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

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

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

More about the SOC...

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

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

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

Join us...

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

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Adult (aged 18 and over)	£ 32.00
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** Rates valid until August 2017 (£31 December 2017), subject to change thereafter*

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President's Foreword



Plate 72. James Main, Aberlady, Lothian, July 2016.
© Doreen Main

The annual Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, hosted by the Fife branch of the SOC, was a great success. There was a full house to hear a series of excellent presentations on many topics relating to the 'Birds of Fife' in a modern and well-appointed venue on the outskirts of Dunfermline - no parking problems! These conferences are held jointly with the BTO, with each organisation leading the conference in alternate years. Many thanks to Paul Taylor and the Fife branch for organising this great event and, of course, to the BTO. Next year's spring conference will be held in Dumfries in March with BTO Scotland and SOC Dumfries branch taking the lead role in its organisation.

Preparations are well under way for this autumn's SOC Conference which will, once again be at the Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry from 20-22 October

(see booking information enclosed). The Atholl Palace is a really good location for our Conference and we are pleased to be returning there. The programme's theme is bird migration, tagging and tracking. Over the years, huge amounts of information have been gleaned from ringing and recoveries of migratory birds. However, we have seen vast changes in recent years in the way tracking can be carried out with the increased miniaturisation of geolocators, which can be fitted to much smaller birds - indeed we have seen them being attached to Monarch butterflies in America. We are fortunate to have a number of excellent speakers on topics including Ospreys both here and on their wintering sites in Africa, Cuckoos, Willow Warblers, Arctic Terns which make a huge journey from Antarctica to breed here, Sanderling and much more. I am sure that the talks will be very topical and thought provoking. We are familiar with what birds do when they are here, but we hope to find out more about what they do when they are not here and what happens on their migratory journey.

As I write this, we have just seen our first Ring Ouzels in Lothian arriving at their breeding site in the Lammermuir Hills. The middle of April is around the peak time for inward migration and it was good to see Wheatears along with the resident Dippers nesting and hear the cronking of the Ravens.

As ever there has been a series of art exhibitions at Waterston House over the past few months and Lucy Newton will be exhibiting her latest works from 27 May. Laurie Campbell has run a series of workshops for those who want to improve their photographic skills - these are very popular and usually fully subscribed.

Best wishes to all and a good summer's birding!

James Main, SOC President



Plate 73. Glossy Ibis, first-calendar-year, Blacklands, Kilwinning, Ayrshire, 21–29 October 2015. © Angus Hogg

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2015

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

This is the eighth annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), covering 2015. Previous reports have covered the periods 2005–08, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, McGowan *et al.* 2013, 2014, McGowan & McInerny 2015, 2016).

Four species returned to the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) list from 1 January 2015 (Anon 2015) and no longer appear in SBRC reports. These are Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*. However, new to the report are three species no longer assessed by BBRC, Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*. White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* remains on the SBRC list, but with local assessment in Shetland and the Outer Hebrides; and Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* remains on the SBRC list, but with local assessment in Shetland, Fair Isle and Orkney. Additionally, from 1 January 2017, following changes by BBRC, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsier cyanurus* will be considered by SBRC and, instead, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* assessed by BBRC. Furthermore, Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* and Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* are removed from the SBRC list, and Blyth's Reed Warbler remains on the SBRC list, but with local assessment in Shetland and Fair Isle. A summary of these changes is given in Appendix 2.

In 2015, the most striking occurrence was the continued increase in observations of two species, Blyth's Reed Warbler and Olive-backed Pipit. Just a few years ago these were very rare vagrants to Scotland, but are now observed every year, with 10–20 records annually. These changes likely reflect population increases and expansions of the breeding ranges on the continent. In the case of Blyth's Reed Warbler it now breeds in large numbers in northern Europe, which now contains 20% of the world population, and it is undergoing a westward range expansion to Finland and Sweden (BirdLife International 2016).

Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual BBRC reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the *Scottish List* (Forrester 2016).

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

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year. Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
- Total number in the current year (2015).

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2015, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2015 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years can be accepted by local recorders without formal submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided. Revised details are also provided for some pre-2015 records published previously.

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

- Year
- Recording area (www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network).
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present throughout; in some cases it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Existence of a photograph, if this formed part of the assessment process.

- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited. All other observers are covered by the use of 'et al.'
- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, local recorder and/or others.

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

Species coverage

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

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

SBRC

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

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

Acknowledgements

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

Next, we thank the following current and former recorders and report compilers for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Jon Cook, Martin Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Rob Fray, Pete Gordon, Nick Littlewood, Sinclair Manson, Ray Murray, David Parnaby, Ian Ricketts, Malcolm Ware, Stephen Welch, Jim Williams, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas. We acknowledge the enormous contribution to bird recording in Borders by Ray Murray over many years. Ray was a first-rate collaborator and we already miss working with him.

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

Systematic list of accepted records

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

0: 11: 2

Table 1. Accepted records of Egyptian Goose in Scotland, 2015.

2015: Angus & Dundee River North Esk, 26 May, photo (D. Short *et al.*).

Argyll Strath Farm, Campbeltown, Kintyre, adult, 22 May, photo (E. Maguire).

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

Both birds recorded in 2015 were the first for their respective recording areas.

From 1 January 2017 this species will no longer be considered by SBRC (Appendix 2).

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

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

19 (of 23 birds): 42: 3

Table 2. Accepted records of Lesser Scaup in Scotland, 2015.

2015: Argyll Loch a' Phuill, Tiree, adult, female, 16 November (J. Bowler).

Ayrshire Trabboch Loch, Martnaham Loch & Broadwood Flash, second-calendar-year, male, from 2014 (Hudson *et al.* 2015) to 30 April, photo (R. Whytock).

Outer Hebrides Loch Àird a' Mhuile (Loch Ardvule), South Uist, second-calendar-year, female, 11–17 April, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*).

Shetland Lochs of Houlland and Benston, Mainland, first-calendar-year, male, 12 November to 2016, photo (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).

Lesser Scaup is a rare visitor to Scotland, though increasing and with observations throughout the country. Most records have described single birds, although multiples, including a group of three, have been observed. A number of individuals have remained for extended periods, sometimes moving between sites, and have returned in following years.

This species was previously assessed by BBRC, and only judged by SBRC since 1 January 2015 (Appendix 2).

(Breeds from Alaska to Ontario and south to California, Colorado and Minnesota. Most migrate to winter from USA south to Central America, the Caribbean and Hawaiian Islands, but smaller numbers regularly move eastwards to winter in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.)

Plates 74 a–b. Lesser Scaup, second-calendar-year, female, Loch Àird a' Mhuile, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 11–17 April 2015. © John Kemp





Plate 75. White-billed Diver, second-calendar-year, Rubha Àird a' Mhuile, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 13 March 2015.
© John Kemp

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*

197: 248: 10

Table 3. Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2015, with an additional record, 2014.

- 2015:** **Ayrshire** off Troon, adult, 9 June, photo (P. Shand *per* Local Recorder).
Borders/Lothian Dunglass, 18–19 April at least (D.K. Graham *et al.*).
Highland Loch Ewe, Ross & Cromarty, 11 February (A. Ash).
Highland Gruinard Bay, Ross & Cromarty, 15 April (K. Evans).
Moray & Nairn Cullen, adult, 8 May (M.J.H. Cook).
Orkney Water Sound, South Ronaldsay, adult (returning), 2 January to 6 May; and 31 December to 2016, photo (P. Higson *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile, South Uist, second-calendar-year, 13 March, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Shetland Brough, Fetlar/Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), from 2014 (McGowan & McInerny 2016) to 19 March (M.G. Pennington *et al.*).
Shetland Kirkabister, Mainland, adult (returning), from 2014 (McGowan & McInerny 2016) to 30 March (J. Dunn).
Shetland Quendale Bay, Mainland, second-calendar-year, 2 May, photo (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).
Shetland Wester Quarff, Mainland, second-calendar-year, 4 June, photo (R.A. Haywood).
Shetland Hamnavoe, Esha Ness, Mainland, adult, 5–16 June, photo (H.R. Harrop *et al.*).
Shetland Lamba Ness, Unst, adult, 28 October photo (M.A. Maher, B.H. Thomason).
Shetland Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), 6 November (T. Thomason).
2014: **Caithness** Sandside Bay, second-calendar-year, 7–9 February, photo, dead 11 February, specimen at National Museums Scotland (accession number NMS.Z 2016.133) (E. Maughan, K. Monro, L. Rolling *et al.* *per* Local Recorder).

White-billed Diver is a scarce though regular visitor to Scotland, with up to 30 being reported each year. Most occur at a number of preferred localities used in spring as stop-over sites between wintering and summering areas in the Outer Hebrides, north-west Highland, Moray & Nairn and North-east Scotland. In Shetland and Orkney, a small number of wintering individuals return to the same sites in successive years, and summering birds have become almost annual. There may be some overlap among these records given the birds' mobility. It also seems likely that a proportion of the spring birds return to use the same stop-over sites each year; as it is impossible to distinguish these and they are registered as new birds, SBRC totals are probably inflated to a slight degree.

The two birds seen in Ayrshire and Borders/Lothian outside the regular sites were the fourth and second/eleventh for the respective recording areas. The former was photographed from a yacht in the Firth of Clyde.

Birds were seen in spring 2015 off both the Outer Hebrides and North-east Scotland, but the records were not assessed in time to be included in this report.

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

Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*

c. 522 (1950–2004): 9,222: 1 (excluding ‘at sea’ records)

Table 4. Accepted record of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2015, with an additional record, 2014.

2015: **Orkney** Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 4 September (M. Warren).

2014: **Borders** St Abb’s Head, 21 September (D.K. Graham).

Great Shearwater was rarely observed in Scotland until many were seen during 2005–07. Since then, however, no more than six have been recorded in any one year, if ‘at sea’ records are discounted. This underlines the exceptional nature of the influxes witnessed during that period.

The species is almost entirely a late summer and autumn visitor, with most sightings from the Outer Hebrides and North Ronaldsay, Orkney, with a few along the east coast. The only 2015 record fits this pattern, and followed the typical North Ronaldsay observation of birds flying west past Dennis Head at the north end of the island. These are thought to be birds

returning to the North Atlantic, having previously entered the North Sea, probably after westerly storms.

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

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

3: 8: 1

Table 5. Accepted record of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2015.

2015: **Shetland** South Collafirth, Mainland, 16–25 October, photo (G.M. Scanlon, G.A. Tyler *et al.*); same **Shetland** Hillwell, Mainland, 1 November (C. & H. Smith).

Cattle Egret is very rare in Scotland, with no pattern or trend.

The South Collafirth/Hillwell bird was the second seen in Shetland, though the first to be found on land. The first appeared on the deck



Plate 76. Cattle Egret, South Collafirth, Mainland, Shetland, 16–25 October 2015. © Rob Fray

of the inter-island ferry *M.V. Hendra* when it was sailing between Mainland and Whalsay on 27 January 1999 (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

(Occurs commonly in sub-tropical and temperate areas throughout the world, the European population being centred on the Mediterranean, extending north to central and western France, with increasing numbers of records farther north. Generally a short-distance migrant.)

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

c. 65: 36: 9

Table 6. Accepted records of Glossy Ibis in Scotland, 2015, with additional records, 2014 and 2013.

- 2015:** **Ayrshire** Blacklands, Kilwinning, first-calendar-year, 21–29 October, photo (J. Johnstone *et al.*). **Fair Isle** various locations, five, 2–4 October, four, 5 October, three to 15 October, photo, one dead 14 October (M. Rimmell *et al.*). **Orkney** Mull Head, Papa Westray, 23 October (J. Branscombe, M. Schott). **Outer Hebrides** Caisteal Ormaideit (Ormidate Castle), South Uist, adult, 31 December to 2016, photo (S.E. Duffield, M. Ferguson *et al.*). **Shetland** Buddabrace, Unst, first-calendar-year, 19 December to 2016, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al.*).
- 2014:** **Caithness** Faulds, 2–3 January, photo (S. Manson *et al.*).
- 2013:** **Caithness** Wick River, 8 November, photo (C. Griffin *et al.* per Local Recorder).

Glossy Ibis is a rare, though increasingly frequent, visitor to Scotland. In the early 20th century a few flocks were observed, including a group of 19–20 in Orkney in September 1907, but the species subsequently became much rarer (Forrester *et al.* 2007). In the early 21st century, larger numbers and flocks were seen again in the UK. This change coincided with more being observed in Scotland, with groups in Orkney and the Outer Hebrides.

This trend continued in 2015 with more seen in Scotland, including a flock of five on Fair Isle.

From 1 January 2017 this species will no longer be considered by SBRC (Appendix 2).

(Nominate *falcinellus* breeds from Spain and France, through the Balkans to central Asia, in

sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian subcontinent, south-east Asia, the east coast of the USA and the Caribbean. Most European birds migrate to Africa with others short distance migrants or resident. Another subspecies in the Far East and Australia).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

19: 24: 1

Table 7. Accepted record of Black Kite in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015:** **Shetland** Sumburgh & Tingwall Airports, Mainland, 26–27 April, photo (P.A. Harris *et al.*).

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

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

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

45: 4: 0 (excluding young from known Scottish nests)

Table 8. Accepted record of Montagu's Harrier in Scotland, 2014.

