record of the rhyme, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, dates back to 1744. It was said to be a parody of the death of King William II, who was killed by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest in 1100, and who was known as William Rufus i.e. the red. The rhyme was also connected with the fall of Robert Walpole's government in 1742. The words of *Who Killed Cock Robin* are also said to refer to the death of the legendary figure of Robin Hood. Red is of course the colour of blood and it is not surprising that Christians developed links between Robins and the crucifixion; one version refers to the bird becoming stained with blood pulling thorns from Christ's head, another to it singing to comfort him in his agony. Yet another legend has it that the bird scorched its breast feathers bringing water to tormented souls in Purgatory. Holly with its red berries and thorns also features in these accounts although our holly *Ilex aquifolium* did not grow in the Middle East.

This popularity did not save Robins - or many other birds - from being caught to be kept in small cages where their life expectancy must have been poor, thus the lines from William Blake's 1803 poem *Auguries of Innocence* "A Robin Redbreast in a Cage - Puts all Heaven in a Rage." Some were killed to be mounted on women's hats, others in display cases in Victorian times. In 1861, taxidermist Walter Potter staged the *Death of Cock Robin* with 98 different species of embalmed birds. The tableau accurately recreated each stanza of the rhyme. In Scotland, a similar exhibit was a major attraction at Tollcross Mansion in Glasgow while it was used as a Children's Museum. The showcase went missing when the museum closed in 1972, but turned up again some years later in the storage vaults of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery & Museum. It was restored and now circulates around libraries and schools on loan. In 2005, the gates to Tollcross Park were redesigned to incorporate elements from the rhyme, and the characters can be seen in the metalwork.

To generate such interest from people the Robin must have been in close contact with them from early times. This is down to the species' original ecological niche as a forest bird that fed by foraging on the ground where it would benefit from an association with large mammals such as deer, bison and wild boar. All these disturb the soil thus revealing invertebrates which the Robin would readily snap up. When people began to cultivate gardens beside their houses, Robins simply used them as another type of ground breaking animal and the long association between Robins and gardeners began. It is easy to attract Robins by throwing worms to the birds and if anyone wants a very tame one, obtain a supply of mealworms - you can breed your own or buy from a reptile shop - and you can soon get it to eat from your fingers. Close association with people has led Robins to be frequent users of human artefacts for nest sites. They naturally like holes in bankings so often utilise buildings or things within them ranging from old kettles to under the bonnets of cars.

Robins may be confiding with people but they are highly aggressive to other Robins. They are unusual in defending territories year-round, with many females also establishing winter territories. That is why Robins start singing after their summer moult. The song with its slow phrases can sound rather sad to the human ear, influenced by the approach of winter, but to other Robins it is purely a way of telling them to keep out. If another bird comes into the territory the red breast will be displayed. If this fails, a fight will ensue which can result in death. In some populations, up to 10% of adult mortality is due to such clashes. Nestlings don't have any red which might set off an attack from their fathers.

In 2015, the Robin topped a poll of more than 200,000 people to choose the UK's first national bird (*Scottish Birds* readers will know of a similar campaign to recognise the Golden Eagle as the national bird for Scotland). David Lindo - who launched the campaign - said the Robin was 'entwined into our national psyche' and has asked the UK government to officially recognise the Robin as its national bird.

Compiled by Stan da Prato

Birding St Kilda

W. MILES



Plate 305. Birding on Hirta, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, June 2007. © W. Miles

This year marks the 30th anniversary of St Kilda being designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site for natural criteria, including its birdlife. A World Heritage Site is defined as 'a site of natural and/or cultural heritage significance so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity' (Mavor *et al.* 2012). Unusually, St Kilda is a dual-status World Heritage Site, for both its natural and cultural attributes. There are only 35 such sites in the world and only two in Northern Europe. In addition to its World Heritage status, St Kilda has a number of other designations that directly or indirectly conserve its birds. Namely, St Kilda is a Special Protection Area, a Special Area of Conservation, a National Nature Reserve, a Marine Consultation Area, a National Scenic Area and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (Mavor *et al.* 2012). In short, for anyone with an interest in birds, conservation and wild places, it's worth a visit.

The term St Kilda refers to the whole archipelago, which lies 64km west of the Outer Hebrides and comprises four main islands and two major sea stacks. The islands are Hirta (638 ha, highest point 430 m), Dùn (32 ha, 175 m), Soay (99 ha, 378 m) and Boreray (77 ha, 384 m and 6 km from Hirta), the stacks are Stac Lee (172 m) and Stac an Armin (196 m), both located close to Boreray, to the west and north respectively (Figure 1).

All the islands and stacks are bordered by high cliffs and are generally difficult to access (at 430 m, Conachair, on Hirta, is the highest cliffline in Britain). Hirta is the most readily accessible island and was the home island of the native St Kildans prior to evacuation in 1930. It is now permanently inhabited by a small number of staff who work on the MOD facility and, from April to November, by staff of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), the landowner. St Kilda's

human settlements, both old and new, are mainly on Hirta in Village Bay and this is where most visitors come ashore.

The first published ornithological observations from St Kilda were made by Martin Martin (1698), since when there have been many further accounts of the birdlife of the islands (e.g. Macgillivray 1840, Dixon 1885, Wigglesworth 1903, Clarke 1911, Bagenal 1953, Williamson 1958a & 1964, Harris & Murray 1978, Murray 2002). The archipelago holds much of interest to birdwatchers and ornithologists, notably its large seabird colonies and endemic subspecies of wren. This article aims to summarise St Kilda's birdlife from an ornithological and birding perspective, with consideration of the fact that St Kilda is now an increasingly accessible day trip, from Harris, Lewis and Skye.

How to get there

A growing number of companies operate day trips to St Kilda by boat and this is the cheapest and most accessible way to get to the islands. Day trips are currently run from Leverburgh on Harris, Uig on Lewis and Uig on Skye for example (see Figure 1 and websites listed below for locations, boat operators and further information).

It is also possible to visit St Kilda by charter boat or yacht (see websites listed below for further information). There is no public accommodation on St Kilda, however there is a small campsite that is run by the NTS for visitors travelling to the islands by sea and wishing to stay on Hirta for up to five nights (website listed below). Additionally, St Kilda is included on the itinerary of many commercial cruises that, weather permitting, stop for a few hours at the islands and land on Hirta.



Figure 1. St Kilda location map showing the main islands and sea stacks. Day-trip boats depart from Leverburgh on Harris, Uig on Lewis and Uig on Skye.



Plate 306. The northernmost corner of Boreray, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, July 2009. © *W. Miles*



Plate 307. The iris beds and drystone walls of Village Bay on Hirta in early September, with Dùn in the background and low cloud and drizzle rolling in - promising conditions for finding migrants. St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © *W. Miles*

Options for staying multiple weeks on St Kilda are relatively limited. However, every year the NTS runs work parties involving travel by boat from the Hebrides and staying for two weeks on Hirta (see websites listed below for information and application forms). Places are limited, but this can be a good way to get out to the archipelago for a decent amount of time and a number of rare birds have been found by birders visiting in this way.

Occasionally, the NTS advertise for research and survey workers on St Kilda and for seasonal wardens and ranger staff. These positions offer the best opportunities for long-term ornithology and birding and are advertised on the NTS job vacancy web pages.

Seabirds, sea stacks, spires and pinnacles

The most visually spectacular natural features of St Kilda are the islands' seabirds, sea stacks and cliffs. There are 17 species of breeding seabird on the islands (Table 1) and the last complete census of all species (Seabird 2000) recorded a combined total of 330,000 pairs, making St Kilda one of the most important seabird breeding sites in the north-east Atlantic (Murray 2002, Mitchell *et al.* 2004). Puffin, Gannet, Fulmar and Leach's Petrel are the most abundant species. The *Seabird 2000* census recorded a total breeding Puffin population of 142,264 AOB (apparently occupied burrows), Fulmar population of 68,448 AOS (apparently occupied sites) and Leach's Petrel population of 45,433 AOS, representing the largest colonies of these three species in the UK (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). Survey work by the NTS suggests, however, that the Fulmar population has considerably declined since

Table 1. Annually breeding species and annual spring and autumn migrants at St Kilda. Classification of species as annual is based on breeding/migrant records since 2000 from years with consistent and intensive coverage.

Annually breeding species	Annual spring migrants	Annual autumn migrants
Seabirds	Pink-footed Goose	Pink-footed Goose
Fulmar	Greylag Goose	Greylag Goose
Manx Shearwater	Brent Goose	Brent Goose
Storm Petrel	Red-breasted Merganser	Red-breasted Merganser
Leach's Petrel	Great Northern Diver	Great Northern Diver
Gannet	Oystercatcher	Oystercatcher
Shag	Golden Plover	Golden Plover
Arctic Skua	Ringed Plover	Ringed Plover
Great Skua	Whimbrel	Whimbrel
Puffin	Curlew	Curlew
Black Guillemot	Turnstone	Knot
Razorbill	Sanderling	Turnstone
Guillemot	Dunlin	Sanderling
Kittiwake	Redshank	Dunlin
Common Gull	Snipe	Redshank
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Black-headed Gull	Snipe
Herring Gull	Common Gull	Black-headed Gull
Great Black-backed Gull	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Common Gull
	Herring Gull	Lesser Black-backed Gull
	Iceland Gull	Herring Gull
	Glaucous Gull	Great Black-backed Gull
Land birds / waders / ducks	Great Black-backed Gull	Merlin
Eider	Collared Dove	Blackbird
Oystercatcher	Merlin	Fieldfare
Snipe	Swallow	Redwing
Hooded Crow	House Martin	Wheatear
Raven	Blackbird	Pied / White Wagtail
St Kilda Wren	Redwing	Meadow Pipit
Starling	Wheatear	Rock Pipit
Wheatear	Pied / White Wagtail	Lapland Bunting
Meadow Pipit	Meadow Pipit	
Rock Pipit	Rock Pipit	
	Snow Bunting	

Seabird 2000, so too the size of St Kilda's Guillemot, Razorbill and Kittiwake populations. The Gannet population was surveyed in 1994 (60,428 AOS), 2004 (59,622 AOS) and 2013 (60,290 AOS), the lattermost survey ranking St Kilda as the second largest Gannet colony in Scotland and the world, after The Bass Rock (75,259 AOS in 2014; Murray et al. 2015). The seabird breeding season lasts from late March to August for most species, however for Gannet, Fulmar, Manx Shearwater, Leach's Petrel and Storm Petrel it goes on much longer, with the last breeding adults and young departing the islands in mid-November (Murray 2002).

The rock pinnacles, towers, crags and spires of Boreray, Stac Lee and Stac an Armin host the entire St Kilda Gannet population plus numerous Fulmars, auks and Great Skuas (combined estimate > 200,000 birds), and to see this area at close range is to experience one of the most stunning natural spectacles in Scotland. It is viewed well from a boat and the St Kilda day-boat operators include a trip around Boreray and the stacks as part of their itinerary - arguably the number one highlight of a trip. Although the boat journey from the Hebrides and back can sometimes be rough, the seabirds of Boreray are unforgettable and the crossing itself can be good for seabirds too. Shearwaters, divers, small skuas and phalaropes can sometimes be seen, and the crossing definitely provides the best opportunity of a St Kilda trip to see storm-petrels.

Storm Petrel is the species most commonly seen from the boats, often at close range. On land, this species breeds within the cleits and other drystone buildings in Village Bay, and although the birds remain hidden throughout daylight hours, during a walk around the village they can occasionally be heard singing from within the larger walls. Sadly, seeing or hearing Leach's Petrels is comparatively difficult. It is rare to see Leach's during a boat crossing, probably because the species tends to favour sea areas with deeper water and upwellings further offshore, and on land the breeding colonies are very difficult to access and only active at night (Mitchell et al. 2004, Newson et al. 2008). To look across at Dùn from Hirta on a clear summer's day and realise that there are thousands of breeding Leach's Petrels on Dùn but that all of them are

completely hidden underground, can present quite a unique feeling - a feeling of amazement but also bemused frustration at not being able to actually see one! However, at sea, from the day-boats, particularly after strong westerlies, occasionally Leach's Petrels are seen.



Plate 308. St Kilda Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis*, Hirta, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, June 2016. The St Kilda subspecies shows distinctive grey plumage tones, heavy black flank barring and is longer billed and bigger bodied than the other UK subspecies of Wren. © W. Miles

The St Kilda Wren (and other breeding land birds)

The St Kilda Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis* is the most distinctive subspecies of wren in Britain and one of the rarest endemic subspecies of bird in Europe. As such, it is one of the sought-after birding highlights of a visit to the archipelago. St Kilda Wrens look surprisingly big and hefty, also weirdly pale. On average, they are bigger bodied, longer billed and paler, greyer and more distinctly barred in plumage than the Hebridean Wren *T. t. hebridensis*, Shetland Wren *T. t. zetlandicus*, Fair Isle Wren *T. t. fridariensis* and UK mainland Wrens *T. t. indigenus* and *T. t. troglodytes* (Love 2009). The last attempted whole-island survey of the wrens on Hirta, in 1993, recorded 113–117 singing males (Vaughan & Love 1994). Whole-island surveys of the main islands and stacks are

extremely difficult and have been few, irregular and inconsistent in methodology (Miles 2011, Waters 2011). Village Bay on Hirta has been surveyed relatively frequently, but it has not always been clear whether the counts of this area are of the whole glen or just the area within the village boundary wall (Williamson 1958b, Miles 2011, Waters 2011). Since 1931, the number of singing males in 'the village area' has mostly remained low (5–12 individuals), and although it peaked at over 20 in the 1990s, a survey in 2016 recorded six males singing in the area bounded by the village boundary wall, including on the wall itself (Figure 2).

The village on Hirta is a good place to look for a St Kilda Wren and on a calm, sunny day in May or June (when the birds are most vocal) it is straight-forward to locate individuals on song. In other months of the year and when the weather is less favourable, finding the village wrens can sometimes be difficult, but the Factor's House and nearby cleits are a good place to look, also the shorefront and boulder beach immediately to the west of the landing jetty.

Annually breeding land-birds, waders and ducks are few on St Kilda - currently there are just ten species (Table 1). During the course of a day-visit these can usually be seen around Village Bay, with the exception of the corvids, which tend to favour the peaks and slopes around Glen Mór. Swallow, Pied Wagtail, Skylark, Dunlin, Golden Plover, Common Sandpiper, Greylag Goose and Peregrine have occasionally bred or attempted to breed in recent years. Prior to 1971, Twite, Tree Sparrow and Corn Bunting bred occasionally (Murray 2002).

Spring and autumn migration

Many interesting common, scarce and rare migrants have been recorded on St Kilda (Murray 2002). Annually occurring spring and autumn migrant species are listed in Table 1. The remote westerly location of St Kilda means that migrant variety and abundance each year is relatively low, especially in comparison with small, remote islands in Shetland and Orkney. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most abundant migrants on St Kilda are species that breed in Iceland and Greenland and travel through north-west Scotland on the way to and from their wintering grounds, for

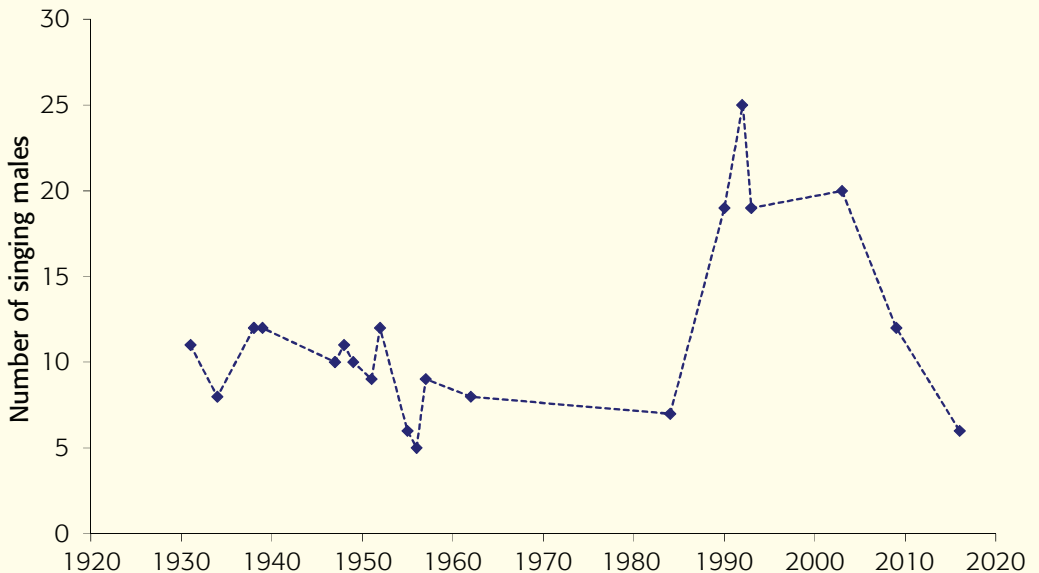


Figure 2. Numbers of singing male St Kilda Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes hirtensis* heard in spring (May–July) in the village area on Hirta, St Kilda, 1931–2016. Data are from the following sources: Harrison & Buchan (1934), Harrison & Lack (1934), Nicholson & Fisher (1940), Fisher (1948), Atkinson (1949), Armstrong (1953), Boyd *et al.* (1956), Williamson (1958b), Waters (1964), Vaughan & Love (1994), Murray (2002), Love (2009), plus various annual reports of the St Kilda Ranger (unpublished reports to Scottish Natural Heritage and the National Trust for Scotland, 1970–2010).



Plate 309 a–f. Examples of scarce and rare birds seen on Hirta in spring (left) and autumn (right), St Kilda, Outer Hebrides. Top left down: Canada Goose (June 2009), Laughing Gull (June 2009) and Bluethroat (May 2008). Top right down: Buff-breasted Sandpiper (September 2008), American Golden Plover (September 2009) and Blackburnian Warbler (September 2009). Canada Goose is a scarce species on St Kilda and the individuals that turn up are an enigma - stray feral birds or genuine wild vagrants? In this case perhaps the latter, as this individual was found during strong westerlies and on the same day as the Laughing Gull and a Green-winged Teal. © R. Tallack & W. Miles

example Meadow Pipit (by far the most abundant migrant passerine), Wheatear, Redwing, White Wagtail, Pink-footed Goose and Brent Goose. The majority of Wheatears seen on migration on St Kilda are large, dark and apparently of the Greenland race *Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa*, most Redwings are of the Icelandic race *Turdus iliacus coberni* and the default Brent Goose is Pale-bellied Brent *Branta bernicula hrota*.

Every year a range of migrant species additional to those listed in Table 1 turn up, including nationally common (but locally unusual) species, plus a variety of scarce migrants and rarities. When you first land on St Kilda, it is impossible to predict what species will be present and what might be found. Bluethroat, Ortolan, Subalpine Warbler and Buff-breasted Sandpiper have all been found by visiting observers within a few hours of arrival, so even a one-day visit in spring or autumn can produce exciting and unusual species.

Migrants can be seen anywhere, but one of the very best habitats to check is the iris beds in Village Bay. Historically, these have been excellent for pipits, chats, thrushes and warblers. The shorefront and beach in Village Bay are definitely worth checking too - for waders, gulls and ducks - also the fire-pond and nearby wet flashes are worth a scan, as a variety of species of wader have occurred here (including Pectoral, Buff-breasted, Solitary and White-rumped Sandpiper). Outside of Village Bay, the plateaux on Hirta called Mullach Sgar is a great place to look for Snow Buntings, Lapland Buntings and migrant waders (in autumn, this area can be excellent for scarce American waders). One other area on Hirta that is definitely worth scanning is Glen Mór, especially the tarn and pools for ducks and waders, also the higher cleits, crags and boulder outcrops around the rim of the glen for swifts and hirundines (also roosting Snowy Owls).

Over the years, migrants have turned up on St Kilda in all weathers. However, clear conditions with high, wispy cloud, sunshine and a light, 'drifty' wind seem to be best. Low cloud with a bit of drizzle can sometimes be excellent too, especially if the wind is from the north or east, although even in these conditions really big falls of migrants are rare.

Despite generally low numbers of birds, migrant birding at St Kilda can still be extremely rewarding, as the ratio of uncommon to common migrants is relatively high. On these islands, the birding is all about quality rather than quantity.

Wildcard rarities

St Kilda has hosted a variety of very rare birds, the rarest and most 'mythical' being vagrant songbirds from America such as Evening Grosbeak, Tennessee Warbler, Hooded Warbler and Blackburnian Warbler. Table 2 lists all the accepted records of nationally rare birds seen on St Kilda (1894 to 2015). This list shows a strong American and Arctic bias, with records of Snowy Owl and Gyr Falcon prominent. However, species from the Far East have also made it, for example White's Thrush, Eyebrowed Thrush and Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler.



Plate 310 a–b. Buff-bellied Pipit and Snowy Owl, 18 September 2008, Hirta, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides. These two rarities were found on the same day within a few hours of arrival on Hirta - when you visit St Kilda, it is impossible to know what awaits. © R. Tallack

Table 2. St Kilda rare bird records by month and day, comprising all records accepted by British Birds Rarities Committee (1894–2015).

Month	Rare bird records
January	14th American Robin (to 15 Feb, 1975).
February	17th Gyr Falcon (2007); 26th Gyr Falcon (to 25 Apr, 1992).
March	15th Gyr Falcon (1910); 26th Evening Grosbeak (1969); 30th Snowy Owl (to 14 Apr, 1968); 31st Gyr Falcon (1995).
April	2nd Gyr Falcon (to 5th, 2002); 5th Snowy Owl (2007); 11th Snowy Owl (1993); 14th Gyr Falcon (1994); 15th Snowy Owl (to 24 Jul, 2010); 17th Snowy Owl (1972); 19th Gyr Falcon (1997); 24th Upland Sandpiper (1980); 28th Greater Yellowlegs (to 9 May, 2002).
May	5th Snowy Owl (to 16th, 2009); 8th Tawny Pipit (1974); 10th Snowy Owl (to 11th, 2005); 17th Red-throated Pipit (2001); 17th Rustic Bunting (1994); 19th Snowy Owl (to 22nd, 1999); 20th Gyr Falcon*** (2007); 21st Red-throated Pipit (to 24th, 1994); 21st Rustic Bunting (2000); 21st Snowy Owl (to 25 Jun, 2009); 22nd Snowy Owl (to 3 Jul, 2008); 22nd Spotted Sandpiper (to 23rd, 1982); 23rd Sardinian Warbler (1994); 24th Collared Flycatcher (1992); 24th Snowy Owl (to 26th, 2005); 24th Snowy Owl (to 31st, 2007); 26th Brünnich's Guillemot (to 6 Jun, 1992); 26th Little Bittern (2004); 26th Red-throated Pipit (1977); 26th Rustic Bunting (to 27th, 1981); 26th Snowy Owl (1975); 27th Rustic Bunting (1992); 29th Thrush Nightingale (to 30th, 1975); 30th Dark-eyed Junco (2007).
June	4th Snowy Owl (to 19th, 2007); 4th Snowy Owl (to 29th, 2007); 10th Rustic Bunting (to 11th, 1990); 11th American Herring Gull (to 15th, 2015); 11th Bonaparte's Gull (to 21st, 2015); 12th Black-browed Albatross (2002); 12th King Eider (to 15th, 1992); 12th Snowy Owl (to 24 Nov, 2013); 13th Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler (to 14th, 1894)*; 17th Rock Thrush (1962); 18th Harlequin Duck (2007); 19th Laughing Gull (2009); 23rd Laughing Gull (to 14 Jul, 1980).
July	8th Snowy Owl (to 1 Aug, 2007); 9th Snowy Owl (2009); 10th Snowy Owl (to 5 Aug, 2007); 15th Snowy Owl (to 30th, 2012); 17th Snowy Owl (to 10 Aug, 2008); 18th Red-throated Pipit (1992).
August	3rd Two-barred Crossbill (to 7th, 2008); 16th Baird's Sandpiper (to 20th, 1994); 27th Solitary Sandpiper (to 31st, 2007); 28th Baird's Sandpiper (to 30th, 1999).
September	1st Yellow-breasted Bunting (1910); 3rd Baird's Sandpiper (to 4th, 1999); 3rd Baird's Sandpiper (to 7th, 1999); 5th Citrine Wagtail** (to 9th, 2013); 5th Snowy Owl (to 29th, 2009); 5th Yellow-breasted Bunting (to 6th, 2000); 6th Great Snipe (1910); 10th Hooded Warbler (1992); 12th Blackburnian Warbler (to 14th, 2009); 13th Citrine Wagtail** (to 18th, 2009); 16th Baird's Sandpiper (to 21st, 1986); 16th Blue-winged Teal (to 17th, 1991); 17th Long-billed Dowitcher (to 18th, 1984); 18th Buff-bellied Pipit (2011); 19th Buff-bellied Pipit (to 3 Oct, 2008); 19th Snowy Owl (to 6 Oct, 2008); 20th Rustic Bunting (2000); 20th Tennessee Warbler (1995); 21st Arctic Redpoll (1990); 21st Black-eared Wheatear (1911); 21st Calandra Lark (1994); 21st Red-throated Pipit (1910); 21st White's Thrush (1993); 22nd Citrine Wagtail** (to 24th, 1992); 25th Rustic Bunting (to 1 Oct, 2000); 26th Red-throated Pipit (to 2 Oct, 2000); 28th Baird's Sandpiper (1911); 28th Bobolink (1986); 30th Buff-bellied Pipit (1910)*.
October	1st Eyebrowed Thrush (to 2nd, 2001); 4th Blyth's Reed Warbler** (1993); 4th Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler (2009); 5th Rustic Bunting (1993); 7th Red-throated Pipit (to 10th, 1961); 8th Red-throated Pipit (1911); 20th Blue-winged Teal (1995); 21st Citrine Wagtail** (to 22nd, 1995); 29th Grey-cheeked Thrush (1965).
November	No records
December	1st Gyr Falcon (1964 to 24 Jan 1965)

* First record for Britain

** Not classified as a national rarity by BBRC since 2015.

*** Found dead

Generally, finding rare birds on St Kilda is not easy and requires a lot of dedicated looking and legwork, coupled with unwavering optimism. Village Bay, for example, has an intimidating mileage of drystone walls and to check this thoroughly is difficult, time-consuming and often produces little to put in the notebook. However, to look is to be in with a chance, and to find a star-spangled vagrant from America or the Far East, alive and glowing on the windswept stonework of St Kilda surely rates as one of the most exciting experiences in Scottish birding.

Conclusions and final comments on travel

A visit to St Kilda never fails to amaze. The birds can be breath-taking and absorbing, so is the human history and archaeology of the islands though, and this is worth seeing too. Overall, it is both the natural and cultural heritage of St Kilda that defines the place. It is unique, engaging and moving.

It sometimes comes as a surprise that there is a small MOD base on Hirta, especially since the base is located close to the landing jetty

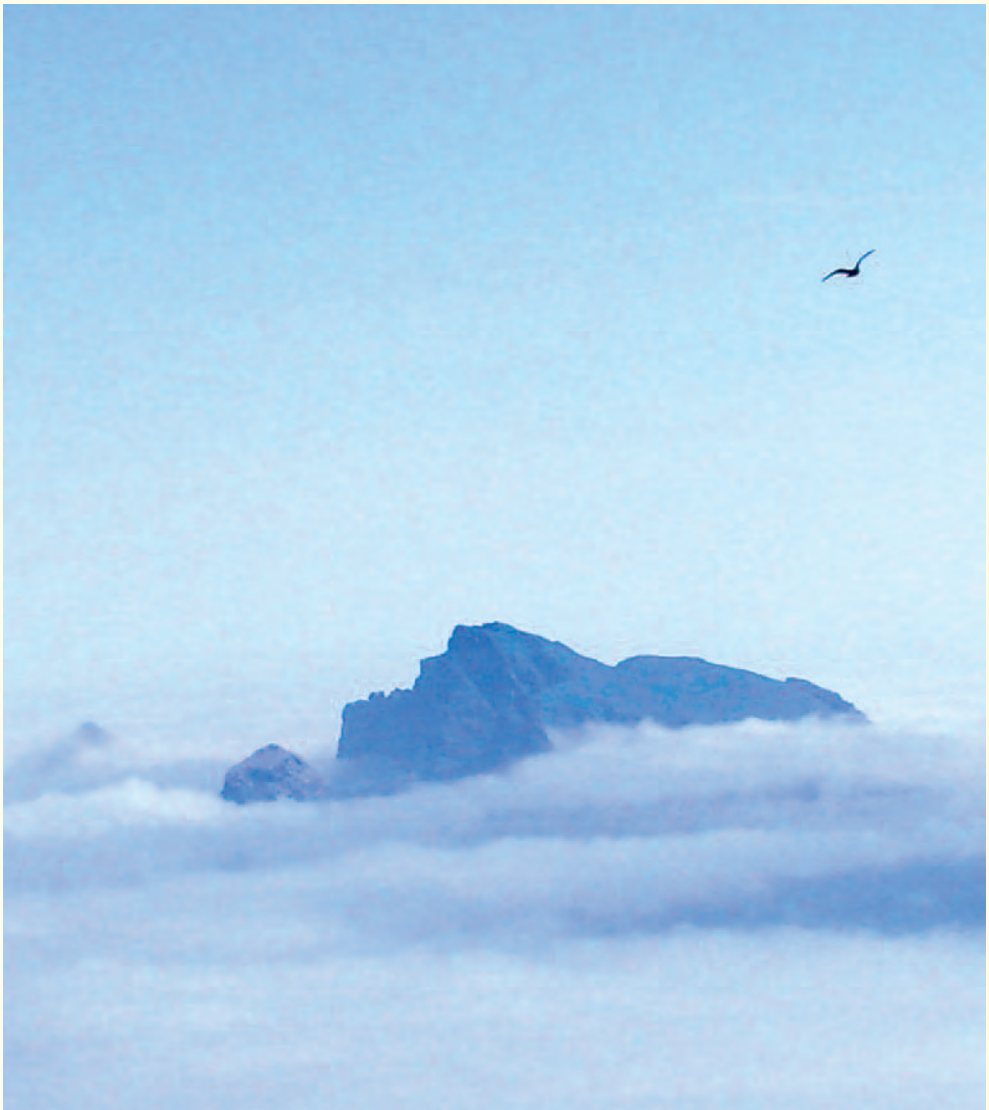


Plate 311. Boreray, Stac Lee and Stac an Armin in low cloud, St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, July 2009. © W. Miles

and therefore is one of the first things that is seen upon arrival by boat. Rest assured though, the visual impact of the base is greatest only from the shorefront. From elsewhere on Hirta, for example from within the heart of the deserted village, it's pretty easy to forget the base.

For those who visit St Kilda by day-boat, one of the most difficult things to deal with can be seasickness. Inevitably, there are days when the journey to and from the archipelago is bumpy, and if you do suffer from seasickness, then it can be worth factoring-in a bit of downtime for when you first arrive. For me this is essential after a tough crossing; I sit down on solid rock, take-in the stillness of the landscape, warm up with a brew and feel better, before setting off to explore and do some birding. During a day-trip there is plenty of time on land, so taking a break to recover from the journey doesn't matter timewise, and can greatly improve the experience of the day (also the diversity of birds that are seen).