- 2014:** **Lothian** Priestlaw Hill & Duddy Bank, Lammernmuir Hills, female, dark morph, 3–4 May, photo (G. Morgan *et al.*).

Montagu's Harrier is a very rare migrant to Scotland, with the few records mostly in spring along the east side of the country from Borders to Shetland. A few breeding attempts have been successful, though none since 1955, and the total of 49 birds to the end of 2015 excludes fledged young from these breeding attempts.

The 2014 bird was dark phase, the first record of this colour morph in Scotland, which is also very rare in the rest of the UK, with just a handful of observations. This was the first Montagu's Harrier seen in Scotland since 2011,

a) b)



Plates 77 a–b. Montagu's Harrier, female, dark morph, Priestlaw Hill & Duddy Bank, Lammermuir Hills, Lothian, 3–4 May 2014 © Geoff Morgan

and the third seen in Lothian where the last occurrence was a pair in 1947.

(Breeds from North Africa, Iberia, England and Sweden across continental Europe and central Asia to Yenisei River; winters in African savannas and on the Indian subcontinent.)

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
15: 4: 2

Table 9. Accepted records of Kentish Plover in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015: **Fife** Balcomie, adult, female, 30–31 May, photo (L. Hatton *et al.*).
Highland Dornoch Point, Sutherland, adult, male, 7–10 May, photo (D. MacAskill *et al.*).

Kentish Plover is a very rare migrant to Scotland. Almost all records have been in spring from the east coast of the mainland on sandy beaches, with just one winter observation.



Plate 78. Kentish Plover (right bird) with Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, adult, male, Dornoch Point, Sutherland, Highland, 7–10 May 2015. © Dean MacAskill

The two records in 2015 followed this pattern, and were the second for Sutherland (third for Highland) and the third for Fife.

(A cosmopolitan species with several subspecies, including nominate *alexandrinus*, which breeds patchily in Europe, North Africa and Asia. European birds are migratory and normally spend the winter in sub-Saharan Africa.)

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
69: 76: 4

Table 10. Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015: **Lothian** Musselburgh, first-calendar-year, 12–14 November, photo (D. Allan *et al.*).
Orkney Loch of the Taing, Papa Westray, adult, 25–28 April, photo (J. Branscombe, A. Forsyth); same **Orkney** Bewan Loch, North Ronaldsay, 1–3 May, photo (G. Gay *et al.*).
Orkney Sandshean & Bewan Loch, North Ronaldsay, adult, 20–24 July, photo (G. Woodbridge *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Baile Sear (Baileshare), North Uist, adult, 14–15 August, photo (S.E. Duffield).

White-rumped Sandpiper is a scarce but annual visitor to Scotland from North America, with most observations in late summer and autumn on the Outer Hebrides.

The spring bird on Orkney was striking, being found on two islands; plumage features allowed confirmation that it was the same individual.

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



Plate 79. White-rumped Sandpiper, Bewan Loch, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 1–3 May 2015. © George Gay



Plate 80. White-rumped Sandpiper (front bird) with Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, first-calendar-year, Musselburgh, Lothian, 12–14 November 2015. © D. Allan

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
12: 18: 3

Table 11. Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015: Clyde Balgray Reservoir, sub-adult, 10–16 January, photo (J.J. Sweeney).
Clyde Balgray Reservoir, adult, 7–21 February, photo (J.J. Sweeney).
Clyde Strathclyde Country Park, second-calendar-year, 24–25 October to 2016, photo (K. Hoey *et al.*).

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

The three Clyde birds double the number recorded in the recording area. The previous three were seen returning for a number of winters in flocks of roosting Lesser Black-backed Gulls.



Plate 81. Yellow-legged Gull (centre bird) with Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*, second-calendar-year, Strathclyde Country Park, Clyde, 24–25 October 2015. © Keith Hoey

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

Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*

0: 7: 0

Table 12. Accepted record of Caspian Gull in Scotland, 2015.

2015: **Shetland** at sea, second-calendar-year, 6 February, photo (M. Lewis).

Caspian Gull is extremely rare in Scotland. All occurrences have been in late autumn or winter.

It is now known that a regular movement of this species takes place each year through England, with most observations in the south and east. The majority are immatures in summer and autumn. It remains very rare elsewhere in the UK. However, under-recording of this difficult-to-identify species is likely.

The Shetland record, the first for the recording area, was found during a seabird survey from the *G.O. Sars*, a Norwegian fisheries research vessel, about 80 km east of Out Skerries. As it was found 'at sea' it is excluded from SBRC totals.

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

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

83: 14: 4

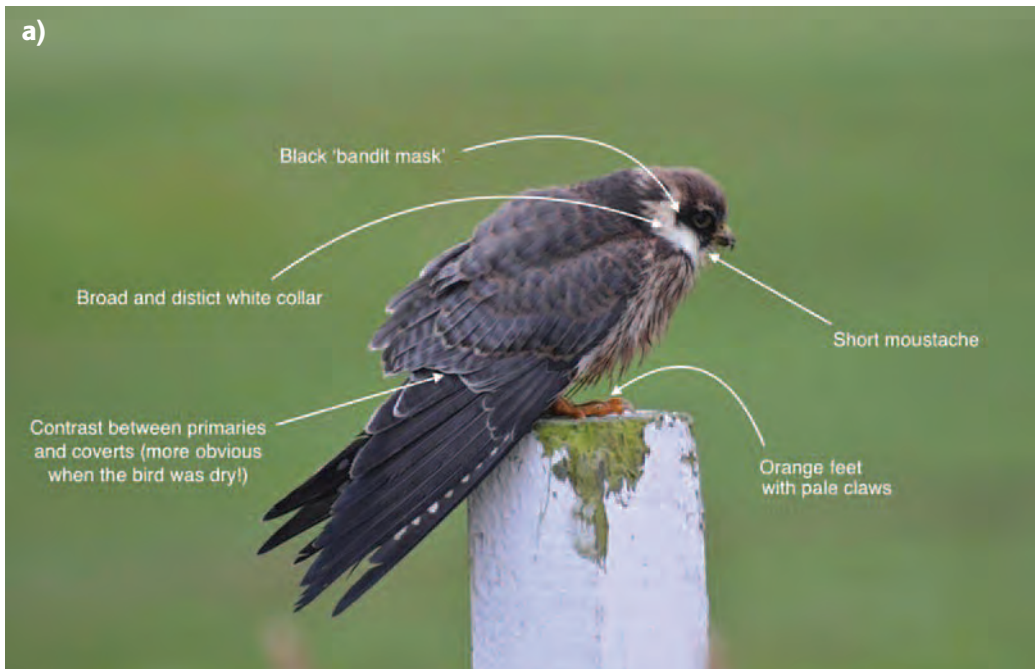
Table 13. Accepted record of Red-footed Falcon in Scotland, 2015.

2015: **Fife** Kingsbarns, first-calendar-year, 24 August (D. Clugston).

Isle of May first-calendar-year, 14–19 September, photo (D. Kinchin-Smith, D. Steel *et al.*) (SB 34: 369–373).

North-east Scotland Newtonhill, second-calendar-year, male, 25 August (J.M. & P.S. Collinson).

North-east Scotland Girdle Ness, first-calendar-year, 31 August to 13 September, photo (M. Lewis *et al.*) (SB 34: 369–373).



Plates 82 a–c (above and opposite). Red-footed Falcon, first-calendar-year, Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, 31 August to 13 September, 2015. © Mark Lewis



Red-footed Falcon is a rare late spring migrant to Scotland, with most sightings coming from Shetland, Orkney and North-east Scotland, with others mainly along the east coast.

The Isle of May individual was the third for the island, with the bird at Girdle Ness the twelfth for North-east Scotland; both remained for a period, and being very confiding were enjoyed by many observers (Lewis & Steel 2015).

(Breeds from Hungary and the Czech Republic east to China, wintering in southern Africa.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

86: 17: 2

Table 14. Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015: **Highland** Strathy, Sutherland, second-calendar-year, male, 18 May, photo (P.R. French *et al.*).
- Orkney** Ancum, North Ronaldsay, 19 May (G. Gay).

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

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

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
286: 81: 2

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

There were just two occurrences in Scotland in 2015. Both were on Fair Isle, one during 8–17 May and the other during 16–22 May. This contrasts with the highest annual total of 19 birds in 2014. The annual mean over the ten years since 2005 is eight birds.

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

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

68 (1950–2004): 22: 2

Table 15. Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015: **Orkney** Kirbest, North Ronaldsay, 12 October (T. Drew *et al.*).
- Shetland** Skelberry, Dunrossness, Mainland, 29–30 October, photo (M. Heubeck *et al.*).

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

Since 1950 the vast majority of occurrences have been on the Northern Isles; 69% were on Fair Isle and Shetland, but only 9% were on Orkney, making the North Ronaldsay bird notable.

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

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

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
40: 41: 2

Table 16. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2015.

2015: **Orkney** Marwick Head, Mainland, 8 June (R. Matson).
Shetland Lerwick, Mainland, 2–14 July, photo (P.A. Harris, R.J. Nason *et al.*).

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

The two occurrences represented a relatively low annual total; in the last ten years this number was only matched in 2007 and 2008. The arrival dates are slightly outside the main peak, but are within the normal range. Shetland has 32.5% of the total Scottish records since 1950.

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

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
157: 65: 18

Table 17. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2015. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 18.

2015: **Fife** Boarhills, 23 August (D. Douglas, S. Pinder, T. Sykes).
North-east Scotland Forvie, 24–25 August (C. Reid, D. Short).

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

Excluding the single June bird in 1949, it is noteworthy that 2015 is the first year that spring occurrences have outnumbered those in late summer and early autumn. A total of ten was present in June, compared with eight in August and September.

A singing male on Sanday in June was the third spring record for Orkney, and the second for the island: the previous was on 28 May 1992.

Table 18. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2015.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	2	1	3–5 Jun	19–20 Aug
Orkney	1	4	2–3 Jun	19 Aug–16 Sep
Shetland	7	1	2–8 Jun	19–25 Aug

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

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
46: 20: 1

Table 19. Accepted record of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2015.

2015: **Fair Isle** Chalet, Barkland, School & Field, first-calendar-year, 14–19 October, photo (L.V. Gregory *et al.*).



Plate 83. Radde's Warbler, first-calendar-year, Chalet, Barkland, School & Field, Fair Isle, 14–19 October 2015. © Lee Gregory

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

The single occurrence in 2015 was typical with respect to location and the peak period.

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

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

60: 30: 7

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

The seven sightings in 2015 were in the Northern Isles. One was on Fair Isle and six on Shetland, all seen between 5 October and 6 November. A bird at Sandwick, Mainland, Shetland lingered for eight days, on 11–19 October.

Table 20. Accepted records of Dusky Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2015.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	1	-	11 Oct
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	6	-	5 Oct–6 Nov

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

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

193: 78: 4

Subalpine Warbler occurs annually in Scotland as a rare migrant, mainly in spring. The overwhelming majority are seen in the Northern Isles.

All records to subspecies level are currently assessed by BBRC (Appendix 2). Subalpine Warbler *sensu lato* is assessed locally in Northern Isles. No records were assessed by SBRC in 2015.

Table 21. Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler in Scotland, 2015, with one additional determination to subspecies for 2014 (BOURC 2016) and one for 2009 (per Hudson *et al.* 2016, and local committees).

- 2015: Fair Isle** Plantation & Observatory, second-calendar-year, male, 30 June to 3 July, trapped, photo, DNA (D. Parnaby *et al.*), *iberiae/inornata*.
Shetland Baltasound, Unst, female, 25–28 May, photo (A. McConlin *et al.*), *S. cantillans* only.
Orkney Gravity, North Ronaldsay, second-calendar-year, male, 20–21 June, trapped, photo, DNA (M. Warren *et al.*), *iberiae/inornata*.
Outer Hebrides Eoropaidh (Eoropie), Lewis, second-calendar-year at least, female, 4–5 September, photo (B.A.E. Marr, A. Williams *et al.*), *cantillans/albistriata*.
- 2014: Fair Isle** Gully, first-summer male, 8 May, trapped (DNA), photo; listed in 2014 SBRC report (McGowan & McInerny 2016), now identified as *S. c. cantillans* (BOURC 2016).
- 2009: Shetland** Scousburgh, Mainland, first-summer male, 19 May, trapped, photo, DNA, *albistriata* (Hudson *et al.* 2016); listed in 2014 SBRC report as *S. cantillans* (McGowan & McInerny 2016).

The three Northern Isles occurrences were typical; the sighting in Outer Hebrides was the first in autumn, and also the first for the Isle of Lewis.

The 2014 Fair Isle record and the 2009 Shetland record, as *S. cantillans*, already appears in the SBRC totals (McGowan & McInerny 2016). In last year's report, an additional *albistriata* (2012, Fair Isle) was added to the totals; as this had already appeared (to species) in the 2012 report, the total in the header above has been adjusted.

The taxonomy of this species group has been undergoing revision, which has had implications for the *Scottish List* (McGowan & McInerny 2016). 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. cantillans* has recently been admitted to the *British List*, based on the bird on Fair Isle on 8 May 2014 (BOURC 2016).

(Nominate *cantillans* breeds in south Italy and Sicily, *albistriata* from south-east Europe through Greece, Aegean Islands to Turkey, *iberiae* in Iberian Peninsula, south France and North-west Italy, *inornata* from Morocco to Libya. Migrates to winter in the sub-Saharan Sahel, though *inornata* probably north-west Africa.)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

53: 12: 1

Table 22. Accepted record of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015: Shetland** Vallyie, Norwick, Unst, 25–27 August, photo (R.J. Brookes, B.H. Thomason).

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

The sighting for 2015 was only the thirteenth since 2004, though it was the third on Unst, with other occurrences in 2007 and 2010.

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

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

46: 85: 12

Table 23. Accepted records of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Scotland, 2015.

- 2015: Fair Isle** Gully Trap, Observatory, second-calendar-year or adult, 8 June, trapped, photo (L.V. Gregory, C. Hatsell *et al.*).
Fair Isle Upper Stoneybrek & Lower Leogh, first-calendar-year, 20–25 September, trapped, photo (L.V. Gregory, J. Walsh *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Port Elphinstone, Inverurie, male, singing, 15–27 June, photo (P. Crockett, E. Meek, A. Stalker *et al.*).
Orkney Senness, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year, 22 September, trapped, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).
Shetland Easting, Unst, 23–24 September, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al.*).
Shetland North Town, Virkie, Mainland, 25 September (P.-A. Crochet, P.V. Harvey *et al.*).
Shetland Hestingott, Mainland, 26–30 September, photo (R.M. Fray, C.C. Roger *et al.*).
Shetland Exnaboe, Mainland, 27 September, photo (R.M. Fray).
Shetland Symbister, Whalsay, 27–28 September, photo (A. Seth, P. Stronach *et al.*).
Shetland Toab, Mainland, 30 September to 4 October, photo (Y. Perlman *et al.*).

Shetland Housay, Out Skerries, 5 October, photo (P. Forrest, M. McKee, L. Pyke, C. Turner).
Shetland Exnaboe, Mainland, 12 October, photo (C. Fentiman, R.M. Fray, R. Riddington, T. Wilson).



Plate 84. Blyth's Reed Warbler, first-calendar-year, Upper Stoneybrek & Lower Leogh, Fair Isle, 20–25 September 2015. © Lee Gregory

Assessment of Blyth's Reed Warbler was undertaken by BBRC until 1 January 2015. A recent significant increase in numbers in Britain means that the species no longer meets criteria for consideration by BBRC, and is instead considered by SBRC. However, from 1 January 2017 the species will be assessed by local committees on Shetland and Fair Isle (Appendix 2).

Blyth's Reed Warbler is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly seen since 2000 (Figure 1). Although the first Scottish record dates from 1910, 88% of occurrences have been in the last two decades. The overwhelming majority of sightings (a similar 88%) have been in the Northern Isles. The sighting at Port Elphinstone (North-east Scotland) was the second for the recording area and notable for its inland location. While most occurrences are in September and October, there have been an increasing number of singing males in spring over the last several years.

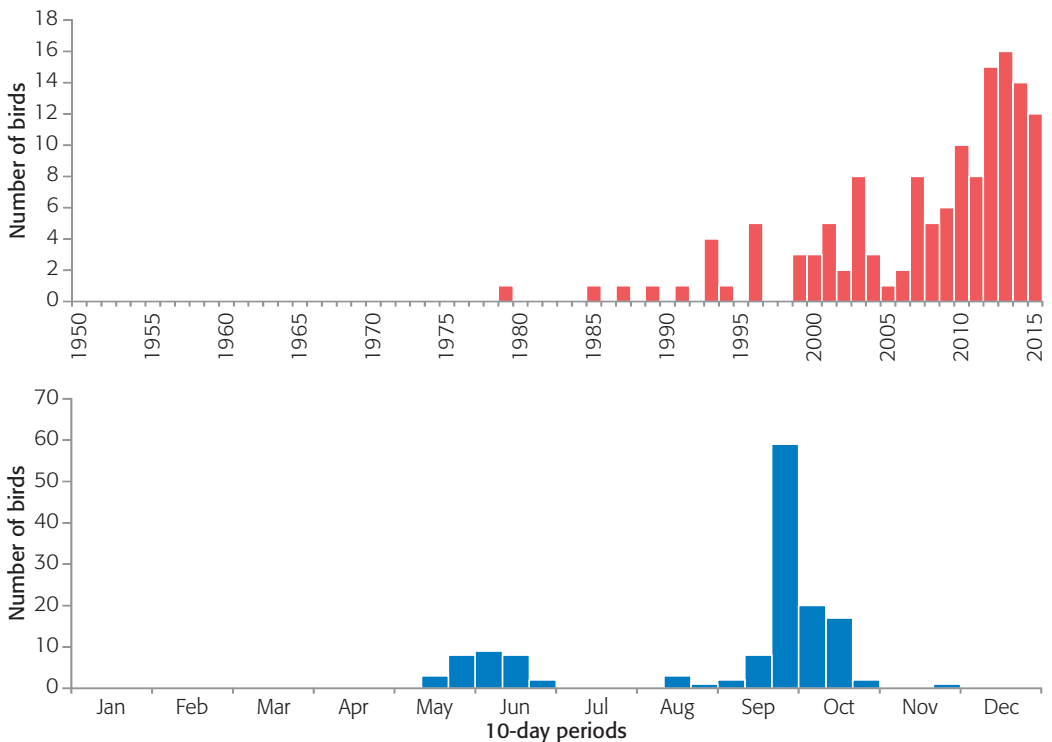


Figure 1. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2015.

The increasing frequency of the species in Scotland follows a westward spread from European Russia through southern Finland, Estonia and Latvia, with breeding also recorded in Sweden and Poland (BirdLife International 2016).

(Breeds from Sweden, Finland and Baltic countries, through Russia to Lake Baikal and Mongolia, and south to Iran and north Pakistan; migrates to winter in Indian subcontinent and Myanmar.)

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
many: c. 318: 24

Table 24. Accepted record of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2015. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 25.

2015: Highland Tongue, Sutherland, male, singing, 26 June (L.J. Degan *et al.*).

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

The sighting in Highland was the fourth for the recording area since 2004, but the first in Sutherland.

Table 25. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2015.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	7	1	1–30 Jun	15 Jul
Orkney	2	1	20–27 Jun	5–19 Aug
Shetland	12	0	2–23 Jun	-

The 24 Marsh Warblers recorded in Scotland in 2015 was lower than the annual mean of 31.8 between 2005 and 2014. The fluctuating annual abundance of this species is related, for spring birds at least, to variation in the prevalence of easterly winds in late May and early June, which are presumed to cause them to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia during northerly spring migration (Forrester *et al.* 2007). As is usual, most birds in 2015 only stayed for a few days.

Breeding has been recorded at Norwick, Unst, Shetland in 2005, 2008 and 2014 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010, McGowan & McInerny 2016).

The breeding pair in 2014 was omitted from the 2014 total, and this has now been adjusted.

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

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
139: 17: 4

Table 26. Accepted record of Nightingale in Scotland, 2015.

2015: Isle of May 13 June, trapped, photo (M. Newell *et al.*).

Nightingale is a rare, but almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland; spring records predominate. In the Northern Isles, claims are assessed locally, and Fair Isle and Shetland account for the vast majority of sightings.

The Isle of May sighting was only the third for the island since 1996. Others were on Fair Isle on 30 June, on Noss, Shetland from 9–31 May; while another at Ollaberry, Mainland on 27 September was the fourth-latest date for Shetland.

There has been a total of eight sightings in the last two years, equalling the total number seen in Scotland from 2008 to 2013.

(Nominate *megarhynchos* breeds from Morocco and western Europe through North Africa and



Plate 85. Nightingale, Isle of May, 13 June 2015. © Rich Howells

southern and central Europe to the Ukraine and Turkey; *L. m. africana* from the Caucasus area and eastern Turkey to Iran; *L. m. golzii* from the Aral Sea to Mongolia. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

105: 80: 6

Table 27. Accepted records of Citrine Wagtail in Scotland, 2015.

2015: **Fair Isle** Gilsetter, Auld Haa & Skerryholm, first-calendar-year, 1–8 September, photo (L.V. Gregory, T. Viles *et al.*).

Fair Isle Guidicum, first-calendar-year, 12 September, photo (L.V. Gregory *et al.*).

Orkney Hooking Loch, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year, 30 August, photo (J. Scragg, M. Warren).

Orkney Bride's Ness & Hooking, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year, 6–9 September, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).

Shetland Quendale, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 25–27 August, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*).

Shetland Norwick, Unst, first-calendar-year, 17–19 September, photo (A.M. Conlin *et al.*).

Plate 86. Citrine Wagtail, first-calendar-year, Quendale, Mainland, Shetland, 25–27 September 2015. © Roger Riddington

Assessment of Citrine Wagtail was undertaken by BBRC until 1 January 2015. A recent significant increase in numbers in Britain means that the species no longer meets criteria for consideration by BBRC, and is assessed by SBRC (Appendix 2).

Citrine Wagtail is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular since the 1990s, and found mostly on islands (Figure 2). The first two records were in 1954, but 73% of sightings have taken place in the last two decades. The overwhelming majority (86%) have been in the Northern Isles, with a further 6% in Outer Hebrides. Occurrence is generally in autumn, with few records in spring. Despite the recent increase in numbers, Citrine Wagtail remains an extreme rarity in other parts of the country. On the Scottish mainland it has been recorded six times in Lothian and twice in North-east Scotland. But elsewhere it has been sighted only once in Inverness and Sutherland (both Highland) and Dumfries & Galloway, and is unrecorded in another ten recording areas.

The six occurrences in 2015 are typical: late August and September arrival dates in the Northern Isles.



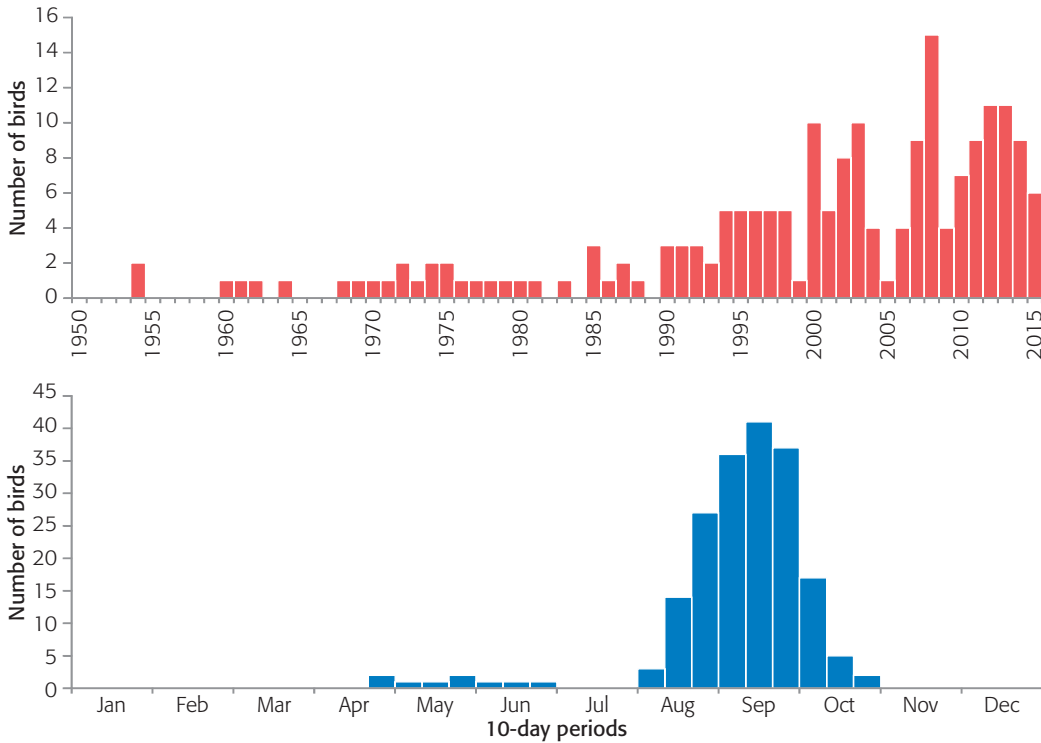


Figure 2. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Citrine Wagtail in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2015.

(Nominate *citreola* breeds in Russia from Kola Peninsula to River Khatanga, south to Himalayas; *calcarata* south of Tien Shan Mountains. Migrates to winter in China, Indochina, north of the Indian subcontinent and shores of Arabian Gulf.)

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

151: 149: 20

Table 28. Accepted records of Olive-backed Pipit in Scotland, 2015. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 29.

2015: Isle of May 11 October, two birds on 12 October, photo (B. Outram, D. Steel *et al.*). Outer Hebrides Brèbhig (Brevig), Barra, 18 October (K. Gillon, C. Scott).

Olive-backed Pipit is a rare but regular autumn migrant in Scotland. There was a marked increase in occurrences in Britain and Europe since the 1980s. Hence the species was dropped from BBRC review in 2013, when it was considered by SBRC, but since 2015 was assessed locally in the Northern Isles (Appendix 2).