There is nowhere else in Scotland quite like St Kilda and to visit the archipelago is a lifetime highlight and unforgettable. In birding terms, the spectacle of the seabirds, the endemic wren, the unpredictability of the spring and autumn migration, plus the outside chance of a mega-rare vagrant, all add massive interest and value to a trip. There is still a huge amount that we do not know about the birds of St Kilda, particularly regarding migrant diversity and timing, but this may change as more and more people with an interest in birds visit the islands. St Kilda is an exciting frontier - geographically, scenically, culturally, but also for further ornithological recording. 'Otherworldly' is the word that for me best describes the archipelago. However, really this word and others do it very little justice, as it is one of those extraordinary places where to even begin to know what it's like, you have to experience it first-hand.

Acknowledgements

I thank the NTS for logistical support on St Kilda, in particular Susan Bain, Gina Prior, Angela MacKenzie and Richard Luxmoore. I am grateful to Bob Furness and the University of Glasgow for my research time on St Kilda in

2007–09, and to Nigel Hudson and the British Birds Rarities Committee for collating and supplying St Kilda's rare bird records.

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Useful websites:

- www.kildacruises.co.uk
www.seatrek.co.uk
www.seaharris.com
www.gotostkilda.co.uk
www.kilda.org.uk
www.kilda.org.uk/workparties.htm
www.kilda.org.uk/visiting.htm
www.nts.org.uk/Property/St-Kilda-World-Heritage-Site
www.nts.org.uk/Vacancies

Will Miles, Aberdeen.

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Appendix 1. Rarities and scarcer species seen during visits to St Kilda in 2007–16 by WM. This table gives an indication of the regularity of some unusual species. Yellow-browed Warbler, for example, is apparently relatively rare on St Kilda.

	2007 (15 May– 3 Aug)	2008 (20 May– 10 Aug)	2008 (19 Sep– 12 Oct)	2009 (5 May– 21 Jul)	2009 (4 Sep– 6 Oct)	2010 (1 Jun– 15 Jun)	2016 (6 Jun– 9 Jun)	2016 (9 Sep– 23 Sep)
Green-winged Teal				1				
Harlequin Duck	1							
Quail		1		2				
American Golden Plover			1		1			
Dotterel			2	1				1
White-rumped Sandpiper			1					
Buff-breasted Sandpiper			1		4			1
Pectoral Sandpiper	1	1	1		3			
Pomarine Skua		1			1			
Laughing Gull				1				
Snowy Owl	5	2	1	3	1	1		
Short-toed Lark		1						
Yellow-browed Warbler			2					
Wood Warbler				1				
Barred Warbler			1					1
Subalpine Warbler		1						
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler					1			
Icterine Warbler					1			
Marsh Warbler				1				
Bluethroat		1						
Blue-headed Wagtail				1				
Citrine Wagtail					1			
Buff-bellied Pipit			1					
Common Rosefinch					1	1	2	1
Two-barred Crossbill		1						
Dark-eyed Junco	1							
Ortolan Bunting		1						
Blackburnian Warbler					1			



Plate 312. The 2016 Young Birders' Training Course crew outside the Obs, Isle of May, July 2016 (left to right, Stuart Rivers, Mark Oksien, Karen Keegan, Abbie Price, Alison Creamer, Michael Christie, Katie Anderson, Gus Routledge and Jamie McPike). © S.L. Rivers

Young Birders' Training Course, Isle of May, 2–9 July 2016

**K. ANDERSON, M. CHRISTIE, K. KEEGAN, J. McPIKE, A. PRICE
& G. ROUTLEDGE**

This July, another six young birdwatchers travelled to Anstruther, Fife, to take part in the third 'Young Birders' Training Course', a joint initiative between the SOC and the Isle of May Bird Observatory (IoMBO).

Around 30 applicants (ages between 16 and 25 years) applied for this year's course, which also included a handful of entries from continental Europe. It appears word of this unique opportunity has spread! The standard of entries was typically high and each was carefully reviewed by a panel of individuals from IoMBO and SOC. Being funded to spend a week on a National Nature Reserve learning essential bird survey skills and techniques, is a fantastic opportunity for any young naturalist and each applicant offered a compelling case for being selected.

This year's chosen six (three males and three females) were once again based at the IoMBO to provide the students with an opportunity to experience observatory and island life under the supervision of IoMBO Trust members and an SOC volunteer leader. The group also had the opportunity to work alongside staff and volunteers from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH).

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

Saturday 2 July

We arrived on the island by RIB, with another RIB taking out most of our supplies. The boat trip provided us with our first views of the various

seabirds we would be getting to know during the week such as the Puffins, Guillemots and Shags, as well as our first sight of the island. Once we had unloaded and had moved into the Observatory, we got our first tour round the island, seeing the Low Light, Main Light, Fluke Street, Heligoland traps and ringing hut. After dinner, we got our first go at ringing, with Rock Pipits and Pied Wagtails.

Michael Christie

Sunday 3 July

Our first full day began with an introductory talk from Mark Newell, CEH supervisor of seabird studies on the island. Mark spoke to us about monitoring the breeding, diet and survival of seabirds. We were also given a 'how to' guide on ringing and identifying birds in the field by Mark Oksien and Stuart Rivers, our YBTC organisers. However, it wasn't just a day of theory - before lunch we had already spotted our first migrant bird, a young male Wheatear. We also recorded the ring colour and ring codes of Shags we spotted on the rocks. These sightings enable the monitoring of previously ringed Shags during the breeding season. It wasn't all about the birds either - our morning moth trap contained 11 Marbled Coronets, sparking our tentative steps to becoming moth ID experts!

Karen Keegan



Plate 313. Carrie Gunn and Abbie Price measuring a Puffin, Isle of May, July 2016. © S.L. Rivers

Monday 4 July

The day started off well, with more moth species out of the moth trap than we'd had the previous day. We then had a rather drastic change in the size of what we were catching, as we headed off to Rona at the north end of the island to have a go at Great Black-backed Gull chick ringing.

This was quite an experience, with some particularly large chicks taking a few chunks out of us. In the afternoon, we read Shag darvic rings, and the evening was spent watching Guillemots and Razorbills taking the plunge as they jumped from the ledges they'd been raised on. Amazing to watch!

Gus Routledge

Tuesday 5 July

The morning began with the usual checking of the Fluke Street moth trap. We then joined Mark and Carrie from CEH in ringing Shag chicks up on the north end of the island. This was a very interesting exercise for all of us as the chicks were much bigger than anything we had ringed before, and of course it was great to see up close the way the coloured rings worked after observing them all week. Also, that morning we explored the gull colony around the Low Light and were able to ring some more Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

After lunch we met up again with Carrie at Cornerstones to learn about the Kittiwake watches that we would be undertaking the following day. We were able to familiarise ourselves with the hide and begin to learn the locations of all the nests we would be watching the next day. Stuart then gave us a talk on seawatching while the visitors were on the island. We sat by the South Horn and practised our seawatching skills, as well as continuing our lookout for Shags with colour rings.

That evening, the third round of the tern watch took place, while the good weather meant we were finally able to try our hand at Puffin netting. All the staff and volunteers on the island joined us and it was a very successful few hours with many Puffins and fish caught.

Katie Anderson

Wednesday 6 July

We started our day at 01:45; off to check the mist nets where there were two Storm Petrels. **Success!** Both were ringed and sent on their way and we went back to sleep to be ready for Puffin netting at 05:00. Puffin netting and did I have the marks to prove it! I was able to ring two feisty Puffins and after being bitten I released them on their way, the third one had already been ringed on 4 June 2004. Off for a hearty breakfast which was always very welcome. This was followed by two hours of solitude in a hide, apart from hundreds of Kittiwakes. I marked the change-over and minutes that the breeding pairs spent with each other for grooming and feeding. Next, sightseeing around the island with some down time for diary writing. Then lunch always enough to fill your belly! After I had the pleasure of joining volunteers on the island to ring my first ever Kittiwake chicks, it was a ball getting covered in faeces and regurgitation. However, my highlight was being able to see a Razorbill chick for the first time close up! Well-earned nap and shower, then straight on to tern watching in the main lighthouse with an SNH volunteer; what a view. Off to an amazing tea: burgers followed by rice pudding - beautiful. On to the log and then bed to end the day!

Abbie Price

Thursday 7 July

Rummaging around in the muck perhaps isn't most people's idea of a fantastic morning, but our first activity of the day was 'Puffin grovelling', which involved lying on the ground and burying our arms as far as we could reach down the Puffin burrows in the hope of discovering some young birds to ring. After getting to grips with the characterful 'pufflings' and now suitably filthy, the remainder of the morning was spent scouring the northern part of the Isle to check up on Great Black-backed Gull chicks.

A fine afternoon was devoted to the construction of 25 new tern nest boxes, which will hopefully encourage more Common Terns to breed on the Isle (and in turn possibly attract the rare Roseate Terns at some point in the future).

The day was rounded off with a good-natured quiz night amongst our group and all the other researchers and volunteers staying on the Isle. Afterwards some of the group sacrificed a good night's sleep to participate in a successful Storm Petrel ringing session, presenting a unique opportunity to get a close view of this enigmatic species.

Jamie McPike



Plate 314. Michael Christie launches a Puffin after it was ringed, Isle of May, July 2016. © S.L. Rivers



Plate 315. The team 'Puffin grovelling' – trying to locate chicks in burrows within a study plot in order to track their development. Of course, you might just find an adult – the bite will soon tell you!. © S.L. Rivers

Friday 8 July

Our final full day on the island started with the daily visit to Fluke Street to check out the moth trap before finishing-off the tern nest boxes we had started making the day before. Before lunch we had the pleasure of listening to Mike Harris who gave us a talk on his time spent researching Puffins and the various other seabirds, mainly on the Isle of May. It was an inspiring talk and a great insight into a life of a researcher, and I am sure it inspired us all. To finish our last day, we got a tour around the art exhibition in the lighthouse and got great views of the island at the top of the Main Light.

Michael Christie

Saturday 9 July

There was a feeling of sadness as we prepared to leave the island. Before we disembarked however, we had one more job to do - clean! With these jobs complete, Stuart spoke to us about the work of other observatories around the UK and Ireland and of the history of the Isle of May Observatory. It was a lovely summary of the beautiful Observatory

we had enjoyed staying in the past week. With some time to spare, we headed off towards Fluke Street to enjoy one last look at the nesting terns. It was then time to load up our bags and wave goodbye as we headed towards the mainland. The week was a great success and we would like to thank Stuart, Mark, Alison and all the CEH and SNH staff - thanks for a great week on the May.

Karen Keegan

A number of people and organisations contribute to making the YBTC the success it is each year. Thanks are given to course organisers and leaders - Jane Cleaver and Alison Creamer (SOC), Mark Oksien and Stuart Rivers (IoMBOT) and to all the Fluke Street team on the island: Mark Newell and Carrie Gunn (CEH), David Steel [Warden], Bex Outram [Assistant Warden] (SNH) and SNH volunteers James Crymble, Viv Hastie and Holly Pickett.

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

St Giles gets his blessings

William Eagle Clarke (1853–1938), Yorkshire-bred keeper at the Royal Scottish Museum (now National Museums Scotland), investigated bird migration by visiting remote isles and corresponding with lightkeepers. He added several species to the British List and discovered Fair Isle as the British Heligoland. He also revealed (Clarke 1919) the only British nesting record of White Stork in *The Scotichronicon* of Walter Bower (or Bowmaker, died 1449), Abbot of Inchcolm (“haf owre frae Aberdour” - *Sir Patrick Spens*) in the Firth of Forth.

A sexcentenary commemorative ballad

It fell sax hunert year lang syne,
AD fowerteen saxteen,
Ane nest o Storks on Sanct Giles Kirk,
A' sesoun they were seen.

Fife centuries the racord skulk't
'th' *Scotichronicon*,
A medieval Latin screed,
By burders quite unknow'n.

Up spak Great Northern Eagle Clarke,
The RSM's bricht sun,
Wha migrants track't at Northern Lichts
Wi questionnaire an' gun.

This doggit bluidhund Yorkshire tyke
Wha bless't the British List
Snift out *Ciconia* frae the buik
For t'*Scottish Naturalist*.

The auldest rarity in the world?
Whiles BOURCS
Hae dicht the List o Whang-neb't Whaps
An' Hastings Rarities.

Stauns auld Scotland whar it did?
Daur ae committee ding?
Hoots! Heeze the saltire tae the lift,
Gar carillons tae ring!

From the Latin: “In the year of our Lord 1416.....a pair of Storks came to Scotland and nested on top of the church of St Giles of Edinburgh and dwelt there throughout a season; but to what place they flew thereafter no one knows.”

The record still stands (e.g. Forrester *et al.* 2007), perhaps the oldest rarity record anywhere. Of the site Clarke adds: “A new stone edifice commenced in 1387...and some of it doubtless forms part of the Cathedral today.”



Plate 316. Spire tower of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, October 2012. © Sid Morgan

The crown spire was probably added late in the 15th Century. Even in its usual range, a White Stork nest on a building is thought lucky.

References

Clarke, W.E. 1919. An old-time record of the breeding of the White Stork in Scotland. *Scottish Naturalist* 1919: 25–26.

Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerny, C.J., Murray, R.D., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D.S. 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady.

Haf owre frae: half way across from; fell: befell; sax hunert: 600; lang syne: long since; ane: a; o: of; sanct: saint; a': all; sesoun: season; fife: five; racord: record; screed: long discourse; burder(s): birder(s); unknow'n: unknown; spak: spoke; bricht: bright; wha: who; Northern Lichts: Northern Lighthouse Board lighthouses and lightships; wi: with; an': and; doggit: dogged; bluidhund: bloodhound; tyke: dog, Yorkshireman; snift: sniffed; *Ciconia* (Latin): (White) Stork; buik: book; auldest: oldest; warld: world; whiles: sometimes; BOURC: British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee; hae: have; dicht: wiped; Whang-neb't Whap: Slender-billed Curlew; stauns: stands; whar: where; daur: dare; ae: this; ding: knock (down); hoots: pooh; heeze: hoist; tae: to; lift: sky; gar: make; Daibhidh FitzJames MacPharlain: D.J. Bates his makar (poyet) name.

Daibhidh FitzJames MacPharlain
(a.k.a. D.J. Bates)

BOOK REVIEWS

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

Birds of the Faroe Islands - facts and numbers. Jens-Kjeld Jensen & Søren Sørensen, 2015. Forlagið í Stöplum, Tórshavn, ISBN 978-99918-77-06-8, hardback, 363 pages, £47.50.



This book provides a definitive account, albeit in Danish, of the status of all species recorded in the Faroe Islands.

Fortunately a brief introduction explaining the layout of the book is provided in both Danish and English, which helps in deciphering the text in the species accounts. Each species ever recorded in the Faroes gets one page containing a good photograph, and brief text on its status. The problem with this treatment of a northern island avifauna is that most of the species included, especially passerines, are vagrants, with the result that Fulmar and Puffin get the same amount of space as Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Dusky Thrush (and Great Auk!). There then follow three appendices. The first deals briefly with species thought to be escapes or to have arrived by assisted passage. The second, rather curiously, is a detailed treatment of species of feather lice obtained from Faroese birds; even more curiously, this is entirely in English. The third appendix deals with bird topography, but this section is in Faroese!

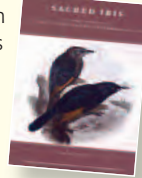
For anyone with a strong interest in the Faroe Islands (and hopefully an ability with Nordic languages) this book will be an essential addition to their library. For the visiting birdwatcher the combination of language, weight, price and emphasis on rarities makes the book of limited use.