The vast majority of sightings in Scotland are in the Northern Isles, with only 17 birds (5%) seen in other areas. There have been only seven mainland records, the last at Blackdog, North-east Scotland in October 2006.

Table 29. Accepted records of Olive-backed Pipit in the Northern Isles, 2015.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	7	-	28 Sep–8 Nov
Orkney	1	1	5 Jun	12 Oct
Shetland	-	8	-	2–13 Oct

The 20 occurrences in 2015 was the fourth highest annual total. Two birds on the Isle of May increased the island’s total to six, and the sighting on Barra (Outer Hebrides) raised that recording area’s total to four. The Orkney spring record was found on North Ronaldsay on 5 June and was only the seventh in spring for Scotland.

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

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
many: 42: 4

Table 30. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in Scotland, 2015.

2015: **Borders** St Abb's Head, 24 August (A. Ash).
Highland Morar, Lochaber, 23–26 June, photo
 (S. MacDonald *et al.*).

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

The sighting at St Abb's Head (Borders) was the fifth since 1950, and the first since 1997. The occurrence at Morar (Highland) was the sixth for the recording area, though the first for Lochaber; the late spring date is also notable. It was found in the observers' garden, coming to bird feeders.

There were two sightings in the Northern Isles. On Fair Isle, a bird seen first on 16 October lingered for a further 21 days, and in Shetland one was observed on Out Skerries on 2 October. The recent general trend of declining numbers appears to be continuing.

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

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*
593: 240: 30

Little Bunting is a scarce but increasingly regular passage migrant to Scotland, mostly in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. The great majority are found in autumn, but there have also been a few in winter and spring. There were no occurrences outwith the Northern Isles in 2015.

There were 30 sightings in the Northern Isles, all of them in autumn.

Table 31. Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2015.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	8	-	27 Sep–26 Oct
Orkney	-	2	-	5–8 Oct
Shetland	-	20	-	14 Sep–7 Nov

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

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Appendix 1.

List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

- 2015:** White-billed Diver Loch Slapin, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, Highland, 9 May; Glossy Ibis St Cyrus, North-east Scotland, 28 August; Yellow-legged Gull adult, Shewalton, Ayrshire, 14 February; Caspian Gull second-calendar-year female, Loch Gilp, Lochgilphead, Argyll, 17 January to 21 August; Marsh Warbler male, Uig, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, Highland, 25–26 July; Arctic Redpoll Kirtlebridge, Lockerbie, Dumfries & Galloway, January to March.
- 1897:** Scottish Crossbill male, Newport, Fife, 7 January (museum specimen).

Appendix 2.

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) and other committees, 2013–17. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included, with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species assessed by SBRC have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC but not shown here.

13	14	15	16	17	
■	■	■	■		Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Black Brant <i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Lesser Scaup <i>Aythya affinis</i>
■	■	■	■	■	White-billed Diver <i>Gavia adamsii</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Cory's Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Great Shearwater <i>Puffinus gravis</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Wilson's Petrel <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Night-heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Stone-curlew <i>Burhinus oedicanus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	White-rumped Sandpiper <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Continental Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa limosa</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>
■	■	■	■	■	White-winged Black Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>

13	14	15	16	17	
■	■	■	■	■	Franz Josef Land Little Auk <i>Alle alle polaris</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Alpine Swift <i>Apus melba</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dryobates minor</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Red-footed Falcon <i>Falco vespertinus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i> (except <i>L. s. badius</i>)
■	■	■	■	■	Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i> (except <i>C. d. daurica</i> or <i>japonica</i>)
■	■	■	■	■	Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Greenish Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Radde's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Dartford Warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Blyth's Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Red-flanked Bluetail <i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Olive-backed Pipit <i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Red-throated Pipit <i>Anthus cervinus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Serim <i>Serinus serinus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Scottish Crossbill <i>Loxia scotica</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Parrot Crossbill <i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Girl Bunting <i>Emberiza cirius</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Rustic Bunting <i>Emberiza rustica</i>
■	■	■	■	■	Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>

■ = SBRC ■ = BBRC ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) ■ = SBRC except Shetland and Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC except Fair Isle and Shetland ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC outside core range (see www.the-soc.org.uk/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills)

Appendix 3.

Corrections to previous SBRC reports:

Report year 2014

Glossy Ibis: The totals were missing the 2013 Argyll record, and so should be c. 65: **29**: 5.

Red-footed Falcon: The 2012 report had 13 records for 2005–2012. Although there were no new records for 2005–2013, this was increased to 14 in the 2013 report with this error perpetuated in the 2014 report. The totals for the 2014 report should be: 83: **13**: 1.

Radde's Warbler: The 2010 Toab, Mainland, Shetland record was duplicated from the 2013 report, so the totals should be: 46: **17**: 3.

Subalpine Warbler: The 2012 Fair Isle *albristriata* record was duplicated from the 2012 report, so the totals should be: 193: **64**: 14.

Marsh Warbler: Following format from earlier reports, a breeding pair (Norwick, Unst, Shetland) was not included in the summary table. However, it was also omitted from the totals, which should be: many: c. 284: **34**.

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Plate 87. Noup Head lighthouse, Westray, Orkney, 16 August 2016. Aerial survey Section 16 between red lines, c10 AOS lower left corner. © Historic Environment Scotland

An aerial survey of Gannets on Westray, Orkney, in August 2016

S. MURRAY, M.P. HARRIS, A.J. LEITCH & D. COWLEY

An aerial survey of the Gannet colony on Westray, Orkney, was made for the first time on 16 August 2016 and found 1,560 AOS, contrasting with a land survey made on 30 May 2016, which found 1,020 AON. The aerial survey photographs show areas of the cliffs that are hidden from land. This, and the different count units used, are the main reasons for the higher aerial survey figure. A third population estimate was made by combining breeding productivity figures from an RSPB monitoring plot with chicks visible in the aerial photographs, which gave a calculated estimate of 1,306 AON. Whichever population estimate is used, it is clear that the colony is expanding rapidly. Future land counts will likely underestimate numbers so would best be combined with an occasional aerial survey to more precisely define colony size.

Introduction

Gannets *Morus bassanus* were first recorded breeding on Noup Head, Westray in 2003, when five nests were found; eggs were seen in two nests and a single young is thought to have fledged (Wanless *et al.* 2005). Since then, counts of nests made almost annually have shown that the population has increased dramatically, to 1,020 AON by 20 May 2016. These counts have been made from the land, but recent aerial surveys elsewhere have shown land-based counts can seriously underestimate the colony size e.g. Scar Rocks and Troup Head (Murray *et al.* 2014, 2015). During August 2016, Historic Environment Scotland flew archaeological surveys across Orkney, including Westray, and this note reports on counts of the gannetry at Noup Head made from photographs taken during this survey and compares them with a count made from the land earlier in the year.

Methods

At 13:00 on 16 August 2016, DC flying just off the gannetry took a series of overlapping images during a single pass at c.200 m ASL above the cliffs (highest point 76 m) and ending well south of any breeding gannet sites. Starting from Noup Head lighthouse (Plate 87) the gannet nesting area extends for just over 1 km to South Hellian (Figure 1). The cliffs form a relatively straight line with only two conspicuous outcropping headlands, Kelda Ber and Lawrence's Piece. There are no offshore islets or sea stacks to block the view of the main cliffs and nesting ledges. More than 40 photographs were taken with a Nikon D800E digital camera using a 70-mm lens, which gives images of a very high resolution, up to 47 MB (Plates 88 & 89). Flying conditions were excellent, although the bright overhead sun resulted in the overexposure of some photographs of the whitened, guano-encrusted ledges. For each over-exposed photograph exposure levels were reduced and the image was restored to an approximation of normal brightness and definition on the computer. Photoshop or Paint Shop Pro 7 software was then used to view images at different magnifications and colour contrasts and each occupied breeding site or chick was blocked out with a dot using the paintbrush option.

Although non-breeding birds in 'club' areas are easily distinguished when counts are made from the land or sea, they can theoretically cause problems during aerial surveys. In practice, most non-breeders fly off in response to the aircraft; those that remain are usually obvious due to (a) the irregular spacing of birds/pairs compared to site holders/nest holders, (b) the lack of guano that makes the club areas less white than breeding areas and (c) plumage differences. The Westray images were unusual in showing strikingly few non-breeders present in the colony. It is unlikely that they would have flown off earlier as the aircraft was first positioned well offshore to assess the cliffs and the close-in flying time was under one minute. If large numbers of non-breeders leave a colony they are obvious flying over the sea but these images show very little gannet traffic over water or close to the breeding cliffs.

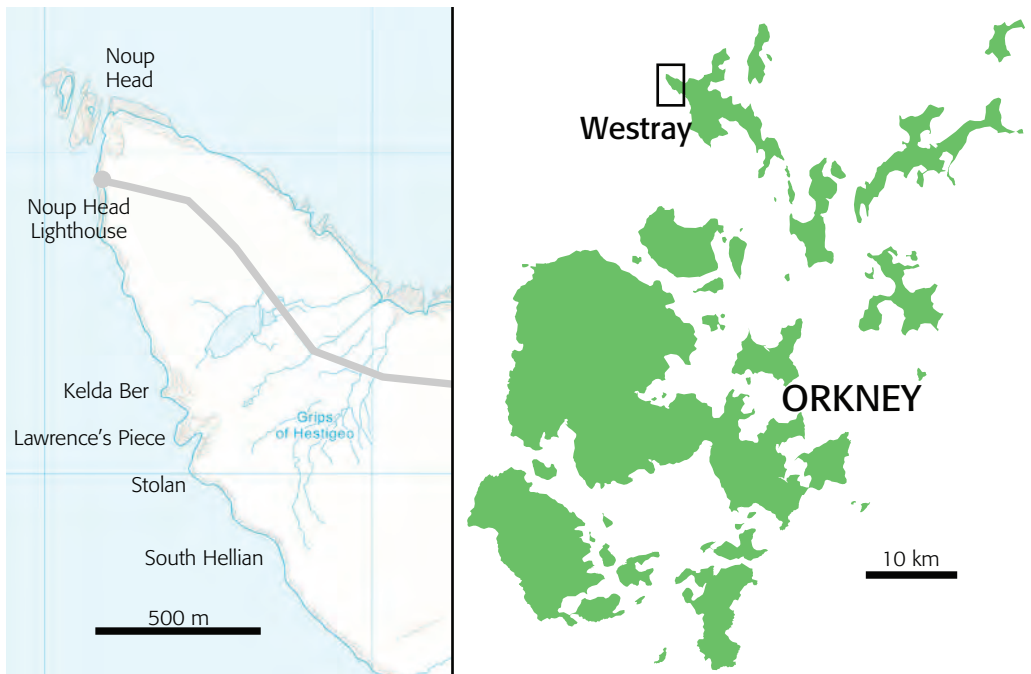


Figure 1. Noup Head, Westray, Orkney. Gannets currently breed between Noup Head Lighthouse and South Hellian. Contains OS data. © Crown copyright and database right 2017

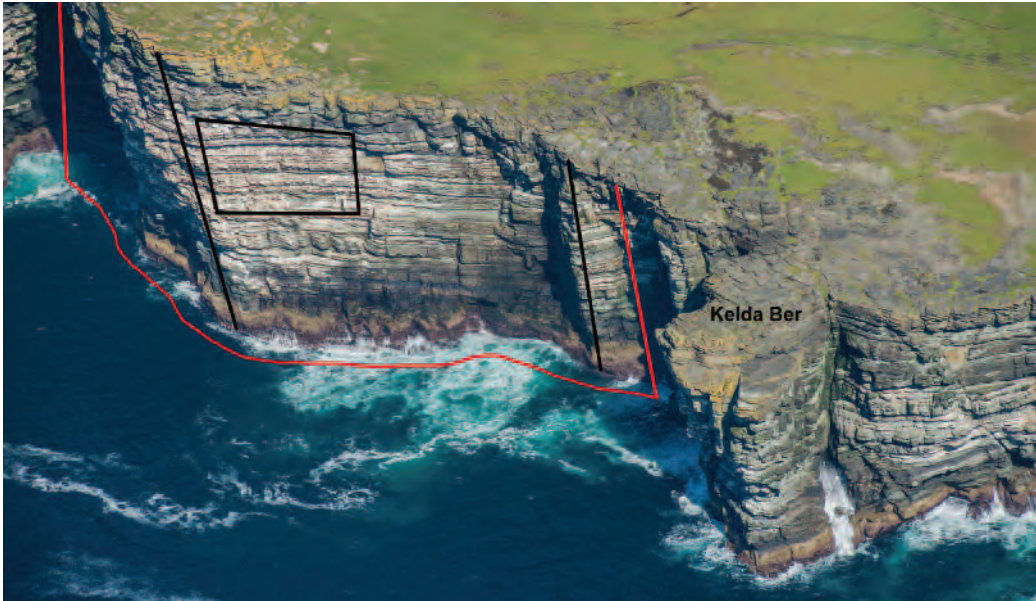


Plate 88. The RSPB Kelda Ber monitoring plot located between the black lines. Air survey Section 10 is bounded by the red line. The area within the black outlined box is enlarged in Plate 89. Noup Head, Westray, Orkney, 16 August 2016. © Historic Environment Scotland

All the photographs were of high image quality and definition and of the 16 chosen each defined a single count section. Each section photograph overlapped with adjacent sections to ensure there was no ambiguity about boundaries. These were drawn directly on photographs and defined as far as possible using prominent natural features, in some cases corresponding with names given on Ordnance Survey maps. So far as could be judged there are next to no hidden areas on the cliffs, with the exception of Section 9, but no nests were found here during the land survey.