Jeremy Brock

Sacred Ibis. The ornithology of Canon Henry Baker Tristram, DD, FRS. W. G. Hale, 2016. Sacristy Press, Durham, ISBN 978-1-910519-13-4, hardback, 322 pages, £55.00. Available from www.sacristy.co.uk

Canon H.B. Tristram (1822–1906) was one of the colourful figures of 19th century ornithology, one of the founding members of the BOU and an intrepid traveller in North Africa and the Middle East. As with many of his contemporaries, he was a careful observer and he shot birds - lots of birds - and took their eggs, amassing important and valuable collections now held in museums. He was also a prolific author, leaving us several books and many articles in the scientific and popular press. Members of the BOU are sometimes referred to as 'Ibises' (after the name of the society's journal) and, being a churchman, Tristram received the soubriquet 'Sacred Ibis', as in the title of this new book.

Bill Hale has examined Tristram's ornithological life in this volume. He starts with his time in Bermuda where in 1847 he met Scottish ornithologist and (later) the first President of the BOU, H.M. Drummond-Hay. During Tristram's explorations of the deserts of North Africa he started to understand geographical variation, especially in larks and chats. His better known travels were in Palestine and neighbouring areas where he made a number of long expeditions with groups of friends including H.M. Upcher (after whom the warbler is named) and where he first came across the bird of the wild mountain gorges that became known as Tristram's Grackle (now



Tristram's Starling). Four species still bear Tristram's name; a storm petrel, a warbler, a bunting and the starling. He had further travels in the Far East and the American North-west. He took an interest in island faunas, the Great Auk and, later, bird protection, and Hale covers all these in some detail.

As the sub-title indicates, the book is not a comprehensive biography of Tristram. Other aspects of his life are described sparingly and there is little about his contributions elsewhere in natural history. The narrow focus on birds leaves much unsaid about the great man. His original writings (available as inexpensive reprints) are replete with first-hand tales of adventurous travel and natural history discovery. On retelling here, the excitement has slipped away. The book also suffers from spelling mistakes, incorrect dates and ornithological errors, and the production quality is disappointing for a volume at this price.

Alan Knox

The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Fife. Norman Elkins, Jim Reid & Allan W. Brown, 2016. Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Aberlady, ISBN 978-0-9512139-6-4, hardback, 384 pages, £35.00.

Ever since I was given a copy of the *Ladybird Book of Garden Birds* in the late 1960s (which I still have!), I have had an enduring love of bird books so writing an objective critical analysis of the second *Fife Bird Atlas* was going to be a struggle, especially as I am acutely aware of the tremendous amount of hard work and dedication that goes in to producing such a book. However, I don't have any problems in waxing



lyrical about this excellent book which provides a benchmark for other such works. It is immediately apparent that the work and hours that have gone into the surveying, writing and production of the Atlas by the Fife Ornithological Atlas Group and local birders has been truly phenomenal and it is fitting that one of the group, Norman Elkins, received the SOC Branch Recognition Award at the recent SOC Conference in Pitlochry.

This atlas brings up-to-date information in the first *Fife Bird Atlas* which mapped bird distribution data from fieldwork carried out in the 1990s. It covers the years 2007 to 2013, mapping the distribution and abundance of birds in summer and, for the first time, winter. The book also features details on survey methods, weather, habitats and bird populations. The preface by Professor Jeremy Greenwood is excellent and asks (and answers!) the important question - what is the point of such work? The book itself is a large format, eye-catching hardbacked volume featuring 213 species over 384 pages with over 400 maps. The authoritative species accounts have been written by names familiar to SOC members and add gravitas to this book. It may have been useful to index the species accounts in the contents page but space and layout perhaps didn't allow. The accounts are short and succinct and are accompanied by maps showing winter and summer abundance and distribution and status where relevant. In some cases a very useful comparison map from the first *Fife Bird Atlas* is featured. Maps can send out a powerful message when analysing bird distributions and population fluctuations and comparing maps from the first Atlas for species such as Grey Partridge, Curlew and Corn Bunting tell an all too familiar and depressing story.

Every species account features one and in some cases two photographs by John Anderson and the use of one

photographer's images throughout the book is a bold move. The images are high quality with the portraits of Garganey, Little Gull, Green Woodpecker and Pied Wagtail particularly impressive, but it is the images of waders that really stand out. The Grey Plover in flight is exceptional and quite beautiful. However, one minor criticism - it would have been nice to have a location and date to accompany the images.

References are given and a very useful and fascinating estimated population size is to be found in the Appendix. This is an outstanding book and will prove a valuable resource to anyone involved or interested in the birds of Fife.

Scott Paterson

Britain's Birds: an identification guide to the birds of Britain and Ireland. Rob Hume, Robert Still, Andy Swash, Hugh Harrop & David Tipling, 2016. Princeton University Press - Wild Guides, ISBN 978-0-691-15889-1, softback, 560 pages, £19.95.



In the over-subscribed market of field guides to British/European birds it takes something special to stand out from the crowd. This does, and by some margin - it is a guide of the highest quality. While the content is most appropriate for 'experienced' birders (every species on the British List is featured), beginners and improvers will also find it indispensable. This is the ultimate photographic reference - almost 520 of the 560 pages are devoted to species identification, with more than 3,200 images included. The quality of the images, uncluttered layout and comprehensive coverage of different ages/plumages is truly excellent. The pages comparing similar species (e.g. ducks) in flight are superb, and birds are grouped for

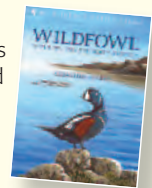
best comparison with similar-looking species, including highlighting of important features, while the distribution maps are up-to-date and well annotated. There is only a very short introduction, with no explanation of topography and structure, terminology, moult and note-taking in the identification process or fieldcraft, while the last 36 pages contain a full British & Irish species list (current BOU sequence), with abundance and legal protection status, acknowledgements, photo credits and an index of English and scientific names.

Highly recommended, and a great complement to your *Collins Guide*. Buy one now!

Stuart L. Rivers

Wildfowl of Europe, Asia and North America. Sébastien Reeber, 2015. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 9781472912343, hardback, 656 pages, £35.00.

More than 25 years have passed since Helm first published *Wildfowl: An Identification Guide to the Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World* by Steve Madge and Hilary Burn. Helm now bring us a new *Wildfowl of Europe, Asia and North America* by Sébastien Reeber. Although this book limits its coverage to the northern hemisphere, it still reaches over 650 pages, and is a mighty piece of work.



Introductory chapters cover taxonomy and systematics, avian topography, moult and plumages, ageing and sexing, and hybridisation. These are well written and sufficient to understand the detailed descriptions. As taxonomic debates arise in several species, the current areas of contention are usefully summarised. The plumage and moult descriptions use the revised Humphrey-Parkes terminology

popular in American publications, but may be a challenge for those more familiar with BWP. The coverage of over 100 commonly encountered hybrids is welcome, and provides a further advance in wildfowl identification guides.

The 72 full-colour plates feature 920 individual illustrations of 83 species, and include distribution maps for each. The plates, all superbly painted by Reeber, are themselves a good reason to buy this book.

The bulk of the book describes in detail, with text and colour photos, each species, subspecies and plumage variation (sex, age and moult). The species descriptions are thorough and the photographs are clear and well chosen.

If you have any interest in wildfowl and their identification, this excellent book has raised the bar, and is a worthy addition to your bookshelf. I did not have to think twice about buying my copy. I now hope that Reeber can be persuaded to produce a companion volume for the southern hemisphere.

Chris Waltho

Printing Wildlife: approaches to wildlife printmaking. Lisa Hooper, 2016. Langford Press, Kings Lynn, 135 pages, hardback, ISBN 978-1-904078-68-5, £20, paperback, ISBN 978-1-904078-69-2, £15.00.



This new book by Lisa Hooper is the second in Langford Press's Wildlife Art Technique Series. It contains a lot of the same material as in her *First Impressions*, also published by Langford Press only two years ago. However, if you have not got that one, like Lisa's excellent work and are interested in printing methods, get this because it is just as good and about half the price.

This book is specifically about printing and describes all the methods that Lisa uses: etching, woodcut, linocut, relief printing, collagraph, monotype, and Japanese woodblock. Her lively images are always cleverly composed and realistic, while retaining the simplicity and limited colour that her methods demand. A paragraph in the book nicely explains her ability to capture the character of her subjects. "What I'm looking for are things which come from observation: the way Long-tailed Tits come in a little group, stay for a while, then disappear. The chipper-ness of House Sparrows and the way they have huge sessions of seeming to shout at one another. The swagger of Rooks and Starlings, the coldness of a Jackdaw's eye, the otherness of a mass of geese, the way a Yellowhammer tilts its head to the sky and seems to unhinge its bill to sing. Thinking about what you see and recognising traits will feed into the way you portray wildlife and will add to the integrity of your images".

Having been on a few different courses in Edinburgh, I can recommend printing as a fascinating and rewarding hobby. Some methods are more challenging than others, but you may well find something relatively simple in Lisa's book to inspire you to make your own greetings cards. It will teach you the tricks of the trade and some of her prints, like the tessellated linocut of grazing Barnacle Geese on page 76, are a revelation.

John Savory

Siberia's Sprite. Andy Stoddart, 2016. Privately published. ISBN 978-1532769030, paperback, 177 pages, £10.00. Available from andystoddart.weebly.com/siberias-sprite.html

Pallas's Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, the sprite of the book's title, was first recorded in Scotland

on Fair Isle in 1966 and within 30 years had become sufficiently common that it was removed from the list of species considered by the Scottish Birds Rarities Committee. For many of us, it has gone from unimaginable rarity to annual possibility - though still all too easy to miss!



Like many others, Andy Stoddart is enraptured by this tiny, hyperactive gem, long after the excitement of his first encounter. His book starts with a skip through the harsh early days of Siberian exploration and the discovery of the diminutive warbler by Peter Simon Pallas in May 1777, followed by the careful filling-in of the map of its breeding distribution in the Siberian taiga, and its wintering range in southern and eastern Asia. Indeed, a map or two would have been useful here to help the reader with many unfamiliar place-names and with a later chapter describing recent research into the relationships between Pallas's Warbler and its closest relatives.

Nearly half-way into the book we reach the first British record, shot from a bush on the shore at Cley in Norfolk on 31 October 1896. For the next 55 years the species eluded further discovery until, on 13 October 1951, Eric Ennion drove one into the Heligoland trap at Monk's House Bird Observatory in Northumberland. Stoddart catalogues the subsequent dramatic increase in the species' occurrence in Britain. This extraordinary change in its fortunes is explored in terms of possible changes in migration and breeding range, ultimately with many questions still to be answered. The book covers all things 'spritely', including the bird in illustrative art and taxonomy, presented in a short and very readable format, though some of the photographs leave a lot to be desired. A nice little book, and good value.

Alan Knox

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

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

Fair Isle

At my last update we were just starting the season, I am now writing this as we approach the end of October and the official Obs season is now almost at an end. It's hard to summarize everything that has happened on Fair Isle in the course of six months, but the migration has been amazing, the seabirds had a relatively good season and it's been another year with a lot of visitors.

The announcement by the Scottish Government that the waters around Fair Isle are to be designated a Research and Development Marine Protected Area was the culmination of over 20 years of effort from the island community, spearheaded by former FIBO Warden Nick Riddiford, and was one of the year's highlights. It followed a seabird season that again showed a glimmer of hope that there may be signs of improvement after some disastrous years in the late 2000s. Bonxies increased to 516 territories, comfortably the highest ever number of breeding birds on the island (the previous highest count was 424 territories in 2014) and fledged a reasonable 0.66 chicks per territory. The whole-island Fulmar survey that is carried out every five years produced a total of 32,061 apparently occupied sites, the highest count since 1996, with most other species staying relatively steady compared to recent years. Breeding success was generally quite decent, with particularly good years recorded for Arctic Tern (0.23 chicks fledged per nest, the highest since 2009), Kittiwake (0.75 chicks fledged per nest, the highest since 2000) and Razorbill (0.74 chicks fledged per nest, the highest since 1998).

Rarities were headlined by three additions to the Fair Isle list: Black-browed Albatross and Little Egret in the spring and Siberian Accentor in October, which (if all accepted) will take the Fair Isle list to 388 species. The Siberian Accentor was followed by another two days later, whilst other notable occurrences included four Pine

Buntings in October (including a flock of three), two Siberian Stonechats, three Red-flanked Bluetails and four Lanceolated Warblers. A whole host of other rarities resulted in over 80 descriptions racked up, with three weeks of constant easterly winds in October accounting for many of these, in a remarkable year for rare birds. From a Fair Isle point of view Mediterranean Gull and Ring-necked Duck were amongst the most notable, both being second records for the island, whilst a returning Swinhoe's Petrel (which had not been recorded since it was ringed in 2013) was also a major surprise.

Over 6,000 birds were ringed, a good total, with ringing records set for Bonxie (566), Mallard (6), Hawfinch (6), Goldfinch (7), Chiffchaff (133) and Wren (44). The latter two were particularly notable as the Chiffchaff record was broken for the third consecutive year suggesting a real increase in numbers, whilst the majority of Wrens were ringed in October during a time of what appeared to be strong passage for this species. Also of note was the second highest ever House Sparrow annual ringing total (127 at the time of writing), with a bird ringed in Orkney in August being caught on the isle in October suggesting that there may have been an arrival to the island. It's the first House Sparrow ringed elsewhere to be found on Fair Isle, although birds ringed here have moved to North Ronaldsay (twice) and Shetland (three times).

The 2014 FIBO annual report was published in the autumn and saw a revamped layout, with a larger format, full-colour design sporting many more pictures. It is available by contacting the Obs or through the FIBO website and hopefully the 2015 report will also be published by the end of the year. Anyone who visited Fair Isle during 2016 and would like to contribute photos to the annual report should contact Ian Andrews on ijandrews@live.com, any contributions are gratefully received.

For anyone wanting to visit FIBO in 2017, spaces at the peak time are already rapidly filling up, whilst bookings for 2018 open on 1 March for Friends of Fair Isle and a month later for everyone else. If you want to get more involved in Obs life, then take a look at our volunteering opportunities, which should be available on the FIBO website (www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk) over the winter, and we look forward to meeting you next year.

*David Parnaby, FIBO Warden.
Email: fibo@btconnect.com*

Isle of May

The middle part of 2016 saw more work being done on the Observatory, with the paths around the building now finished. The next task was repairs to the pointing between the stonework on the south wall, while a couple of new benches were assembled and varnished, ready to serve visitors well for years to come.

However, the biggest news has been the relentless accumulation of new birds for the year, with every passing week.

It has been a stunning year on the Isle of May for rarities and scarcities. The year started well with only the third ever Water Pipit discovered in January (which remained until March) and was followed by a superb spring (not often we can say that).

Outstanding rarities included Citrine Wagtail (first spring record for the island), a lingering Thrush Nightingale and a Western Subalpine Warbler (which was confirmed through DNA analysis). Amongst the rarities, a good scattering of drift migrants was discovered including eight Bluethroats, five Red-backed Shrikes, two Red-breasted Flycatchers and island 'oddities' like Treecreeper and House Sparrow (only seven records in the last 50 years). The spring then signed off in style with a female Rustic Bunting discovered in mid-June, the first island record since 1999.

Although autumn was slow to pick up, the Isle still produced a Leach's Petrel, caught and ringed during nocturnal ringing activities, and a Greenish Warbler was the pick of the bunch in



Plate 317. Great Grey Shrike, Isle of May, October 2016.
© David Steel

August. September was dominated by westerly winds, but late in the month these switched to the east and the flood gates opened. The island recorded some impressive birds in October including two Blyth's Reed Warblers, Dusky Warbler, Radde's Warbler and Olive-backed Pipit to name but a few. Add six different Little Buntings (a new record annual total), plus two Common Rosefinches and more island rarities and the year list record was within grasp. The previous record for the Isle of May stood at 168, set in both 2013 and 2015.