Aerial photographs use the count unit apparently occupied site (AOS, a site occupied by one or two Gannets irrespective of whether nest material was present). However, the late date of the Westray survey (16 August) meant there were many large chicks present without obvious nests, with by contrast, single birds and pairs attending nests with no obvious chick visible. The high resolution of the images made possible the precise recognition of the categories of AOS and also allowed the counting of large chicks (Plate 89). We therefore counted chicks and also AOS without a visible chick separately (Table 1).



SM also counted individual Gannets, separated where possible into adults and immatures, both flying over water and on ledges not used for nesting.

Plate 89. Section of the Kelda Ber monitoring plot enlarged from Plate 88, illustrating the high resolution the Nikon D800E is capable of. Noup Head, Westray, Orkney, 16 August 2016. © Historic Environment Scotland

Table 1. Westray Gannet surveys. RSPB land - count 30 May 2016 (AON). Aerial survey 16 August 2016 (AOS with and without chicks). Notes: (1) Section 9 partly obscured from the air. No AON seen from land. (2) RSPB monitoring plot is within Section 10.

Section numbers	SM (air)			MPH (air)			RSPB (land)
	AOS with chick	AOS with no chick	AOS Total	AOS with chick	AOS with no chick	AOS Total	AON Total
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	11	22	33	13	24	37	135
4	158	76	234	166	71	237	
5	27	25	52	28	21	49	0
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9 ¹	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10 ²	136	114	250	142	112	254	237
11	182	190	372	177	161	338	300
12	102	109	211	103	116	219	338
13	101	99	200	106	82	188	
14	124	95	207	127	82	209	
15	3	2	5	3	1	4	
16	4	6	10	4	7	11	10
Total	848	726	1574	869	677	1,546	1,020
Mean AOS	1,560						

D. Roche (RSPB) made two counts from the land, the first on 30 May was of apparently occupied nests (AON, one or two birds at a site with nest material present). At this early date, nests would be obvious, mainly with adults sitting tight on eggs or very small chicks. Some late pairs would still have to lay but these would have been included in the count of AON. The later visit on 23 August counted chicks only.

Neither count unit provides an unbiased estimate of the number of breeding pairs, nor is it strictly correct to equate occupied sites with pairs, as some sites may be held by a single bird for at least a year (Nelson 1978).

Results

Independent counts of the photographs by SM and MPH found 1,574 AOS and 1,546 AOS, respectively, an average of 1,560 AOS. There was similar close agreement between their counts of chicks, (848 and 869, average 858. Table 1). This can be attributed to high image quality and the relatively small number of AOS and chicks in each section.

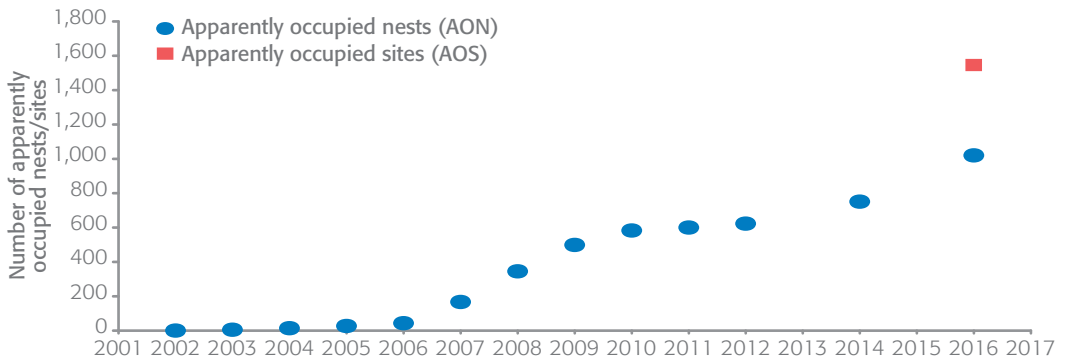


Figure 2. Plot showing counts of AON made from the land by RSPB at Westray since colony foundation in 2002 and the estimate of AOS made from aerial photographs in 2016.

A count of all 16 sections found 42 adult plumaged birds flying over water but none in any immature plumage phase. On-shore and loafing, away from nesting ledges, there were c173 'club' birds in white plumage, some of which could have been fourth- or fifth-year birds. A further 58 had dark mottled backs and wings with white heads and under parts, indicative of three-year-old immatures. We conclude that an exceptionally low number of immatures was present at the colony at this time but can offer no explanation for this.

The land count of nests visible from cliff tops on 30 May was 1,020 AON. No allowance was made for hidden ground. On 23 August, 559 chicks were counted throughout the colony. This count included 163 nests in a defined part of Kelda Ber (aerial Section 10) that was used to monitor breeding success (Plate 89). On 23 August, there were 115 near fledging young in this plot, giving a productivity figure of 0.706 chicks per nest.

Discussion

The large difference between the August aerial survey count of 1,560 AOS and the May count from the land of 1,020 AON is not an unusual result, since generally there is less hidden ground when sites are counted from aerial photographs. The Noup Head cliffs are steep with deep cut horizontal ledges which may be out of sight of cliff top vantage points. This makes it difficult to judge how much hidden ground there may be and so combining a land and aerial survey can resolve this. The clearest example on the Noup cliffs is on the Stolan face, air Section 5, where no nests were seen from the land but the photographs showed 50 AOS, including 27 chicks. Neither count found nests or sites in Sections 1 and 2 or 6 to 8 and for Section 9, partly obscured from the air, the land count found nothing. Elsewhere, in Sections 10, 11 and 16 where exact comparisons could be made, there was quite close agreement in totals (Table 1). However, in combined Sections 12 to 15 there was a large discrepancy, 620 AOS compared with 338 AON. The likeliest explanation for this is that many breeding Gannets here and elsewhere on Noup Head cannot now be seen from the land. This could explain the rather unexpected reduction in the rate of population expansion between 2010 and 2014 evident in Figure 2.

Breeding success was calculated by applying the measured nesting success in the monitoring plot to the aerial count of chicks. A proportion of the pairs that laid will have failed by the time the count of chicks was made, while others will not have bred at all. The estimate of success (70.6%) and the count of chicks (858) can be combined to estimate that there were possibly c.1,215 AON ($858/0.706$).

The count of chicks from the aerial photographs will inevitably be an under-estimate since some large chicks in the back of overhung ledges would have been overlooked, as would small young still being brooded or sheltered by adults. On 2 August 2016, Sarah Wanless and MPH used the state of plumage development to age a sample of 356 Gannet chicks at Troup Head, Banffshire, 200 km south of Westray (Nelson 1978, Murray *et al.* 2013). The distribution of chick ages there suggests that two weeks later 7.5% of chicks would have been four weeks or less old and so could potentially have been missed when counting chicks from photographs. Applying this figure to the Westray results increases the calculated total of AON to 1,306 ($1,215 \times 1.075$). The actual total could even have been slightly higher, since breeding of Gannets is later at more northern and recently established colonies (Nelson 2008, Wanless *et al.* 2008).

Regardless of which of these population estimates is used, the colony is still expanding rapidly and has plenty of space to accommodate a very much larger gannetry, albeit by displacing Guillemots *Uria aalge* from large, flatter ledges as has occurred at Troup Head and other expanding gannetries (Murray *et al.* 2015). Due to logistic constraints, routine future counts will probably continue to be made from the land, but there is an obvious need for an occasional aerial survey to more precisely define colony size, since land-based counts will continue to miss increasing numbers of nests.

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Plate 90. Stac an Armin, Stac Li and Boreray (left to right), St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, June 2008. © Will Miles

A survey of cliff-nesting seabirds on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li, St Kilda, in 2016

W.T.S. MILES, R. RIDDINGTON, J.W. MOSS & J. STURGEON

Whole-island counts of breeding Fulmar, Shag, Razorbill, Guillemot and Kittiwake on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li, St Kilda, were carried out by boat in early June 2016. For each species, the total population estimate in 2016 was the lowest on record, and since the last complete multi-species census (Seabird 2000) numbers of Fulmars, Razorbills, Guillemots and Kittiwakes had decreased by approximately 60% or greater. The magnitude and extent of decreases was broadly consistent with those recorded at long-term seabird population monitoring plots on Hirta and Dùn, St Kilda, as well as with general long-term patterns of decline in Scottish seabird populations.

Introduction

Three nationwide seabird censuses have been carried out in the UK: *Operation Seafarer* (1969–70), *The Seabird Colony Register* (1985–88) and *Seabird 2000* (1998–2002). These occurred at approximately 15-year intervals and in keeping with this pattern a fourth nationwide census was scheduled to start in 2015. However, due to widespread financial constraints within the nature conservation agencies that would potentially coordinate and fund the work, the fourth complete census (*Seabirds Count*) has faced logistical difficulties for several years, although it is now off the ground. Many different organisations are contributing to the new census and making efforts to carry out contemporary surveys of seabird colonies in the UK. Here we report the results of a survey of cliff-nesting seabirds on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li, St Kilda, that was co-ordinated and funded by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and carried out in June 2016. The survey included Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Razorbill *Alca torda*, Guillemot *Uria aalge* and Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* and was boat-based. Although also a cliff-nesting seabird, the Gannet *Morus bassanus* was not included in this survey because, unlike others, this species is censused by aerial photography and was last surveyed relatively recently, in 2013 (see Appendix 1

for survey results; Murray *et al.* 2014 & 2015). Black Guillemot has never been recorded on or near Stac an Armin or Stac Li, but 34 individuals were counted around Boreray in 1980 (the most recent record) and it is possible that small numbers nest in the cliffs on this island (Murray 2002 & 2014). However, census counts of breeding Black Guillemots are best done in April during the pre-laying period, and thus were outside the scope of this survey (Walsh *et al.* 1995).

Methods

Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li are part of the St Kilda archipelago (64 km west of the Outer Hebrides), but are situated in relative isolation, approximately 6 km north-east of St Kilda's main island cluster (comprising Hirta, Soay, Soay Stacs, Levenish and Dùn). Boreray and 'the Stacs' rise to 384 m, are composed of intricate cliffs, rock pinnacles and steep grassy slopes, and are one of the most remote and spectacular island groups in the UK. The 2016 seabird survey was carried out by boat, the *MV Lochlann* (www.seatrek.co.uk), chartered by NTS. Shags, Razorbills, Guillemots and Kittiwakes were surveyed on 6 June. The Fulmar survey began on 7 June, when Boreray's west and south-east coast and both Stacs were counted, and was completed on 8 June, when Boreray's east and north-east coast was counted. For each species, the survey protocol followed the standard whole-colony census method given by Walsh *et al.* (1995), and was the same basic protocol used for previous whole-colony boat surveys (see Appendix 1). The counting unit was 'apparently occupied sites' (AOS) for Fulmar, 'apparently occupied nests' (AON) for Shag and Kittiwake, and 'individual adults on land' (individuals) for Razorbill and Guillemot. Kittiwake trace nests were also counted. All counts were made by two observers working together (counting small areas of <500 AOS / AON / individuals at any one time, avoiding replication and, where necessary, reciprocally recounting and agreeing on area totals). On all survey days, count-conditions were exceptionally



Plate 91. Roger Riddington and Will Miles surveying Stac an Armin in calm conditions, with Boreray (left), Stac Lee (right) and Hirta (distantly) in the background. St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, June 2016. © Jason Moss

good: the sea was flat-calm with no swell, there was very little wind (Beaufort scale force 0–1), visibility was generally good (>10 km), the light was bright but not glaring and there was no rain. The calm sea state meant the survey boat could be safely manoeuvred close in to cliffs, caves and boulder beaches, to check occupied and potentially occupied nesting habitat in greater detail if necessary. The only weather-related hindrance to counting was localised cloud-cover that periodically formed around Boreray on 7 and 8 June, temporarily hiding large areas of Fulmar nesting habitat. When this occurred, counting was stopped, the boat was held in position offshore until the cloud had dissipated, then counting resumed.

Results

Fulmar

The sum total population estimate (Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li combined) numbered 1,634 AOS in 2016, a decrease of 65.6% since the *Seabird 2000* estimate in 1999 (4,752 AOS), the most recent previous survey of this species (Figure 1 & Appendix 1). From 1999 to 2016, the population estimate for Boreray decreased from 2,637 to 1,094 AOS (-58.5%) and for Stac an Armin from 2,107 to 527 AOS (-74.9%), but for Stac Li increased slightly from 8 to 13 AOS (+62.5%).



Plate 92. Fulmars now nest alongside many of the drystone cleits on Boreray, Hirta, Soay and Dùn. Historically, cleits were used by the native St Kildans for drying seabirds hunted for food. St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, June 2016. © Jason Moss

Shag

No nests were found in 2016 (Appendix 1). Adult and immature Shags (c.5–10 in total) were seen on all survey days, standing on rocky promontories apparently drying their plumage and resting, but no direct evidence of breeding was observed. This species is difficult to survey on Boreray and the Stacs (see Discussion), but even in good conditions evidence of breeding has rarely been seen. Two AON in Coinneag on Boreray in 1986, 1997 and 2000 are the only records (Murray 2002).