The record was finally broken on 15 October with the arrival of a Great Grey Shrike near the Beacon, and further enhanced the following day with the appearance of a Northern Bullfinch. Since then we've gone from strength-to-strength with Little Grebe, Waxwing, Long-tailed Tit, Mediterranean Gull, Mute Swan, Coal Tit, Shorelark (first record since 2010) representing the 177th recorded species, followed by Goldeneye on 7 November, Red-necked Grebe on 9th, and a Slavonian Grebe on 12 November became 180th bird of the year.

Overall the year list record has been smashed by an impressive 12 birds and there is still time for more! With an increase in observer coverage and general recording in recent years are we likely to see it broken again soon? It all starts again on 1 January.

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*David Steel (SNH warden)
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Plate 318. Shag, Garron Point, Stonehaven, North-east Scotland, 10 September 2016. © Nick Littlewood

Ghost Shags in eastern Scotland and North-east England

N. LITTLEWOOD

Not the sort of autumn migrant that I was seeking along the coast of North-east Scotland on 10 September 2016, but a strikingly white Shag was certainly bird of the day! It flew in across the mouth of the bay just north of Garron Point, Stonehaven, dropped down onto the sea and then climbed out onto rocks at the end of the point itself. I was some distance away initially but managed to make my way along the point and clamber down the rocks into a moderately precarious position close to where the bird was. Whilst remaining hidden from it by the angles of the cliffs, I held my bridge camera out around the corner of the rocks, with the viewing screen angled back towards me, and took a series of photos before leaving the bird in situ.

The bird was very striking indeed, with entirely white plumage (Plate 319). Its bill was orange instead of the more usual yellow/grey, its gape

and eye ring were similarly orange and its legs were pinkish-orange. The eyes were grey/green, as is normal for a Shag.

In one of the photos (Plate 318), I caught the bird 'performing' for the camera in mid-flow. This photo was shared online and through feedback, I learnt of what was presumably this same bird being seen earlier by Jared Wilson, at Anstruther, Fife, on 25 August. Subsequently, on 13 September, it flew north, then back south, past a seawatching Mark Lewis at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen.

A few days later, on 18 September, Adrian Breeman saw and photographed a pale Shag that pitched up for a few minutes at the north end of Sandford Bay, Peterhead (Plate 320). This bird showed some duskier tones throughout its plumage, especially on the underwings and thighs. Whilst the date may suggest that this was

the same bird, having acquired plumage staining, the observer was confident that this was not the case and an apparent, but subtle, dark ridge along the top of the upper mandible seemingly provides further differentiation from the Garron Point bird. In fact, the Peterhead bird showed a close resemblance to another pale Shag, at the Farne Islands, Northumberland, that was seen and photographed by one of the boatmen, Andrew Douglas (Plates 321–322). The dates of sightings at the Farne Islands, 23 August and 3 and 7 October at least, make it unlikely that it is the same as the Peterhead bird, but could they be related, perhaps even siblings?

The absence of any hint of a crest on any of these birds suggests that they are all most likely to be juveniles. It is not known from where any of these Shags fledged, but it would seem unlikely that any of them have been at large for long in eastern Scotland or North-east England before being reported. However, if any remain and do survive to maturity, we can expect many more reports of these 'Ghost Shags' in the future.

Finally, a reminder that Shag movements are much studied in eastern Scotland. A high proportion of birds are darvic-ringed at breeding colonies, especially on the Isle of May, but also elsewhere. If you see such a bird, please do report it to shags@ceh.ac.uk.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Adrian Breeman, Andrew Douglas, Mark Lewis, Mark Newell, Jane Reid, Harry Scott and Jared Wilson for information and discussion on these 'Ghost Shag' sightings.

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Plate 319. Shag, Garron Point, Stonehaven, North-east Scotland, 10 September 2016. © *Nick Littlewood*



Plate 320. Shag, Sandford Bay, Peterhead, North-east Scotland, 18 September 2016. © *Adrian Breeman*

Plates 321–322. Shag, Farne Islands, Northumberland, (left) 23 August, (right) 3 October 2016. © *Andrew Douglas*





Plate 323. Eastern Kingbird, Barra, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Alison McPhillips

Eastern Kingbird, Barra and South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 29–30 September 2016 – the first British record

C. SAUNDERS, A. McPHILLIPS & M. FORREST

Barra, Outer Hebrides

The island of Barra at the southern end of the Outer Hebrides is a fabulous place to visit and look for rare birds. It is not only stunningly beautiful, but its position on the edge of the Atlantic makes it a birding hotspot for both Eurasian and American land birds. In the last few years, a series of American passerines has put Barra firmly on the birding map.

Barra has been a favourite birding destination of mine for many years and this year we were lucky enough to be staying on the island for a month. Thursday 29 September 2016 started very quietly with nothing to report in the morning from any of the residents or visitors. With all the main sites having been covered in the morning, my wife, Alison, and I decided to head to the north of the island to Eoligarry. This is an area of crofting land, wet pasture and agricultural land in which areas of cover are few and rather thin. However, there have been migrants here in the past and reports of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo at the other end of the island chain in Lewis made me think it may be worth a visit. Light rain was beginning to fall and after an hour of walking

from the north tip of the island, we were on the point of heading for home. It was then that it happened. That moment most birders dream about but none of us really expect to occur.

About 100 m away in a fallow pasture field an interesting bird flew up from the vegetation onto a fence post. One scan with the binoculars set the pulse racing. Here on the fence was a Blackbird-sized bird with a head pattern like a giant Pied Flycatcher. Clearly this was not ordinary and when the bird flew I knew I had an American flycatcher. The bird had disappeared into a nearby garden which gave me a little panic as it was not immediately visible. However, Alison picked it up on a fence line shortly after and started collecting record shots on the camera.

With no doubt that this bird was very special, I got messages out to the resident birders, Ian Ricketts and Bruce Taylor. The message was garbled as I was trying desperately to text while shaking with excitement. I was unsure of the bird's identity at this stage, but I had narrowed the choice to either a phoebe or a kingbird.

The bird approached a little closer along the fence line. The black and white body pattern made it a striking bird. It had a slightly off-white chest band and the wings were a uniform grey-brown contrasting with the darker grey of the mantle with a black head and tail. The tail tip showed a clear white band which seemed to be uniform across all the tail feathers. The bird acted like a flycatcher, actively pursuing prey items before returning to prominent perches around the fields and garden. Each time it flew, the striking tail pattern was clearly visible.

By the time Ian and Bruce arrived I was happy that this had to be an Eastern Kingbird. Within 20 minutes all the birders on Barra at the time (just nine in total) had assembled and had seen the bird well. All were agreed that this was an Eastern Kingbird and the news was released. The bird was watched for the next hour during which time it moved around the chosen garden and field, but was never out of view for very long. It remained faithful to a small area and seemed to be feeding with ease.

It was only when Bruce suggested that we warn the owners of the garden about the discovery and the interest that it may cause, that I realised the enormity of this bird. A quick call to a friend confirmed that this was a first for Britain, and with just two brief appearances in Ireland, it was clear that would draw an audience should it still be present in the morning.

The bird stayed faithful to the area until about 14:00 hrs the next day. At this time, the bird did two fairly long flights into the distance. Each time the bird was then set upon by the local Twite flock and Starlings that clearly did not like its presence before returning to the garden. At 15:30 hrs the bird was seen flying strongly to the north and out over the Sound of Barra. However, by then some 70 birders from around the country had managed to get to the island and see the bird.

Clive Saunders & Alison McPhillips
Email: alimaclive@yahoo.co.uk

Remarkably the same bird was found again two days later ...

Plate 324. Eastern Kingbird, Barra, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Steve Nuttall





Plate 325. Eastern Kingbird, Bornais, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Angus Hogg

Bornais, South Uist, Outer Hebrides

"Sleepily head for kettle; Sunday morning, back of eight and getting light; glance out of window and catch sight of thrush-sized bird landing in Grey Willow. No instinctive identification, divert to binoculars. Obliging bird moves to top of tree (wake up! look properly may fly away at any time); upright stance; black/dark back and head; pronounced light/white front up to bill; thrush-like bill - no hook; tail dark with noticeable white band at terminal and running up edge of outer feather. Unknown to me, but unusual birds are always likely in the Outer Hebrides. Take photos and reach for *Birds of North America*, where it is fairly easily identified as an Eastern Kingbird, one of the tyrant flycatchers, Family Tyrannidae. Just how unusual is this bird here? Cannot find it in the *Outer Hebrides Bird Report*. Ring Andrew Stevenson, my local 'defer to fount of all bird knowledge', and he informs me one has been seen on Barra two days previously, and that this was a first for

the UK; although there have been two previous sightings in Ireland. Says he and fellow birder, Angus Hogg, will be round directly!"

As the light increases the Kingbird starts to behave like a flycatcher, perching on prominent branches then flying after insects and returning to perch. It proves to be a very accommodating bird that is unconcerned as more people begin to arrive to watch and photograph it. It stays until about 14:00 hrs in the vicinity of our garden and our neighbour's, easily visible with its white breast marking and its penchant for perching where it has a good view of its surroundings. It then flies purposefully off northwards leaving a lot of disappointed birders looking for it over the next few wet and windy days.

Miranda Forrest, Bornish, South Uist
Email: miranda.forrest@tesco.net

Status of Eastern Kingbird in Scotland

This Nearctic flycatcher breeds across Canada from southern Northwest Territories east through southern Ontario and Quebec to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, and south to northernmost Nevada and east across the USA to the Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico to central Texas. The entire population is migratory and winters in Central America from southern Mexico south to north-western South America to Venezuela and northernmost Chile and Bolivia.

The Barra and South Uist bird represents the first record of this species in Britain, but there have been two previous records in Ireland:

- 2012:** 5 October, first-winter at Kilmurvey, Inishmore, Co. Galway
- 2013:** 24 September, adult at Inishbofin, Co. Galway.

The find date of the Barra individual lies between those of the two Irish records which encompass a window of 11 days. The north-westerly bias in the find locations is to be expected with a vagrant from North America. The fact that three birds have been found in the last four years does suggest we might expect another in the not too distant future, with the Outer Hebrides a good prospect for its location.



Plate 326. Western Sandpiper, Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Steve Duffield

Western Sandpiper, Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, August–September 2016 – the first Outer Hebrides record

B. RABBITS

Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, is well known as the premier seawatching site in Britain for witnessing the spring migration of both Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas (see for example *Scottish Birds* 33(3): 275–280). There was an even larger Long-tailed Skua passage in May 2015 when an astonishing 4,640 passed (over 2,000 more than in 2013). Unless it is very windy, seawatching here in autumn is hard work, with most birds usually heading far out on a south-westerly heading. Griminish Point, a headland some 7 km to the north, can be far more productive at this time of year, but access has become more difficult in recent years with quite a long slog out to the point from the main road.

On 31 August, the weather conditions looked good after midday for a seawatch, but as I was suffering from a heavy cold I decided the effort to get to Griminish Point was not worth it, so I opted to try from Aird an Rùnair. My visit started well; as I was driving out towards the parking spot I disturbed a Turtle Dove from the track. On arrival at the end, the Monach Islands were not visible as fairly frequent pulses of light rain swept across the headland and watching from the car nothing much appeared to be moving through. Anyway I needed to be much further around the headland in order to see any movement and when the rain eased off I made my way out to a relatively sheltered position amongst the rocks.

Eager to start a seawatch, I didn't give the waders on the beach much scrutiny, but noticed these were mostly Dunlin with small numbers of Knot and Bar-tailed Godwits.

A two-hour seawatch (13:30–15:30 hrs) in mostly sunny weather produced 15 Sooty Shearwaters and 485 Manx Shearwaters but not much else. Most were passing quite far out so the seawatch was hard work and two hours was enough for me. As I returned to the car the tide was fast coming in pushing all the waders closer in and onto the banks of seaweed. I sat down for a bit more stability in the WSW F4–5 wind to study these and started to go through them systematically. After a minute or so I came across a bird that was obviously no Dunlin with startling white underparts and rich rufous upper scapulars. Also it had a longish bill, and nothing about it suggested that it was a Little Stint or a Semipalmated Sandpiper (I have seen several on North Uist including a spring bird at Aird an Rùnair - admittedly identified by photographs much later from when first seen!).

Although my only previous experience of Western Sandpiper was of a bird in Devon many years ago (despite the time lapse I remembered that it had a particularly long Dunlin-like bill), my first thoughts were that the Aird an Rùnair bird was the same species. I made a couple of phone

calls to alert others and Ian Thompson rang back to say he would be with me in an hour. As I was getting some photographs, a Peregrine shot onto the beach creating panic among the waders, but missing its intended wader quarry. It didn't take long for them to return however so while waiting for Ian to arrive I decided to check out the nearby stubble aware that Tony Marr had seen a Buff-breasted Sandpiper at the Butt of Lewis earlier in the morning. Apart from a couple of Lapwings there didn't appear to be much else, but on walking a bit further into the stubble up got a Buff-breast. Soon after, I got another flight view when the white underwing with a dark crescent on the primary coverts was seen. Also the bird called, a quiet, rather soft 'cheu', not often given but I have heard this on a few occasions from others that I have seen.

Returning to the beach, by the time Ian arrived the high tide had peaked making for a lot of movement among the waders. After a while they all settled down and we were able to get good views of the target bird and obtain some more photos. As an added bonus, the Buff-breasted Sandpiper also forsook the stubble and landed on the beach for a while. We were both reasonably happy that the bird was indeed a Western Sandpiper, but surely identification couldn't be that easy. I was aware that some juvenile Semipalmated Sandpipers can show rufous in their upper scapulars, in fact one of three that turned up at nearby Loch Paible in 1999 showed this (a photograph appears in the *Outer Hebrides Bird Report*). This, however, was nowhere near as bright and outstanding as on our bird. In addition, the bird's structure and jizz appeared to be quite different from the Semipalmated Sandpipers that I have seen on the Uists (at least six in 1999 and singles in 2009 and 2013).

There have long been identification issues involving the two species and there is one such Outer Hebrides record not yet resolved of a bird seen by Andrew Stevenson on South Uist in early September 2012. It was initially thought to have been Semipalmated, but now by some as Western. Juvenile Western Sandpipers are said



Plate 327. Western Sandpiper, Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © *Brian Rabbits*



Plate 328. Western Sandpiper, Aird an Rùnair, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Steve Duffield

to moult during their southward migration and most will have moulted at least their scapulars by mid-September. Our initial caution on identification was later seen to be unjustified on the still-to-moult Aird an Rùnair bird. More identification questions are often posed with later autumn or earlier moulted birds that occasionally occur in Britain, but the Aird an Rùnair bird with its distinctive scapulars along with its structure and bill should ensure a safe passage into the record books.

If I had not felt under the weather on the 31st I would have undoubtedly gone to Griminish Point thus missing out on a rewarding afternoon's birding. There was every chance, however, that it would have been discovered over the following days as it (also the Buff-breasted Sandpiper) remained until 4 September. The day before I had managed to separate its call from the other waders and I noted it as a high 'jeet'.

Brian Rabbitts, Carinish, North Uist
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Status of Western Sandpiper in Scotland

This Nearctic wader has a breeding range along the north and west coast of Alaska and the entire population is migratory, occupying wintering areas along the entire length of the west coast of the USA, and the east coast south from New Jersey, into Mexico and south through the Caribbean and coastal South America to Ecuador and Venezuela.

There have been five previous records of Western Sandpiper in Britain, with three of these in Scotland: a juvenile at Pool of Virkie, Mainland Shetland on 25 September 1988; a first-winter/adult at Musselburgh/Aberlady, Lothian on 9–25 August 1997 (probably present since 25 July); a juvenile at Deerness, Mainland Orkney on 28 September to 3 October 1998; a juvenile/first-winter at Poole Harbour, Dorset on 29 September to 15 October 2004, and a first-winter at Cley/Blakeney Harbour, Norfolk on 28 November 2011 to 31 January 2012. There are also four records from Ireland: in Co. Wexford in September 1992 and August 1996, in Co. Cork in September 1999 and in Co. Galway in September 2008.