Razorbill

Razorbills were last counted in 1999 (*Seabird 2000*), when the sum total population estimate numbered 256 individuals. In 2016, this had decreased by 59.8% to 103 individuals (Figure 1 & Appendix 1). From 1999 to 2016, the population estimate for Boreray decreased from 192 to 67 individuals (-65.1%), for Stac an Armin from 50 to 29 individuals (-42.0%) and for Stac Li from 14 to 7 individuals (-50.0%).

Guillemot

In 2016, the sum total population estimate was 2,072 individuals, representing a decrease of 64.8% since the last survey, in 1999 (*Seabird 2000*) when the numbers totalled 5,880 individuals (Figure 1 & Appendix 1). From 1999 to 2016, the population estimate for Boreray decreased from 4,822 to 1,344 individuals (-72.1%), for Stac an Armin from 571 to 532 individuals (-6.8%) and for Stac Li from 487 to 196 individuals (-59.8%).

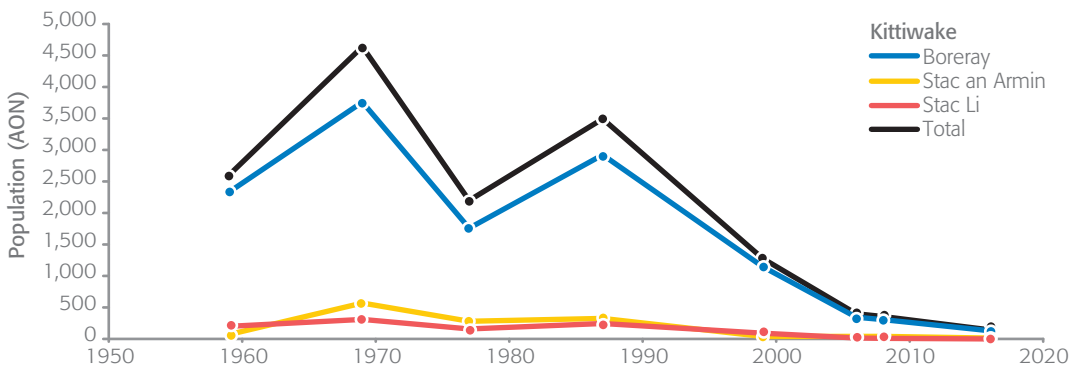
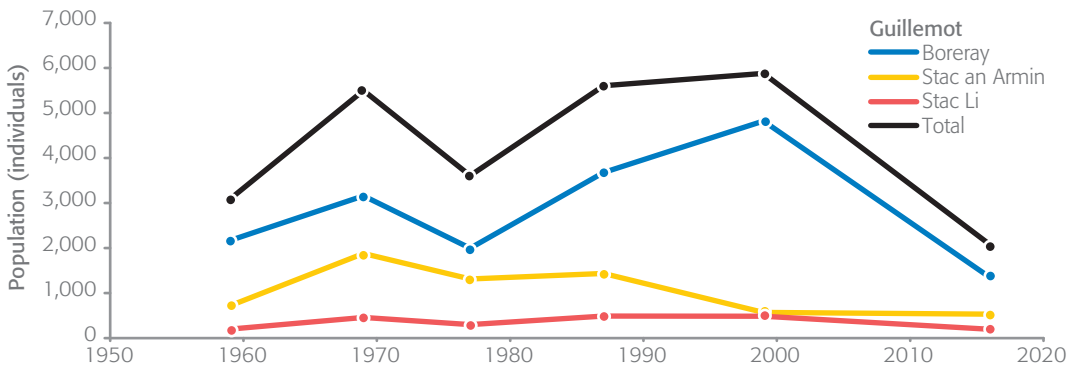
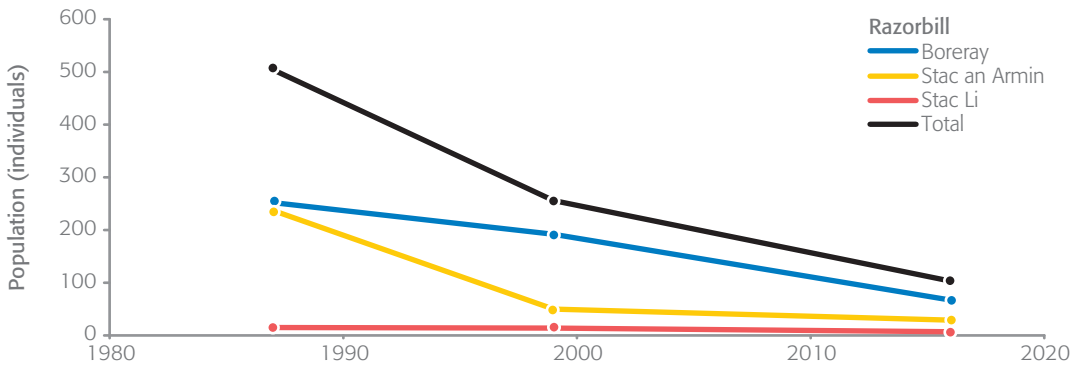
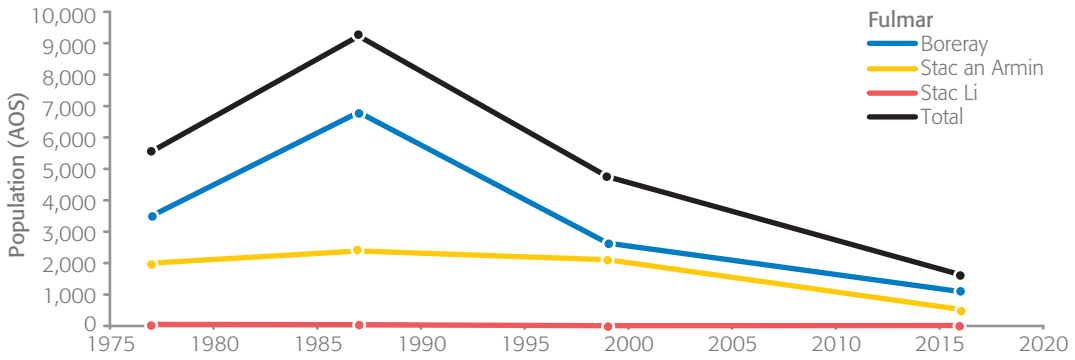
Kittiwake

The sum total population estimate of 144 AON in 2016 represented a decrease of 88.7% since the 1999 survey for *Seabird 2000*, when it was 1,276 AON, and a decrease of 59.6% since the most recent previous survey, in 2008, when it was 356 AON (Figure 1 & Appendix 1). In 2016, in addition to 144 AON there were 12 trace nests seen in total, comprising 11 on Boreray and 1 on Stac an Armin. From 1999 to 2016 and from 2008 to 2016 respectively, the total population estimate (AON) decreased by 88.7% and 57.7% on Boreray, by 64.1% and 65.0% on Stac an Armin and by 100% in both cases on Stac Li, where Kittiwakes apparently no longer breed (Figure 1 & Appendix 1).



Plate 93. Stac an Armin, showing the area of deep tussocks and boulders known as 'the bothy greens' (central green patch), where many Fulmars and Razorbills nest. This photograph was taken from the north-east corner of Boreray, looking north-west at the stac. St Kilda, Outer Hebrides, July 2010. © *Stuart Murray*

A survey of cliff-nesting seabirds on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li, St Kilda, in 2016



Discussion

This survey revealed substantial decreases in the population size of Fulmars, Razorbills, Guillemots and Kittiwakes on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li. Without exception, the total population estimate of each species was the lowest on record. Since 1999, when populations were counted for *Seabird 2000*, total estimated Fulmar, Razorbill, Guillemot and Kittiwake numbers had each decreased by approximately 60% or greater. With the exception of Guillemot, these results continue a pattern of sharply decreasing seabird numbers on these islands since the late 1980s (Figure 1). Proportionally, the most extreme decrease has been in the Kittiwake population, that numbered 3,494 AON in 1987 but 144 AON in 2016, a decrease of -95.9%.

Clement weather and a calm sea during the 2016 survey meant that counting accuracy was not reduced by poor conditions such as heavy sea swells or rain. Across all species, the behaviour and postures of breeding birds on the cliffs were typical of incubation and/or early chick brooding, and this plus the relatively few Kittiwake trace nests that were seen (<8% of all nests) suggested the survey was appropriately timed (broadly coinciding with peak colony attendance during breeding; Walsh *et al.* 1995). The north-east corner of Boreray has a high and complex structure of steep grass slopes overtopped by rock spires and pinnacles, and from a boat there are patches of suitable Fulmar nesting habitat that cannot be seen. These areas are comparatively small, so the inaccuracy of Boreray counts is unlikely to be large, especially when made in calm sea conditions. On Stac an Armin, there is a large area of deep tussocks and boulders ('the bothy greens'; Plate 93) in which Fulmars breed that cannot be seen from a boat. These birds can be seen and counted on aerial photographs, but distinguishing breeders from non-breeders (AON from 'loafing' adults) is then not possible. However, such counts suggest that many hundreds of Fulmars have bred in this area (e.g. >1,500 individuals in 2013; Murray pers. comm.), also many Razorbills, and that boat-based surveys may underestimate numbers. Fulmar and Razorbill population estimates incorporating boat-based counts of Stac an Armin should therefore be interpreted cautiously, as population indices rather than absolute values. It is possible to survey the hidden areas of the northeast corner of Boreray from land, also to count Stac an Armin from this position (Plate 93), but this requires very detailed local knowledge, a lot of time, and exactly the right conditions for landings. Overall, purely boat-based counts are the least logistically challenging and most repeatable option for multi-species surveys. Censusing Shags on Boreray and the Stacs is difficult, because even from a boat it is not possible to check all potential nesting habitat, such as deep rock crevices and the back of small caves. However, only a few individuals have been recorded in previous surveys of these islands (Appendix 1), so any breeding population is probably very small (Murray 2002, 2014).

Surveys of the other islands and other breeding seabird species at St Kilda are intended for the near future, subject to financial and logistical constraints. The decreases in seabird numbers on Boreray and the Stacs evident from this survey were broadly consistent with decreases observed at seabird population monitoring plots on Hirta and Dùn that have been surveyed by the NTS Rangers for over 20 years (Prior 2016). For example, Kittiwake numbers on the Hirta and Dùn plots have decreased from 172 AON in 1994 to 1 AON in 2016 (Prior 2016). The decreases on Boreray and the Stacs also accord with general long-term patterns of decline in Scottish seabird populations since the late 1980s (Foster & Marrs 2012, Miles 2013, Heubeck & Mellor 2016). One cliff-nesting species that has not declined in Scotland however, including at St Kilda, is the

Figure 1 (opposite). Population estimates of Fulmars, Razorbills, Guillemots and Kittiwakes on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li, St Kilda, and the sum total estimates of these three colonies. AOS = Apparently Occupied Sites; AON = Apparently Occupied Nests. Each graph shows the results of all surveys where whole-colony population estimates have been made of all three colonies using methods comparable across years (Boyd 1960, 1961 & 1969, Harris & Murray 1978, Duncan *et al.* 1982, Tasker *et al.* 1988, Mitchell *et al.* 2002, Murray 2002, Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Money 2006 & 2008).

Gannet (Murray *et al.* 2015). Total population estimates of this species on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li are shown in Appendix 1; since 1959 numbers have increased or changed little (Murray *et al.* 2014 & 2015). The cause(s) of these contrasting trends across species is uncertain, but Gannets seem less sensitive to climate change and overfishing than many other seabirds (Murray *et al.* 2015).

Seabird census data show changes in breeding numbers but do not reveal underlying causes of change. The observed decreases in breeding Fulmars, Razorbills, Guillemots and Kittiwakes on Boreray and the Stacs could be due to a variety of factors, but research from other colonies strongly suggests that a key cause of seabird declines in Scotland is reduced availability of small fish prey of high nutritional value, notably sandeels *Ammodytes* (e.g. Furness & Tasker 2000, Oro & Furness 2002, Wanless *et al.* 2005, Harris & Wanless 2011, Wanless & Harris 2012). Kittiwake breeding success has been monitored by the NTS Rangers at plots on Hirta and Dùn for several decades, and has greatly declined across years (e.g. 0.72 chicks fledged per AON in 1994 down to zero fledged in 2016; Prior 2016). This is strongly indicative of reductions in fish prey availability and/or nutritional quality in the seas around St Kilda, although predation of young Kittiwakes by skuas and gulls may also be a factor (Phillips *et al.* 1999, Miles 2010). Major reductions in the abundance of small fish can result from shifts in oceanographic conditions associated with climate change and/or overfishing (Durant *et al.* 2003, Furness 2003, Frederiksen *et al.* 2008), and it seems likely this situation may have occurred within the foraging ranges of St Kilda's breeding Fulmars, Razorbills, Guillemots and Kittiwakes.