There are also two British records of birds not differentiated between Western or Semipalmated Sandpiper: one at Sutton Bingham Reservoir, Somerset/Devon in October 1973, and one at Dawlish Warren and Turf End, Devon in April–May 2009.

The records do not share the generally western bias of many other Nearctic wader records in Britain, but instead occur at well-watched locations which reflects the difficulty of its identification and the need to get good, close views to clinch the record. The handful of previous records is notably different to the closely related Semipalmated Sandpiper which has now reached 138 accepted records in Britain by the end of 2015. This presumably reflects the more westerly location of the Western Sandpiper breeding range and its primary migration route compared to the more easterly Semipalmated Sandpiper.

The timing of records shows a pattern of autumn arrivals between 9 August (possibly 25 July) and 15 October, plus the single overwintering record in Norfolk. The dates of the North Uist bird fit well within the previous window of autumn occurrence.



Plate 329. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Tony Marr

Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Isle of Lewis, 28 September 2016 - second Outer Hebrides record

D. POINTON & B.A.E. MARR

Dan Pointon visited the Isle of Lewis for the last week of September 2016 with the avowed intention of finding a Nearctic vagrant blown across the Atlantic by the storms which had been forecast to hit the Outer Hebrides. He had made two previous visits, successfully twitching the Chimney Swift at the Butt of Lewis in October 2014 and the Wilson's Warbler in Port of Ness, just two miles to the south, in October 2015. He called Tony Marr, who lives in Port of Ness during the spring and autumn migration periods and who he had met on both his visits, to say that he had decided to try his luck in finding his own 'mega' on this 70-mile long island which is so clearly underwatched, and that he was on his way.

There are currently fewer than a handful of active resident, or even part-resident, birders on Lewis and Harris, which confusingly are one island, the southernmost one-third being Harris. Two of these birders live in the 'capital', Stornoway, where the Castle Grounds are very well wooded but overwhelmingly extensive, and where birds disappear very easily. The western coastline is particularly rugged and in places difficult to access; there is scant cover for landbirds, most trees and bushes to be found in scattered gardens and crofts; it is usually very windy; and it rains a lot, sometimes horizontally. Accommodation is not easy to find. And then there are the dreaded Scottish midges! As if all that doesn't deter birding visitors, transport to

and from the island, by plane or by ferry, can be adversely affected by the weather.

The Butt of Lewis is recorded in the *Guinness Book of Records* as being the windiest place in Britain. Ironically, the weather which leads to the arrival of rarities is often the worst weather for travel or for looking for vagrant birds. Birding can be frustrating, and the results are sometimes all or nothing. Undoubtedly the combination of all these factors, plus distance and cost, must account for the relatively small number of visiting birders. However, the island's location off the north-west corner of mainland Britain, where it bears the brunt of the Atlantic gales throughout the year, puts it in a prime position for birders hoping to find the top prize in rarity hunting: an American vagrant, particularly if it's a landbird.

Dan was well aware of the opportunities, and Tony was very happy to have another pair of eyes and ears to help find the good birds at such a critical time in the autumn. After eight years of mostly solitary watching, he has confirmed the rarity potential of North Lewis and the Butt many times, and it is clear that more observers would increase the hit rate further. Tony recommended working the area in the south-west of Lewis, around Uig and Gallan Head, which projects well out into the Atlantic for seawatching and for autumn migrant arrivals, but which is rarely watched; and made suggestions for accommodation. We agreed to keep in touch by phone, and Dan set off on his marathon drive from Bristol to the north-west of mainland Scotland.

Dan arrived there to meet not only stormy weather which was causing some disruption to the ferry timetable, but to learn that one of the ferries had struck a pontoon, reversed into another pontoon, and finally veered off to the side and hit the rocky shoreline. Considerable damage was caused to the pontoon structure of the marina; the ship involved was taken out of commission; and there were consequential changes to the timetable to be accommodated, affecting routes over to both Lewis (from Ullapool to Stornoway) and to Harris (from Uig on Skye to Tarbert). Eventually he reached the island, secured accommodation in Stornoway, and was up at the Butt early on Monday morning.

By a happy coincidence, Nick Davies, who runs Gairloch-based Hebridean Whale Cruises, cetacean and wildlife boat trips, had decided to visit Lewis and the Butt during the forecast period of turbulent weather, which would prevent him from going out in his boat for several days. Nick had found the Chimney Swift in 2014, and this time had booked accommodation in a local B&B in Cross for a few nights. He and Dan knew each other from that earlier occasion, and this time they travelled together in Dan's car to cover as much of the west coast of Lewis and Harris as would be feasible. With Tony based at the Butt, a good south-westerly gale forecast, and such an experienced team assembled, the stage was surely set for another mega!

Plate 330. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Tony Marr





Plate 331. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Tony Marr

Monday 26th was a windy day, and produced a good selection of typical Ness migrants for us all. Six Snow Buntings coming in off the sea at the Butt were the first ones of the autumn; a Pied Flycatcher, seven Barn Swallows, a Blackcap, a Goldcrest and single Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff were satisfying by local standards, but not guaranteed to set pulses racing. Tuesday 27th came in with gale-force south-westerly winds and heavy rain, and seawatching by Dan and Nick from Mangersta, near Uig, produced just two Sooty Shearwaters, with single Leach's and European Storm-petrels off Labost, near Barvas. Gardens up and down the west coast held just a few Willow Warblers and Blackcaps, and a single Snow Bunting was found near Aird Uig.

Wednesday 28th got off to a great start, with a Barred and a lovely Yellow-browed Warbler in the gardens in Port of Ness. At the Butt a single Snow Bunting was near the lighthouse, and the first of many small flocks of Pink-footed Geese were passing over on this grey drizzly morning. The

wind had dropped to a light south-westerly breeze. Tony had an appointment in the local newspaper office to deliver his fortnightly copy on Ness bird news to the editor, so Dan and Nick headed off slowly southwards through Ness, checking gardens and outcrops of trees before planning to move further on down the coast.

Tony was leaving the newspaper office a few minutes past midday, after handing over his article, when a text message came through on his mobile: '*Yellow-billed Cuckoo - Dell*', followed by details of the precise location - in a garden only about 500 yards from the final sighting of the White-crowned Sparrow in South Dell on 31 May this year. Dan had hit the jackpot and found his own mega! After informing Ian Ford who was in Ness with a Heatherlea Birdwatching Holidays group of six, Tony hastened to the site and joined Dan and Nick. The bird was up in the trees in the large garden, and he and Nick quickly managed to obtain some photos before it moved away out of sight into deep cover.

Identification of this striking bird was not a problem, but there was an extraordinary twist of fate in that a closely related Black-billed Cuckoo had been seen on North Uist in May this year. That bird was the first Outer Hebrides, and fifth Scottish, record, and our Yellow-billed Cuckoo proved to be only the second Outer Hebrides, but the fourteenth Scottish, record. Both species have a very poor survival record, thought to be hastened by their need for a particular type of caterpillar which is not found in Britain in the autumn. The previous Outer Hebrides record was of one found dead on South Uist in early November 2010. Ours was thus the first live one to be seen, although we suspect it died soon after we saw it.

It stayed in the garden through the afternoon in ever-increasingly heavy rain, looking more and more uncomfortable (as we all felt). A total of 14 observers saw the bird up to 15.00 hrs, when rain stopped play and we all left. The bird was not seen the following day, when three observers who had come over on the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry, and two who flew into Stornoway, sadly dipped.

We learned later that the cuckoo had been seen earlier on 28th, at about 9.15 hrs, by nearby neighbours David Greenall and Ruth O'Dell, on their bird table, and they too had photographs. Ruth has given us her account of their sighting as follows:



Plate 332. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Peter Stronach



Plate 333. Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, September 2016. © Ruth O'Dell

"I was at the sink when I noticed an unusual bird land on the bird table. It looked very tired and bedraggled. I had never seen one like it before and rushed off to get the binoculars. It had a white front, yellow bill and a long tail and I also noticed a lovely reddish colour on both wings. It didn't move too much except to reach up to a leaf to grab at something, so that enabled me to take a few photos. It stayed for about 15 minutes and then took off in the direction of the neighbouring holiday home garden where there are a lot more trees".

Dan's mission had succeeded, and was a just reward for his long and difficult journey to Lewis; even more so for his having checked every sizeable garden in the fifty miles between the Butt and Uig over the previous two days looking for windblown vagrants. He is looking forward to returning to Ness for a fourth year running in 2017. What will he find next time?

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Aspects of autumn migration in 2016

C.R. McKAY

This report brings together sightings from across Scotland to highlight interesting aspects of autumn (July–October) 2016. The list of sightings is not comprehensive, and is based on the most easily accessible and analysable database records held by BirdTrack, BirdGuides and Trektellen, sometimes supported by reports in local birding grapevines and bird observatory blogs. It focuses upon non-rarities.

July waders

Autumn wader migration can start as early as June, but July is a good time to look for freshly arrived migrants, especially if there has been overnight rain, or adverse winds. An early Green Sandpiper was at Baron's Haugh (Clyde) on 1 July, and more were seen throughout Scotland in the late summer months, with five at Baron's Haugh by mid-August. On 2 July, there were three Whimbrels at Powfoulis on the Forth estuary (UF) along with two Common Sandpipers. A Wood Sandpiper at Letham Pools (Fife) on 4th was the first of only a handful of records of this species this autumn. Seven Sanderling on Tiree on 6th had presumably

arrived from the high Arctic in north-west Greenland or Canada. Less far-travelled were 280 Black-tailed Godwits from Iceland at Kinneil (UF) on 17th. By mid-August, their numbers here had increased to an impressive 660 birds. Among our own breeding waders, Common Sandpipers are among the first to leave their breeding grounds - evidenced by 34 at roost at the Cart/Clyde (Clyde) in the late evening of 18 July. The month ended with 24 Whimbrel at Carsethorn (D&G) on 31st.

Curlew Sandpiper

A huge influx of Curlew Sandpipers occurred at coastal sites in eastern England from 19 August onwards, with the highest number being 253 birds at Frampton Marsh (Lincolnshire) on 23rd. A similar influx occurred across Scotland at the same time. Though the scale of the movement was less, never the less some nationally significant counts were made. The first bird of the autumn was a single on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3 July. By the month's end others had been seen at Loch Gilp (Arg) and Aberlady (Loth) on 24 July, Spey Bay (M&N) on 26th and Kinneil Lagoon (UF) on 27th, with two on the Eden Estuary (Fife) on 31st.

Plate 334. Curlew Sandpiper, Tynninghame, Lothian, 28 August 2016. © Ian Andrews



In **August** a total of 108 reports were submitted to BirdGuides, with locations stretching from Shetland to Dumfries & Galloway. In early August two were at the Lower Garnock Estuary (Ayr) on 2nd, one was at the Wilderness (Fife) on 4th when one was also at Scatness (Shet), with two singles in Orkney at Braebuster and North Ronaldsay. Five at Musselburgh (Loth) on 17th was the first hint of a fresh influx, but the largest numbers appeared at sites in the west from 19th when 24 were at Traigh Cornaig, Tiree (Arg) and two at Baleshare, N Uist (OH). The next day there were 18 at Machrihanish (Arg), six at Peninerine and four at Ardivachar Point (both S Uist, OH).

The 21st saw an unprecedented passage at Machrihanish, where 39 passed >S with other waders and 16 off-passage birds were present on the shore. Even more were on the move there the next day when 72 passed >S with other waders, one of the highest UK visible migration counts for this species (www.trektellen.org). The influx was reflected across the country subsequently, with eight at Musselburgh (Loth) on 21st, seven at Skinflats (UF) on 22nd, and on 24th there were 14 at Baleshare, N Uist (OH), nine at the Ythan Estuary (NES), and seven at Montrose Basin (A&D). Birds lingered to the month end at over 20 sites spread across the country.

A further 106 reports were submitted to BirdGuides in **September**. Maximum counts included 20 at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 3rd, 14+ at Tynninghame Bay (Loth) on 8th, nine at Skinflats (UF) on 21st, eight at Musselburgh (Loth) on 7th, six at Hunterston Sands (Ayr) on 10th, five on the Eden estuary (Fife) on 4th and five at Carsethorn Bay (D&G) on 5th. Thereafter numbers declined as birds moved on. There were fourteen reports in **October**, all singles but for three at Ardivachar Point (S Uist) on 1st. The last sightings were one at Cardoness (D&G) on 21st, one on Tiree (Arg) on 22nd and one at Belhaven Bay (Loth) on 26th.

Influxes of Curlew Sandpipers such as these are related to many factors, one of which is the abundance of Lemmings in the sandpiper's breeding areas: in poor lemming years predators such as Arctic Fox, Snowy Owl and skuas turn their attentions to breeding birds, which in turn

suffer poor breeding success. The great majority of the birds present in Scotland were juveniles, suggesting that the species had indeed had a good breeding season in 2016. So maybe the Curlew Sandpipers on our beaches and estuaries this autumn were telling us something about lemmings in the arctic!



Plate 335. Migrating Tree Pipit, De Vulkaan, Netherlands, September 2014. © Eduard Opperman

August pipits

The southerly visible migration of **Meadow Pipits** through Scotland is characteristic of September days with south-westerly winds. But their close relative the **Tree Pipit** has almost completed its migration by this time. Autumn 2016 proved to be a record breaking one for this species in Scotland, as logged by Graham Sparshott who made regular visible migration counts at Ferryhills, North Queensferry (Fife). The first migrants heard heading overhead towards the shortest crossing of the Forth were three in calm conditions on 23 July. Numbers increased rapidly in August, with 32 >S on 6 August a significant Scottish count in its own right. However, 83 >S on 13th was even more remarkable, followed by an incredible 167 >S the next day - the highest ever UK vismig count on Trekellen (www.trektellen.org).

There's always something new to discover if you put the effort in and do something different! The first small passage of Meadow Pipits didn't occur until 27 August when 71 danced their way towards the road bridges old and new, but they were still out-done by 81 Tree Pipits! In September, the tables were turned, with a mere

26 Tree Pipits on 3rd - not easy to pick out among the accompanying 566 Meadow Pipits. The last double figure count of Tree Pipits was of 16 on 11 September, and the last of the year (a single bird) was on 17 September. By contrast, Meadow Pipit passage continued to the end of October. By the season's end Graham had logged 629 Tree Pipits and 7,483 Meadow Pipits - a ratio of 1:12 - uniquely high in a UK context.

Lapland Buntings in the north-west

It was a modest year for this species, but following the first two birds on Papa Westray (Ork) on 31 August (a typical first arrival date and location) numbers built up rapidly in September. Maximum counts during September included 54 on North Ronaldsay (Ork), 53 on Papa Westray (Ork), 51 on Fair Isle (Shet), 40 at Eochar, South Uist (OH), 33 at Haroldswick Pools, Unst (Shet) 30 at Berneray and 20 at Balranald (both N Uist) and 13 on Tiree (Arg). The high proportion of birds at western sites strongly suggests that these birds were from the Greenland breeding population. Unlike in some previous 'invasion' years when following their first arrival birds have spread across the country, often accompanying migrating flocks of Meadow Pipits, in autumn 2016 they mostly remained within the Northern Isles and Outer Hebrides and along north and west coasts. There were records from only three sites in North-east Scotland (maximum eight at Troup

Head), one in Argyll away from Tiree (Kinnabus, Islay), one in Ayrshire, one in the Borders, three in Fife, four in Lothian and one in Moray & Nairn.