St Kilda is a UNESCO World Heritage Site for natural criteria, a Special Protection Area, a National Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and its seabird populations are a key qualifying feature for these conservation designations. Clearly, the substantial decreases in seabird numbers shown by this survey and other seabird monitoring by NTS are a cause for serious conservation concern. In order to track how this situation develops and for management planning, maintaining the long tradition of complete whole-island seabird colony counts at St Kilda is crucial. However, only if a fourth nationwide census is completed will it be possible to understand the full extent of seabird population changes in Scotland and the UK, and, therefore, the full conservation status of this important group.

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Appendix 1. Population estimates of cliff-nesting seabirds on Boreray, Stac an Armin and Stac Li, St Kilda. AOS = Apparently Occupied Sites; AON = Apparently Occupied Nests. For each species, included here are the results of all surveys where whole-colony population estimates have been made of all 3 colonies using methods comparable across years (Boyd 1960, 1961 & 1969, Harris & Murray 1978, Duncan *et al.* 1982, Murray & Wanless 1986, Tasker *et al.* 1988, Murray & Wanless 1997, Mitchell *et al.* 2002, Murray 2002, Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Money 2006 & 2008, Murray *et al.* 2014, Murray *et al.* 2015).

Species	Counting unit	Year	Boreray	Stac an Armin	Stac Li	Sum total (% change)
Fulmar	AOS	1977	3,500	2,000*	50	5,550
		1987	6,802	2,387	39	9,228 (+66.3)
		1999	2,637	2,107	8	4,752 (-48.5)
		2016	1,094	527	13	1,634 (-65.6)
Shag**	AON	2016	0	0	0	
Razorbill	Individuals	1987	252	237	15	504
		1999	192	50	14	256 (-49.2)
		2016	67	29	7	103 (-59.8)
Guillemot	Individuals	1959	2,170	720	200	3,090
		1969	3,160	1,880	460	5,500 (+77.9)
		1977	1,996	1,313	300	3,609 (-34.4)
		1987	3,679	1,436	490	5,605 (+55.3)
		1999	4,822	571	487	5,880 (-4.9)
		2016	1,344	532	196	2,072 (-64.8)
Kittiwake	AON	1959	2,330	70	200	2,600
		1969	3,760	570	310	4,640 (+78.5)
		1977	1,759	281	158	2,198 (-52.6)
		1987	2,923	326	245	3,494 (+58.9)
		1999	1,146	39	91	1,276 (-63.5)
		2006	345	41	14	400 (-68.7)
		2008	307	40	9	356 (-11.0)
		2016	130	14	0	144 (-59.6)
Gannet***	AOS	1959	24,133	9,618	10,775	44,526
		1985	24,673	11,853	13,521	50,047 (+12.4)
		1994	32,818	12,950	14,660	60,428 (+20.7)
		2004	32,333	13,921	13,369	59,623 (-1.3)
		2013	32,240	13,060	14,990	60,290 (+1.1)

* Count made from high-resolution photographs taken from Boreray, looking over to Stac an Armin.

** Evidence of breeding very rare: 2 AON on Boreray in 1986, 1997 and 2000 the only records.

*** Not surveyed in 2016 - see Murray *et al.* 2014 and Murray *et al.* 2015.

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Egg dumping by a Golden Plover in a Greenshank nest

The laying of eggs in another bird's nest (egg-dumping) is not uncommon and it is particularly prevalent among duck species, but also occurs amongst waders (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1986, Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998). Generally, birds egg-dump in nests of the same species. It is less common to find the eggs of another species in a nest. Species with well-marked eggs and subject to brood parasitism (hosts of the Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*) or which nest close together in colonies (e.g. Guillemots *Uria aalge*) can discriminate and reject eggs that are not their own unless the colours are closely matched (Campbell & Lack 1985). Here, we report an instance where a Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* laid an egg in a Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* nest. However, we were unable to follow the nesting attempt to hatching as it failed after a fire.

A Greenshank nest was found with three eggs on 5 May 2016 near Tongue, Sutherland. We returned to the nest three days later expecting

to find a full clutch of four eggs. A fourth Greenshank egg had indeed been laid, but there was also a Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* egg (Plate 96). Golden Plovers and Greenshanks are both regular breeding birds in the study area. An automatic camera was set at the nest to record whether or not a Golden Plover returned to the nest. However, the surrounding moorland was set alight on 10 May (illegal after 15 April in the uplands) and the fire burned several hundred hectares (Plate 95). Remarkably, although the fire passed through the nesting area, the vegetation immediately around the nest was not burned (Plate 94). The camera (2 m from the nest) however, was consumed. All that remained were the burnt mount, melted plastic and charred circuit boards and batteries.

Despite the fire, the Greenshanks returned to incubate. The fire, which was still smouldering on 11 May, attracted a flock of about 20 Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix* which were seen



Plate 94. The aftermath of the fire, extending to beyond the distant hill, and showing the strip of unburnt vegetation with the Greenshank nest that survived the fire. Brian Etheridge surveys the scene. Tongue, Sutherland, 13 May 2016. © Ron Summers



Plate 95. The start of the fire that burned an extensive area of moorland, including the nesting area of the Greenshank. Note the multiple ignition points. Tongue, Sutherland, 10 May 2016. © Nick Christian



Plate 96. A Greenshank nest containing four Greenshank eggs and a Golden Plover egg, Tongue, Sutherland, 8 May 2016. © Ron Summers

quartering the burnt ground, presumably hunting for small animals killed by the fire. For example, we found the charred remains of a Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*. The fire would have also destroyed the nests of many Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* and Skylarks *Alauda arvensis*, which were common ground-nesting species on the moor. The Greenshanks were still attending the nest on 13 May, but on 22 May, the nest was found to be empty, having been predated, perhaps by the crows. Hooded Crows have been seen taking Greenshank eggs on two previous occasions in other years (NC pers. obs.). Although we were unable to follow the fate of the nest to hatching, the Greenshanks had accepted and incubated the extra egg in the nest, despite the different colouration.

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Successful late autumn nesting of Ravens at Tarbat Ness, Easter Ross

Tarbat Ness peninsula projects 15 km north-east into the outer Moray Firth. The whole peninsula is given over to mixed farming, predominantly beef cattle and sheep grazing, some of which is on unimproved land where there is a healthy population of Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes*. A pair of Ravens *Corvus corax* has bred at the same site on the east cliffs at Tarbat Ness since 2011. Prior to this, they were an infrequent visitor and there are no earlier known records of Ravens breeding on the Tarbat Ness peninsula. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that breeding has been successful in most years but in 2016, the pair failed to fledge any young.

A local birder, Carrie Weager, was exploring Tarbat Ness on 2 January 2017 and was amazed to discover that a nest was occupied by two well-developed chicks. I suspected that the timing of this breeding record was remarkable and circulated the details via social media. Amongst the replies I received was one from Brian Etheridge who had in turn passed

the details to Mick Marquiss and Richard Mearns. Their joint response was that it was an astonishing record that points to egg laying commencing in early November. On 5 January 2017, I was able to confirm that there were two well-feathered Raven chicks in the nest; I estimated that they were about four weeks old (Plate 97). On 27 January 2017, I revisited the nest to discover that both young birds had fledged. One juvenile was present on the cliffs, continually calling. The other juvenile was sitting quietly on one of the rocks by the shore. A pair of Buzzards flew over the nest site and within seconds the adult Ravens appeared from over the ridge and started to harass them, soon to be joined by the juveniles. Both juveniles were confident fliers, suggesting that they must have fledged some days earlier. That it occurred during a relatively mild, snow-free period and in a south-facing frost-free location is perhaps significant.

Ratcliffe (1997) gave average incubation and fledging periods of 21 and 45 days and a combined 70-day period from first egg to first



Plate 97. Raven chicks in nest, Tarbat Ness, Highland, 5 January 2017. © Dave Tanner

flight. Assuming the assessment of the chicks' age was correct on 5 January, the young birds will have fledged around 22 January. This suggests egg laying commenced sometime in early to mid-November. There are two previous records of autumn breeding in Scotland. On 1 January 1989, a nest on the Galloway coast contained a single, almost fledged chick. On 7 January, the nest was empty and successful fledging was thought to have occurred though this could not be confirmed (Mearns & Mearns 1989). In Ayrshire, a nest was found in September 2002, eggs were seen in October and five young in November. Only one young bird fledged successfully being last seen on 20 December (Grant 2003). This was on a west-facing site, the birds having moved from their previous site on a colder, north-east facing cliff. Mearns & Mearns list other autumn nesting attempts: a nest with four eggs near Sedbergh in the Pennines on 13 October 1945 that was subsequently robbed (Hyatt 1946) and a nest with six eggs in South Wales in November 1988 which too was unsuccessful.

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Footnote: in April 2017, Bob Swann informed the editors that the Ravens at Tarbat Ness were rearing a second brood in the same nest that was used to rear the chicks in January. *Eds*

Great Spotted Woodpecker feeding juvenile Cuckoo

One morning in late June 2016, we noticed a Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* on the corner of our greenhouse near Aboyne, North-east Scotland. A medium-sized brown bird, slightly larger than the woodpecker, was sitting on the ground below it, calling. We realised it was a young Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*. The woodpecker flew down, fed it something and they flew away together with the Cuckoo following the woodpecker. That was the only time we saw the Cuckoo being fed. It stayed with us for about ten days before it disappeared. We managed to get within five metres of the Cuckoo to take photos. We know the woodpeckers very well as we have had them breeding in the wood beside our house and coming to our bird feeder and nuts with their young for the past five years. We never saw the Cuckoo being fed by any other birds. We passed this information to David Jenkins who comments that feeding of a Cuckoo by a Great Spotted

Woodpecker may not have previously been recorded in Britain.

Alan & Irene Robertson, Logie Coldstone, Aboyne, Aberdeenshire.

Revised ms accepted March 2017

This is a remarkable record. Cuckoos have not been recorded parasitizing woodpeckers as their nesting holes would be inaccessible to a Cuckoo. However, woodpeckers feed their young away from the nest after fledging. It seems that the woodpecker simply responded to begging behaviour by the Cuckoo on this one occasion. The BTO Garden Bird Survey has noted at least ten species feeding other species' young in gardens, though not Cuckoos. Eds

Common Gulls nesting on a Hawthorn hedge

On 6 June 2015, I was driving along the road between Braco and Kinbuck in Perthshire when I spotted a Common Gull *Larus canus* sitting on a Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* hedge. The bird appeared to be sitting on a nest but it subsequently flew off, as did a second bird from the same hedge. On inspection there were two nests containing eggs on top of the hedge, one of which was photographed (Plate 98). The hedge had evidently been regularly trimmed, giving it a very dense flat top on which the nests were placed at a height of about 1.8 m above ground level (Plate 99). The nests were constructed of grass or similar material. The hedge was immediately adjacent to a track which seemed to be in regular vehicular use by local residents. A third nest was found nearby in a fenced off gas facility, but this was more typical, located on the ground on an artificial gravel surface.

Urban Common Gulls in the Highlands often select nesting sites such as fenced enclosures and roofs which provide protection from ground predators (Sellers 2015). Presumably the raised position of the hedge nests described here provided a safe location from ground predators. Recent editions of *Scottish Birds* have included notes on tree-nesting gulls (Addy 2015, Murray 2015, Everett 2016). As stated in Addy (Editorial



Plate 98. Common Gull nest and eggs, Braco-Kinbuck, Perth & Kinross, June 2015. © Kevin Duffy

note) and Everett, Common Gulls have been noted nesting in trees and bushes in other parts of their European range and, while still unusual in Scotland, this behaviour may be more common here than appreciated.



Plate 99. Common Gull nest site on Hawthorn hedge, Braco-Kinbuck, Perth & Kinross, June 2015. © Kevin Duffy

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Otter killing Great Northern Diver

On 11 February 2017, my wife and I were visiting Applecross, Wester Ross, Highland. We set up our telescope on the shore, near Loch a' Mhuilinn, looking out over the shoreline and the southern part of Applecross Bay. The bay was quiet with small groups of Eiders *Somateria mollissima* and gulls but, after a short time, two divers appeared in the middle distance. As they moved closer, we identified them as Great Northern Divers *Gavia immer*, a species that regularly occurs in the area in winter. As they moved closer to a small skerry, they were involved in bill-dipping. One also gave its haunting signature call. I concentrated on watching one of the divers fishing. It disappeared under the water before reappearing on the surface. It dived again and re-surfaced several times.

After it dived again, and before we saw it reappear, the alarm calls of some gulls overhead alerted us to the likely presence of a predator. When the diver re-surfaced, it was in the jaws of a European Otter *Lutra lutra*. Wings and webbed feet flapped in a short struggle before the Otter made off, swimming parallel to the shore for several hundred metres, with the diver clenched firmly in its jaws. We followed its progress for several minutes, but the Otter and its prey then disappeared behind a small skerry. Neither re-appeared. Later, we saw the surviving diver in another part of the bay.

We are not certain whether such an event has been seen before in Scotland although there is a record of a Black-throated Diver attacked by an Otter on Loch Maree, Wester Ross, and later found dead (Collier 2010). Otters have also been recorded taking Black-throated Diver eggs and have killed incubating adults (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Brown 2010). In North America, a number of instances of Sea Otters *Enhydra lutris* predating Great Northern Diver have been recorded (Van Wagenen 1981, Riedman & Estes 1988).

Harris & Yalden (2008) say Otters take birds, but these constitute a small proportion of their diet: 6% in one study.