Raptors

An early dispersing **Merlin** flew over the beach and then the golf course at Peterhead (NES) on 25 July, with a female **Marsh Harrier** wandering around the dunes at the Sands of Forvie on 27 July. More wandering Marsh Harriers turned up in August with one at Lochwinnoch (Clyde) 16–18th, singles at Durness (High) and Caerlaverock (D&G) both on 26th. None were seen in September, but a single migrant (from the east?) was at several sites in Shetland during 1–4 October. Migrant **Hobbies** appeared on Tiree on 28 August, Shetland on 20 and 29 September (Grutness and Fetlar respectively), and a very late juvenile hung around the cliffs at the Mull of Galloway (D&G) on the very late dates of 24–25 October. **Ospreys** seem to hang on later and later each year as the breeding population increases, and sightings of migrating birds heading over south are now a regular feature from August onwards. Late birds included one fishing off the beach at Dornoch (High) on 21 September, one south over Dunbar (Loth) on 22nd, and one on the merse at Caerlaverock on 28th. The last couldn't have been any further north - a bird that arrived on Unst (Shet) on 26 September that remained until 4 October.

A number of **Hen Harrier** chicks were tagged in 2016 at nests across Scotland as part of the RSPB's Hen Harrier LIFE project. The movements of these birds can be followed at www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/henharrierlife/. The birds have proven to be very mobile, mostly moving around within Scotland, with some moving further afield in October. The bird named "Wendy" spent September commuting between the Perthshire Hills, the Trossachs and the Campsies, then in October headed west to mainland Argyll and then to the island of Mull before finally settling on Ulva (Arg) where she remained to the end of the month. "Harriet" spent most of August and September in upper Donside and Deeside (NES), with one brief sojourn to the Flanders Moss area (UF) before returning back to Deeside. Eventually the migratory instinct must have got the better of her as she headed SSE direct to Fife, then SSW



Figure 1. Movements of Hen Harrier "Donald", August–October 2016 © RSPB

to Dumfries and Galloway, and by the end of October was in the Lake District. The most adventurous bird was the male "Donald" ringed on MoD land at Garelochhead by John Simpson, which spent August and most of September in Argyll, then headed SSE to Dumfries & Galloway, then SSW in early October to the Isle of Man, before moving through Wales and directly on to Brittany in NW France. Fascinating movements that show that the harriers that we see in the autumn could hail from just about anywhere.

Record-breaking numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers

Another record-breaking autumn in 2016 followed hot on the heels of last autumn's seemingly unprecedented numbers. These lively little warblers are no longer the rarities that they used to, but this doesn't diminish the enjoyment of watching these eastern gems.

BirdGuides received a total of 173 reports during **September**. The first two birds appeared on 13 September - one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) and one at Rerwick (Shet). Four more arrived on 15th: one on Fair Isle, the rest in south-east Scotland with singles at Barns Ness (Loth), Kilminning (Fife) and St Abb's Head (Borders).

16–30 September (148 reports)

On 16 September singles were scattered along the east coast from Barns Ness (Loth) and Troup Head (NES) to Grutness (Shet). Numbers started to increase from 17th, with the arrivals focussed very much in Shetland (19 of the 22 remaining reports). The first major fall occurred on 20th with two on the Isle of May (Fife), 13 on North Ronaldsay and the rest in Shetland: three on Unst, four at Hoswick and five at Quendale. Fair Isle had been quiet on the morning of 20th, but a veritable deluge appeared in the afternoon, with 54 birds logged by the end of the day, the island's third highest count at the time (but see 2 October below). Shetland and Orkney continued to dominate proceedings to the month's end, with a second influx on 22 September bringing 20 to North Ronaldsay, and large numbers to Shetland: 28+ on south Mainland, 26 on Unst, 19 on Whalsay, and 31 on Fair Isle. The first 'unusual' locations came in this period from Bettyhill (High) on 22nd, Skinflats (UF) on 25th, Tiree (Arg) on

27th, Haddington (Loth) on 28th, Lochwinnoch (Clyde) on 30th, and in the Outer Hebrides singles at Brevig (Barra) from 26th and Locheynort (S Uist) from 29th.

1–15 October (370 reports)

In continuing easterly winds a huge fall hit the east coast on 2 October from Shetland to the Borders with 65 reports from 50 sites: nine sites in North-east Scotland, five in Angus & Dundee, one in Argyll (Tiree), one in the Borders (St Abbs), four in Fife, one in Highland (Noss Head), five in Lothian, seven in Orkney and seventeen in Shetland. More impressive than the spread of sites was the number of birds involved with totals of 68 in North-east Scotland (including 35 at Collieston, 23 at the Sands of Forvie and ten at Girdleness), 14 in Angus & Dundee (maximum five at Arbroath), 20 in Fife (maximum 16 on the Isle of May), 45 in Lothian (including 24 at Barns Ness and ten at Skateraw), 170+ in Orkney (maxima 86 on Sanday, 51 on North Ronaldsay, 18 on Papa Westray and ten on Burray), not forgetting 122+ birds on Shetland, where there were c.58 at mainland sites, 25 on Foula, 23 on Bressay and 10+ on Unst. Fair Isle recorded its second highest day total of 72 birds. With many other migrants on the island it was a day to remember. The FIBO website sums up feelings on the day: *"Where to start? Many Fair Isle regulars declared it their best day on the island, whilst several people rated it highly in their 'best ever day's birding' list. And all in sunny, mild conditions"*.

The grand total of Yellow-browed Warblers in Scotland that day based on reports sent to BirdGuides and BirdTrack was at least 487 - and that was just the ones logged by birdwatchers. How many really entered the country?

Over the next two weeks' numbers at these northern and eastern sites began to decline, with birds clearly moving on through the rest of the country producing some good county records such as one at Peebles (Borders) on 3rd, two in the Auchie Glen, Mull of Galloway (D&G) on 4th, and on 5th two at Broadford, Skye (High), three at Tarbat Ness (High) and one at Portnockie (M&N). Singles were at Powillimount (D&G) from 8th, Lochwinnoch (Clyde) on 10th and two were at Cardoness (D&G) on 10th; a bird at Musselburgh (Loth) on 9th was an unusual

location for Lothian. Good numbers were reported from the Outer Hebrides, with a maximum of 28+ on Barra (OH) on 9th.

16 October–4 November (85 reports)

By this time, it seemed that any patch of trees in Scotland was worth checking for a Yellow-browed Warbler! Birds at new sites included one at Bellanoch (Arg) on 16th, singles at five sites in Clyde (Baron’s Haugh, Glasgow, Lochwinnoch, Motherwell and Uddingston), four sites in Highland (Broadford and Drumfearn (Skye), Durness and Oldshoremore), one at Invergowrie (P&K) and two at Kingoodie (P&K) on the 18th, Kinnabus, Islay (Arg) on 22nd and Hunterston Sands (Ayr) on 25th. Highest counts were three at Balephuill (Tiree, Arg) on 19th and seven on Barra on 20th. Only three birds were reported on the last day of October there were singles at Contin (High), Falkland (Fife) and Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) and in November singles were at Ardmore Point (Clyde) from 1st and at Lerwick (Shet) on 3rd.

Concluding remarks

There are few UK ringing recoveries of Yellow-browed Warblers ringed elsewhere. But a clue to the origin of this autumn’s colourful *Phylloscopus* warblers comes from two ringing recoveries of Goldcrests trapped at the Isle of May during the

October falls - both had been ringed originally in Finland over 1,000 miles (1,600 km) to the ENE (Isle of May website). Calculating an estimate of the total number of individual birds involved is very difficult as it is impossible to know what the turnover of birds is at each site, and whether individual birds were recorded on multiple occasions at different sites. The best we can hope to produce is some sort of index that would enable one year to be compared to another in simplistic terms. By 4 November, Yellow-broweds had been recorded in over 340 1-km squares in Scotland (data from BirdGuides and BirdTrack), a useful statistic in itself. Taking only the maximum count of the autumn for each 1-km square (e.g. 86 for Sanday, 72 for Fair Isle, 51 for North Ronaldsay etc.), the total number of birds recorded was 1,255. An alternative statistic is to calculate total ‘bird-days’, by simply adding the total number of birds recorded at each site on each date (e.g. for Fair Isle this is over 400). The total number of bird days in Scotland was at least 3,061. Is this the pattern of things to come? Will any stay to winter with us? Certainly, a bird to keep eyes and ears open for over the coming months. If you are not familiar with the distinctive call, check it out on the www.xeno-canto.org bird recordings archive.

Table 1. Number of reports of Yellow-browed Warbler at sites in Scotland received by BirdGuides, September–November 2016.

	Number of reports
1–5 Sep	0
6–10 Sep	0
11–15 Sep	5
16–20 Sep	29
21–25 Sep	77
26–30 Sep	62
1–5 Oct	151
6–10 Oct	168
11–15 Oct	51
16–20 Oct	52
21–25 Oct	19
26–30 Oct	7
31 Oct–4 Nov	7
Total	628

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Plate 336. Yellow-browed Warbler, Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 26 October 2016. © John Kemp



Scottish Bird Sightings

1 July to 30 September 2016

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayr; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

The American White-winged Scoter lingered to the end of August, and a good range of rare & scarce waders in July and August, though as expected mostly in the north and west. September brought a steady stream of eastern scarce and rare migrants to the east coast, and the earliest ever live Brünnich's Guillemot was much appreciated, and a spell of westerlies later in the month delivered Nearctic fare including Britain's first Eastern Kingbird to Barra.

Snow Goose: one was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 29–30 September.

Egyptian Goose: one was at River Esk mouth, Musselburgh (Loth) on 5 August. **American Wigeon:** single drakes were on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 1 July, and on Loch Leven (P&K) on 9 September.

Black Duck: the returning drake (since 2011) was at Loch Sunart, Strontian (High) from 2 August into October. **Ring-necked Duck:** single drakes were at Loch of Busquoy, Mainland (Ork) on 14–27 August, and on Fair Isle on

23 August - second island record. **Lesser Scaup:** a drake (with a Portuguese nasal-tag) was at Vane Farm RSPB Reserve, Loch Leven (P&K) on 30–31 July. **King Eider:** the returning drake was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) to 1 July, with presumed same off Murcar (NES) on 2–12 July; an eclipse drake was at Delnies (M&N) on 3–4 September. **Surf Scoter:** the adult drake was still at Musselburgh/Joppa (Loth) to 28 July; a first-summer drake was still off Murcar Links (NES) to 12 July, with up to four birds there on 16th, a drake from 17th, a drake and a female on 23 July, two drakes on 27th, a drake and 1st-summer drake on 3–7 August, two males on 17th, and one still to 8 September; a drake was off Kinnaber (A&D) from about 18 August to 4 September, and presumed same in Lunan Bay (A&D) to 18 September; a female was off Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 27 September, and one was again off Ruddons Point, Largo Bay (Fife) on 30 September. **American White-winged Scoter:** a drake was off Murcar Links/Blackdog from June to 29 August - the second Scottish/British record of this subspecies.

White-billed Diver: one was in Burghead Bay (M&N) on 11–16 July; one drifted south past Blackdog (NES) on 14 August.

Cory's Shearwater: one was off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26 August, and one passed Scoughall (Loth) on 29 August. **Great Shearwater:** singles were off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 August and 7 September. **Balearic Shearwater:** one was off Troon (Ayr) on 4 August; three off

Corsewall Point (D&G) on 12 August; one was off Tiree (Arg) on 26th; one off Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 28th; one off Hynish, Tiree on 29th and two on 30th; one off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 August; two were off Turnberry Point (Ayr) on 2 September; one off Frenchman's Rocks, Islay (Arg) on 3 September; one off Saltcoats (Ayr) on 6th; one off Troon on 8 September; one flew past Barassie and Troon (both Ayr) on 22nd, and one was off Troon on 29 September. **Swinhoe's Petrel:** one trapped on Fair Isle on 14th and 15 August was originally ringed there in July 2013, it was also heard but not seen on 23 August. **Bittern:** one was at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 30 September. **Little Egret:** poorly reported from the usual SW and central Scotland haunts; notable records elsewhere included one at Loch of Stenness, Mainland (Ork) on 26 September. **Great White Egret:** one remained at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) to 25 July, and again on 19–24 August; one was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 22 August to 30 September, and one was at Glendale, Skye (High) on 27–28 September. **Spoonbill:** one was still at Montrose Basin (A&D) to 1 July, with it or another at Tynninghame (Loth) on 2–3 July.

Honey-buzzard: one flew over Inverness (High) on 14 July; one over Troon (Ayr) on 1 August; one at Strathpeffer (High) on 14 August; one flew over near Contin (High) on 16 August; one over Bo'ness (UF) on 23 August; one flew over Steelend, Saline (Fife) on 4 September; one was at



Plate 337. Semipalmated Sandpiper, Balgarva, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, August 2016. © John Nadin

Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 13 September; one on Fair Isle on 16 September, and one flew over Fetlar (Shet) on 18 September. **Pallid Harrier:** one was near Toab, Mainland (Shet) on 25 August; a male was at Loch Loyal, near Tongue (High) on 9 September; on Shetland, a juvenile at Hillwell, Mainland on 17–23 September, was then at Sumburgh and Levenwick on 24th, Quendale and Loch of Spiggie on 25th and between Easter and Wester Quarff on 27th September. **Pallid/Montagu's Harrier:** a juvenile of this tricky pair was seen at Collieston (NES) on 30 September. **Hobby:** singles were near Dornoch (High) on 11 July; at Insh Marshes RSPB Reserve (High) on 7th and 14 August; at Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 22nd; at Nethybridge (High) on 23 August; at Tugnet (M&N) on 31 August; one at Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 1 September; one at Hestily, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4 September; at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 16th; at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 20th, and one at Feal, Fetlar (Shet)

on 29 September. **Spotted Crane:** singles were on Fair Isle on 21st and 26 September. **Crane:** one was still at Spiggie/Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) to 27 September; one in the Loch Fada/Loch Mor/Torlum area, Benbecula [also seen on North Uist] (OH) from 15 July to 26 September; one at Fleck, Mainland (Shet) on 4–17 July; one was at Quoys of Reiss, near Wick (Caith) on 3 September; one was near Forfar (A&D) on 23 September, and one was circling over Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 30 September.

American Golden Plover: an adult was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 3 September; a juvenile at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 7 September; a juvenile at Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 8–9 September; an adult at Berneray, North Uist on 20–21 September; a juvenile on Sanday (Ork) on 26th; an adult at Knoyav, Tiree (Arg) on 26–30 September, one at Cleatt, Barra (OH) on 29–30 September, and one at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay on 30th. **Pacific Golden Plover:** an adult summer bird was at

Middleton, Tiree (Arg) on 29 August to 1 September. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 18–20 August; a juvenile on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 17–25 September, and two juveniles at Vaul Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 30 September. **Western Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 31 August to 4 September - first definite record for the Outer Hebrides. **Temminck's Stint:** two were on Stronsay (Ork) on 3 August. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** an adult was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 22–25 July; an adult at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 2–5 August, and an adult at Girdleness, Aberdeen (NES) on 10–21 August. **Baird's Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 17 August, and a juvenile at Boisdale/Daliburgh, South Uist (OH) on 7 September.

Pectoral Sandpiper: singles were at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 10 August; one at Loch of Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 6 September; one at Loch of

Swartmill, Westray (Ork) on 7–13 September; one at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 12–13th; one at Borve, Berneray (OH) on 13th; one at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 14–15th; one at Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 17th; one again at West Gerinish on 25th, and three at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 30 September. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** there were singles at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 31 August, 2nd and 5 September; at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 31 August to 4 September; at Sandaig, Tiree (Arg) on 2–5 September; one at Ardivachar, South Uist (OH) on 2nd; five at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree on 4th; two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6th; one on Burray (Ork) on 7th, with two there on 9th; one at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 7th; two at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 9–14th, and one still on 12th; one at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis on 13th; one at The Range, South Uist on 13th; two at Borve, Berneray (OH) on 13th; one at Ardivachar Point, South Uist on 14–16th; one at Ormiclate, South Uist on 20th; one at Balcomie (Fife) on 22 September; one at

Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 26th September, and three at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 30 September. **Great Snipe:** singles were on Fair Isle on 13–18th and 26–27 September, and on Out Skerries (Shet) on 27 September. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was at Balpetherish Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 14–19 August; one was at Dunbar (Loth) on 15–21 August. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 7–8 September, with it or another near Stornoway Airport, Lewis on 10–11 September. **Red-necked Phalarope:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3 July, with three there on 17 July and four on 19th; one on Arran (Clyde Islands) on 31 July; one at Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 12 August; one was at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 25 September. **Grey Phalarope:** one was at Newark Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 4 September; two flew past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 6 September; one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 September, one flew south at Ardvule and one passed Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 11th and 12th; one was off Siadar, Lewis (OH) on 12th;

one was off Mull of Galloway (D&G) on 16 September; one was near Milovaig, Skye (High) on 22nd; one at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 23rd; one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 25th; one was off Ardvule on 27th; one flew past Cleatt, Barra on 27th; one was on North Ronaldsay on 29–30th, and one in Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 29 September, and one off Skye (High) from the Uig to Lochmaddy ferry on 30 September.

Pomarine Skua: one was off Arisaig (High) on 17 July; one off Newbie (D&G) on 23 July; one off Tiree (Arg) on 8 August; three off Tarbat Ness (High) on 13 August; singles off Fair Isle on 16 August; Tarbat Ness (High) on 18th; off Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 20th; Burwick, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21st; off Musselburgh (Loth) on 28th; two off Seafield, Edinburgh (Loth) on 29th; one off Pow Burn (Ayr) on 30th, and five off Tarbat Ness (High) on 31 August. About 60 were seen in September, with high counts of three off the Isle of May and Dunbar (Loth) on 5th. **Long-tailed Skua:** one was off Fife Ness (Fife) on 27 August; one was off



Plate 338. Spotted Sandpiper, Balpetherish Bay, Tiree, Argyll, August 2016. © Jim Dickson

Barns Ness (Loth) 28 August; one was in The Minch (High/OH) on 31 August. Over 55 were noted in September with a high count of 10 off Gairloch (High) on 13th. **Sabine's Gull:** singles were in Staffin Bay, Skye (High) on 16th, 25–27th and 30 August; off Tiree (Arg) on 26th, and in The Minch (High/OH) on 27 August; one passed Chanonry Point (High) on 29 August; one off Neist Point, Skye on 30th, and one was off Strathly Point (High) on 31 August. At least 26 were noted in September, including seven off Gairloch (High) on 13th.

Mediterranean Gull: very few reported away from the Firth of Forth or Ayrshire, but notable records elsewhere included one at The Green, Tiree (Arg) on 19 August, and an adult at Birsay Bay (Ork) on 7th August and 3rd and 10 September. **Iceland Gull:** a second-summer was at Aird Asaig, Harris (OH) to 23 July; singles were at Treshnish, Mull (Arg) and Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 5 July; a juvenile at Kilkenneth, Tiree on 18th; one was at Stranraer (D&G) on 23 and 30 July; a juvenile at Loch Ryan (D&G) on 30 July and another at Tobermory, Mull on 31 July. A juvenile was at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 14 August; one at Loch Fada, Benbecula, North Uist (OH) on 18 August; one at Loch Ryan (D&G) on 26 August to 30 September; a juvenile at Sandaig, Tiree on 3–6 September; a second-winter at Barrapoll, Tiree on 5th; an adult at Kirkwall (Ork) on 14th; an adult at Loch na Keal, Mull on 28th and a second-winter at Kilkenneth, Tiree on 30 September. **Glaucous Gull:** a juvenile was at Ullapool (High) to 27 Sept; otherwise a juvenile was at Burray (Ork) on 2 July; a juvenile at Brora (High) on 3–10 July; another at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 7th; a second-winter at Spey Bay (M&N) on 10 August and 28 September; a juvenile at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 25 September, and a second-winter at

Lhanbryde pig farm (M&N) on 30 September. **White-winged Black Tern:** one was at Cotehill Loch (NES) on 24th and 29 July, and then at Meikle Loch (NES) on 29–30 July; an adult was at Meikle Loch on 5 August. **Brünnich's Guillemot:** a moulting adult was at Anstruther Harbour (Fife) on 25–29 September, and found dead on 30th - the first for Fife.

Turtle Dove: singles were at North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11 August; at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 1 September; at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 4–5 September; at Burness, Sanday (Ork) on 8th; at Craignure, Mull (Arg) on 13th; at Loch of Hilwell, Mainland (Shet) on 26th, and on Barra (OH) on 28 September. **Yellow-billed Cuckoo:** one was at South Dell, Lewis (OH) on 28 September - second for the Outer Hebrides. **Bee-eater:** one was at Musselburgh (Loth) on 31 July; one was seen on a ferry north of Fraserburgh (NES) on 4 August. **Hoopoe:** singles were at Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 15–16 September; at Wester Lix, near Killin (UF) on 16–17 September; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 21st, at dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 22nd; at Easter Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 26–30th, and one at Sellafirth, Yell (Shet) on 28 September. **Wryneck:** one was on Fair Isle on 19 August, three on 20th, one on 21st, three on 23rd; singles at Ness, Burray (Ork) and at Dunbar (Loth) on 20th; on Papa Westray (Ork) on 21st; on Fetlar (Shet) and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22nd; two at Norwick and one at Haroldswick, both Unst (Shet), two at Quendale, Mainland and one at Sumburgh, Mainland (both Shet) on 23rd; one at Skaw, Unst and two on Fair Isle on 25th; singles on Noss (Shet) on 26th; at Burrarfirth, Unst at Baltasound, Unst, at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) and one on North Ronaldsay on 27th; singles at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on Fair Isle and at Auchie

Glen (D&G) on 28 August, and at Westing, Unst (Shet) on 31 August to 1 September. Singles were at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 1 September, on Fair Isle on 4–5 September, at Westing, Unst on 16th; on Fair Isle on 17th; at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 21st; and one found dead on Fair Isle on 25 September.

Eastern Kingbird: one was at Eoligaray, Barra on 29–30 September - the first British record. **Brown Shrike:** one was on Out Skerries (Shet) on 27–30 September, and one at Aith, Mainland on 30th. **Isabelline Shrike:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 17–22 September. **Red-backed Shrike:** singles were on Fair Isle on 20–26 August; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20th and 22–25 August, and two at Collieston (NES) on 20 August. Singles were at Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 8th and 13 September; at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 9th and 14 September, with two on 14th, and one on 16–18th and 21st; singles on North Ronaldsay on 9 September; at Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 11th; at Bakkasetter, Mainland (Shet) on 25–26th; at Neist Point, Skye (High) on 27 September; at Laxo, Mainland (Shet) on 28 September; at Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 25–30 September, and at Luskentyre, Harris (OH) on 29–30 September. **Great Grey Shrike:** one was at Luskentyre, Harris (OH) on 12 July. **Short-toed Lark:** one was on Fair Isle on 14–20 September, another on 21–30th; and one on Out Skerries (Shet) on 24–27 September.

Greenish Warbler: singles were on Fair Isle on 19 August; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 19–20, and Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 19–20th; at Papa Westray and Eastside, South Ronaldsay (both Ork) and Kilmanning (Fife) on 20th; on Isle of Noss (Shet) on 21–24th; on

North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 21st; at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 21–23rd; at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 22nd; on Bressay (Shet) on 23rd; on Fair Isle on 23rd and 28th; on the Isle of May on 25th, and at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 30 August. One was on Fair Isle on 4–5 September, and one at Aith, Mainland (Shet) on 26–30 September. **Arctic Warbler:** singles were at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 27–28 August; at Mid Dale, Mainland (Shet) on 28th and at Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 29 August; at Norwick, Unst (Shet) and Sanday (Ork) on 4 September; at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 21–25 September, at Channerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 26th; on Foula (Shet) on 26–27th, and one at Frakkafield, Mainland (Shet) on 28–29 September. **Radde's Warbler:** one was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 27 September. **Dusky Warbler:** one was at Burrarfirth, Unst on 28 September. **Yellow-browed**

Warbler: the first of the autumn were singles at Rerwick, Mainland (Shet) and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13 September. A trickle of birds followed to 20th when there was a sizeable arrival to the Northern Isles and a steady stream continued to the end of the month with birds in NES, Fife, Isle of May, Lothian and Borders (see pages 370–374 for a full analysis). Elsewhere, one at Skinflats (UF) on 25th was only the second record for Upper Forth; at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 26th and 30th; at Carnan Mor, Tiree (Arg) on 27th; inland at Haddington (Loth) on 28th, and at Castle Semple Loch (Clyde) on 30 September.

Barred Warbler: singles were at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 20 August; on Noss (Shet) on 21 August; on Fair Isle on 21st; at East Denwick, Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 20th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20–22 August, with two there on 23rd; four on Fair Isle on 28th with two still on 29–30th and one on



Plate 339. Arctic Warbler, Hoswick, Mainland Shetland, September 2016.
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31st, and three on North Ronaldsay on 28 August. In September, there were at least 25 on Shetland and about eight on Fair Isle. Elsewhere there were two on North Ronaldsay on 7th; at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 13th; at Garrygaal, Barra (OH) on 18–26th; at Sandside Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 22–25th; at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 28–29th, and on Barra on 29 September.

Lanceolated Warbler: one was on Fair Isle on 13 September; one at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 17 September, and singles on Fair Isle on 21st and 26 September.

Icterine Warbler: singles were at Nethybridge (High) on 28 July; on Fair Isle on 15–19 August; on the Isle of May on 19th, with two there on 20th; one at Tarbat Ness (High) on 20–21st; two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20th, and one on 21st; two on Fair Isle on 20th, with one still on 21–23rd; one at Rattray Head (NES) on 25 August, two on Fair Isle on 26th, one on 27th and four on 28th; one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 26th, and

singles at Rerwick, Mainland and Quendale, Mainland (both Shet) and on North Ronaldsay on 28 August. Two were on Fair Isle on 4 September, and one on 5th; singles were at Burrarfirth, Unst and Scousborough, Mainland (Shet) on 4 September; at Holsen's Road, Unst on 9th; on Fair Isle on 11th; at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 14th; on North Ronaldsay on 22–23rd; at Baltasound, Unst on 24–26th and 28 September, and one at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 28–30 September.

Booted Warbler: singles were at Aith, Fetlar (Shet) on 22 August; at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 28 August to 3 September and on Fair Isle on 28–31 August and 4–6 September; one was on Noss (Shet) on 7–10 September; at Melby, Mainland (Shet) on 9 September, and at Funzie Bay, Fetlar on 10 September. **Sykes's Warbler:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28 August. **Booted/Sykes's Warbler:** an

individual of this tricky species pair was at Sandgarth/Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 28–30 September.

Paddyfield Warbler: one was at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 27 September, and one on Fair Isle on 28–29 September. **Great Reed Warbler:** one was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 22 September. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 23 August; at Skaw, Unst on 24–27 August; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25 August, and on Fair Isle on 29–30 August; at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 4 September; on North Ronaldsay on 16–17 September, and at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 22 September. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 28 August; one at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 20–29 September; one at Northdale, Unst on 22–23 September; one at Baliasta, Unst on 25–30th; one at Norwick, Unst on 30th, and one at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 30 September.

Swainson's Thrush: one was at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 22–23 September, and one at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 22–25 September. **Rose-coloured Starling:** one was at East Mey (High) at the end of July/early August; a juvenile

on Fair Isle on 31 August to 2 September, and a juvenile at Wester Quarff/ Scalloway, Mainland (Shet) on 17–30 September. **Red-spotted Bluethroat:** singles were on Fair Isle on 17th and 21 September, with two on 22nd, three on 23rd, and one on 25–26th and 28–29th; at Clousta, Mainland (Shet) on 19 September; at Skaw, Unst (Shet) and North Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 25th; at Aith, Fetlar on 26th and 30th; at Laxo, Mainland (Shet) on 28–30 September, and at Haroldswick, Unst on 30 September. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** at least 20 were on Shetland in September, elsewhere singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4 September; at Foveran Bushes (NES) on 15th; at Barns Ness (Loth) on 15–16 September; on the Isle of May on 17th, and one on Fair Isle on 21–22 September.

Yellow Wagtail races - Blue-headed (*flava*): singles were at Torness (Loth) on 4 September and at Dunbar (Loth) on 13th; **Grey-headed (*thunbergi*):** one or more were on Fair Isle during 18–26 August. **Citrine Wagtail:** one was on Fair Isle on 13 September, and one at Stinky Bay, Benbecula (OH) on 26 September. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were on Fair Isle on 25th

and 29 September. **Olive-backed Pipit:** one was on Fair Isle on 23 September, and one at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 24–25 September. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was on Fair Isle on 18 September. **Common Rosefinch:** a singing male was at Kildonan (Arg) on 11 July; in August, there were seven on Shetland and about five on Fair Isle, with others on Papa Westray and North Ronaldsay (both Ork) on 28th. In September, there were about 15 on Shetland, seven on Fair Isle and about eight on Orkney; elsewhere there were singles at Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 12 September; one at Nigg Bay, Aberdeen (NES) on 17 September, and up to four on Barra (OH) on 26–29 September. **(Hornemann's) Arctic Redpoll:** one was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 30 September.

Snow Bunting: first of the autumn was one on Fair Isle on 8 September, thereafter higher counts included three at Tummel Bridge (P&K) on 16th; five at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 26th, and seven on Fair Isle on 28 September. **Lapland Bunting:** first of the autumn were two on Papa Westray (Ork) on 31 August. In September, there were high counts of 53 on Papa Westray on 12th; 19 at Scrabster (Caith) on 11th; 74 on Fair Isle on 13th; two at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 18th; 110 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17th; six on Tiree (Arg) on 21st; four at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 25th, and 40 at Eochar, South Uist (OH) on 29th. **Ortolan Bunting:** one was on a ship 40 miles NE of Peterhead (NES) on 19 August; singles on Fair Isle on 8th, 11th and 13–18 September, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28 September. **Rustic Bunting:** one was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 9 September. **Little Bunting:** in September, there were up to 20 on Shetland, and at least four on Fair Isle. **Black-headed Bunting:** a male was at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 17 September.

Plate 340. Blyth's Reed Warbler, Baliasta, Unst, Shetland, September 2016. © Peter Garrity



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PhotoSPOT

Plate 341. I was at work on 10 August 2016 when news of Mark Lewis' latest Girdle Ness find was pinged through on my mobile. Although White-rumped Sandpiper was a bird I'd previously seen on a handful of occasions, the fact it was showing at ridiculously close range had me thinking about how soon I could get out from my work.

I arrived on site in the early evening to find a few cars and birders were about, but the bird was showing a good distance from us on the shoreline. It soon flew on to the fourth fairway of the golf course where it was relocated by Ian Gordon and Phil Crockett. The sight of Phil crouched down in the rough watching the bird as some Nigg Bay regulars were bashing 7 irons down the fairway was a memorable one!

Eventually, the bird returned to the car park puddle (allowing me to use my car as a makeshift hide) where it did indeed show ridiculously close, revealing its subtle plumage details compared to the other commoner waders which accompanied it. But, after the all too familiar "how many more photos do you need" being uttered by my wife, Diane, I reluctantly had to leave.

By recompense, after enjoying a dinner in town, we returned in the very gloomy conditions (after I managed to negotiate a detour via Girdle Ness on our way home) where we sat for 40 minutes watching the sandpiper just a few feet away and all to ourselves.

Equipment used: Canon 7D mk II, Tamron SP 150–600mm f5–6.3 lens, aperture priority, ISO 500, shutter 1/640, aperture f6.3.

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