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Obituaries

Eric Richard Meek (1947–2017)

Eric Meek was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1947 and, apart from his time at university, lived in north-east England until his early thirties. In 1981, he moved to Orkney and more recently retired to Aberdeenshire thus spending more than half of his life in Scotland.

A successful school career ended with him as Head Boy at Gosforth Grammar School, winning a scholarship to read Geography at Cambridge and representing England at rugby at schoolboy level. Perhaps unusually for an academic sportsman, he became passionate about wildlife, especially birds. As a 15-year-old, he joined the newly formed Tyneside Bird Club, then a hotbed of young and talented ornithologists. He started ringing birds with the Northumbria Ringing Group, and developed a deep interest in birds of prey, especially the Merlin which was special to him and remained the focus of his personal research for the rest of his life.

Having graduated from Cambridge in 1968, Eric trained as a teacher and took up his first job, in Newcastle. Scotland called, however, and in 1972 he took a year out to go and work as an assistant warden at Fair Isle Bird Observatory, having fallen in love with the island on two previous visits. Then, he also visited Orkney for the first time, on a day trip to North Ronaldsay. After that year he returned to teaching and quickly rose to become a head of department at a school in Northumberland. At this time, he was a key figure in birding in Northumberland and Tyneside and co-author of the county report *Birds in Northumbria* published when he was still only 24. Now the Merlin study in Northumberland really took off, mostly driven by Eric, and leading to a landmark paper on Merlin breeding biology published in 1977 by Eric, Ian Newton and Brian Little (*British Birds* 71: 376–398). Typifying his enthusiastic, energetic and meticulous approach to such things, part of his research involved visits to the local museum archives to find where eggs had been collected



Plate 100. Eric Meek with juvenile Merlin, Rousay, Orkney, July 2004. © Marian Ginnever

up to 100 years before; he then checked those sites and found many of them still occupied!

Balancing all his work on birds with a full-time teaching job and the demands of a young family was clearly difficult. In 1981, he made the brave decision to give up teaching and move away from Northumberland. He became the RSPB's Area Officer on Orkney, a job he loved and which he carried out with skill and dedication for 31 years. The scope of his achievements on Orkney is impressive. By 2012, a quarter of the land area of these beautiful islands was RSPB reserve requiring considerable management skills on Eric's part, in particular the motivation and inspiration of a large range of employees and volunteers. He was at the heart of research into a range of species including Merlin, Hen Harrier and Corncrake and to all that research he brought his own special understanding of the importance of the

wider habitat, of which he developed a deep and profound knowledge. He developed a national reputation for his botanical expertise and after his retirement was contracted to do several detailed botanical surveys in Scotland. Of course, he had to be adept at public relations too; he was already good at public speaking but diplomatic skills needed to be quickly learned, transforming himself from his fiery youth. At times, the situation in Orkney was extremely difficult, with huge controversy about the increased designation of land as SSSI, much of it directed very personally at Eric, including the burning of his effigy on Hoy! It says much that by the time he retired he was universally respected by those who had earlier opposed him. When retirement came he still carried on with a lot of survey and contract work, both with birds and botany.

He played a leading role in the local birding community, including the production of Orkney Bird Reports, monthly bulletins and newspaper articles in the *Orcadian*. He was deeply passionate about the islands, their environment, history and culture. Although he had moved to Aberdeenshire, this love continued and he was

buried where he had lived throughout his time on Orkney in Stenness, in the shadow of the two ancient stone circles.

Among many posts, he became chairman of the BOU Records Committee in 2002 and, until just a few weeks ago, he was Chairman of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, a place he loved perhaps more than anywhere.

He was a devoted family man and he loved walking with them and his black labradors in wild places. When his first wife, Christine, died in 2001 he was devastated but, with the support of his children, Terry and Sally, he worked through it. Then in 2006 he found a soulmate in Aileen and it was good to see him happy and relaxed again. He was looking forward to establishing himself in Aberdeenshire and settling into his new home with Aileen, his legendary drive undiminished. Eric died on 16 February 2017, having collapsed suddenly a few days earlier. Our condolences and hearts go out to Aileen, his children and their families.

John Ginnever

G.R. (Dick) Potts (1939–2017)

Dick Potts died on 30 March 2017, aged 78, having been ill since December. He was not a member of the SOC though he addressed at least one SOC conference. As former Director General of what was then the Game Conservancy Trust, he supervised the Trust's research on Red Grouse in Inverness-shire and was also one of the initiators of research in Borders on Red Grouse and Hen Harriers. He was a major figure in British ornithology. His study for his PhD was of Shags on the Farne Islands though after this he moved to Hampshire to work on Grey Partridges which had begun to decline in southern Britain in the 1950s. He was an ecological polymath, developing an exceptionally wide knowledge of the ways in which birds, plants and invertebrate animals integrated on agricultural land. He soon understood that partridges were declining because they were rearing too few young, due to

the absence on farmed land of caterpillars. The loss of these and many other invertebrates stemmed from chemical sprays. Coupled with predation and parasitism, the last of these particularly in Red Grouse, and with ever more intensive land use, these changes greatly influenced wildlife. Dick spent most of his life identifying problems and seeking ways to integrate agriculture with conservation. He published two books, the early *The Partridge: pesticides, predation and conservation* in 1986, and the scholarly *Partridges: Countryside Barometer* in the New Naturalist series in 2012. He will be remembered not only as a good scientist who lived a remarkably full life but also as a cheerful enthusiast who many were proud to know as a friend.

David Jenkins



Plate 101. SOC President James Main, March 2017. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Dunfermline, 18 March 2017

With the new *Breeding and Wintering Birds of Fife* published last autumn, it seemed fitting to head to the 'Kingdom' for this year's spring meeting and to adopt a local theme, 'Bird Life from Fife'.

Stephen Hunter was on hand to provide technical support and also came up with an interesting conference logo for the title slides (Plate 101) - the Fife coastal path and the White-tailed Eagle were obvious local connections but only the keen-eyed spotted that the image sported a *linoleum* effect - a nod to the one of the area's most famous industries.

The Carnegie Conference Centre in Halbeath, just outside Dunfermline, provided excellent meeting facilities, including an attractive restaurant area and a spacious foyer for the intervals and for hosting this year's exhibitor displays by artist, Leo du Feu; photographer, David Palmar; Fife Bird Club; Isle of May Bird Observatory; RSPB Scotland; as well as stands by the host organisations, BTO Scotland and SOC. This year's bookstall was organised by local Fife SOC member, Mary Macintyre, who brought along her wide selection of natural history books to sell, kindly donating all proceeds to the Club.

SOC President James Main opened the conference and welcomed a full lecture room of 170 attendees. There was an excellent turn-out from local members as well as delegates who had travelled from all over Scotland. Our youngest attendee was 15-year old bird enthusiast, Lucy Purbrick (Plate 102), who attended with mother Janette.



Plate 102. Lucy Purbrick, March 2017. © Janette Purbrick



Plate 103. Norman Elkins, March 2017. © David Palmer www.photoscot.co.uk

Mapping Fife's Birds - again!

Norman Elkins (Fife Ornithological Atlas Group)

The recently published Fife bird atlas followed on from field work for the last national BTO Atlas with an extra two years of recording to increase coverage at the local scale. Norman's talk led us through examples of how distributions have changed since the previous Fife atlas in 2003 and pointed out a number of interesting examples and some of the difficulties encountered when surveying.

The new atlas covers both summer and winter distributions of birds in Fife with quantitative population estimates resulting from timed tetrad surveying, as used for the BTO Atlas. Norman explained through the course of the talk that the (few) 'grey areas' on the distribution maps had not been covered by timed tetrads. Both summer and winter recording had been at the tetrad scale this time, a finer resolution than the 5x5 km squares used for winter records in the earlier atlas.

Norman gave examples of birds from the whole range of Fife's habitats and drew attention to notable changes over the years, illustrated by maps from the new atlas. The breeding decrease in farmland birds such as Lapwing appeared to coincide with a marked increase in the population density of Carrion Crow and the inferred increase in predation pressure. After a decline in Corn Buntings their population now appears to be stabilising though they are now only found in the East Neuk.

Interestingly, the number of species recorded as breeding in Dunfermline town is half that of the equivalent area in Kirkcaldy. Suburban gardens are particularly important nowadays with feeding stations throughout the year and Goldfinches have taken advantage of this and show an increased presence in gardens, especially in winter.

Coastal areas are of great significance in Fife due to the very long coastline, from the Tay estuary round to the Forth and including mudflats, saltmarsh and marine rocky, sandy and cliff habitats. Eider winter in the Tay in very large numbers but are found all around the coast. The distribution of Dipper clearly showed the courses of the Rivers Leven and Eden and Fife's commonest raptor, the Buzzard, is present throughout in woodland areas after a steady increase.

The illustration of the difficulty we all have in estimating numbers of birds at a site was an instance where 15 Snipe had been counted on a wetland before a Sparrowhawk went over and flushed around a hundred from the reedbed. We all do our best when recording but the Fife birders have shown true dedication in producing the records for this atlas, so clearly described by Norman in his talk.

Dr Anne Reid

Developing conservation solutions for Scotland's Corn Buntings

Allan Perkins (Senior Conservation Scientist, RSPB Scotland)

Allan's talk explained how the decline in Corn Buntings in the 1970s and 80s coincided with an increase in agricultural intensification, which has now restricted the species to a few strongholds in Fife, Angus, North-east Scotland and the Outer Hebrides. As these birds are so closely associated with farmland, changes are needed to the agricultural practices that have caused these declines and such changes come through the implementation of Agri-Environment Schemes (AES).

RSPB has been working since 2001 on the Farmland Bird Lifeline (FBL), a project which targets farms where Corn Buntings are present and offers



Plate 104. Allan Perkins, March 2017. © David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

them advice on AES. This advice focusses on three areas: protecting Corn Bunting nests, providing invertebrates for young birds to feed on and providing a seed resource in the winter.

Corn Bunting nests can be destroyed when silage fields are cut in June but delaying this cut allows first broods to fledge before the birds move into spring sown cereals. This can lead to an eight-fold increase in nest success and the silage is still acceptable for feeding sheep and cattle.

The increased use of herbicides and the trend of increasing field sizes means that there are fewer opportunities for invertebrates in modern farmland. There are also fewer areas where grains are left into the winter. Wild Bird Cover planting (a mix of grains including oats and Triticale) provides an area of crop that is attractive to invertebrates, which can in turn be used as a foraging resource for young Corn Buntings. Planting the crop annually also provides a winter seed resource that increases winter survival of the birds.

In areas where FBL practices have been used, populations have increased, compared with no change from standard government-funded AES, and decreased in areas with no management change. These practices need to be constantly tested and adapted to maintain their effectiveness.

In order to halt population decline, 70% of our Corn Buntings need to have access to these management practices, at an estimated cost of £120,000 per year. I'm sure anyone who has heard their distinctive song while out for a walk would agree that that is fantastic value!

Danny Oliver

Farmland birds: problem solved after 15 years of agri-environment?

Gavin Siriwardena (Head of Terrestrial Ecology & Principal Ecologist, BTO)

In the conference programme issued in the delegate pack on the day, Gavin's title appeared minus his original question mark, perhaps leading attendees to wonder whether one of our major bird conservation issues had at last been solved! Sadly, our raised hopes were due to a typo. But progress has been made. Over the past 15 years, the effect of an agri-environmental scheme involving retention of stubbles, planting bird seed crops, and protecting or reinstating field margins, ditches and hedges has been studied. Farmers are paid to manage their land in an environmentally-friendly way, with most funds coming from the EU via the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).



Plate 105. Gavin Siriwardena, March 2017. © David Palmar www.photoscot.co.uk

The first two measures were aimed primarily at providing food during the lean winter months, while the last three focussed on increasing nesting sites. Gavin's excellent and detailed talk gave us a clear insight into how the scheme has fared. At a first glance, the results seemed rather unpromising; in England the scheme had failed to significantly halt the declines of species such as Yellowhammer, Grey Partridge, Linnet and Lapwing.

Attention is now focussing on whether different components of this multi-faceted scheme may be having opposing effects. For example, planting of wild bird-seed crops may provide additional food, but can also concentrate flocks of winter finches, making them more susceptible to epidemics of infectious diseases or to increased predation by Sparrowhawks.

A major concern was that Skylark numbers, a key species in the study, actually fell more steeply during the operation of the scheme. Future work will try to dissect out which components of the scheme address the limiting factor(s) for individual species. At present, lack of winter food seems to be more important than lack of nest sites. There is concern that Brexit may result in loss of funding from the EU, although if alternative funds are provided these could actually be applied in more beneficial ways due to lack of constraints from the CAP. Overall, we were left with a feeling that we now have some idea of the multiple problems facing our farmland birds, and that future work needs to address these individually.

Jeremy Brock

Why go all that way when you could have stayed at home?

Will Cresswell (Professor, School of Biology, University of St Andrews)

Will began his presentation with a message: "Don't go away feeling depressed! These birds are amazing! *But*, the declines are startling." Migratory species in the UK are doing much less well than most resident birds, but why?

An engaging and well-presented talk looked at the costs and benefits of being migratory, specif-



Plate 106. Will Cresswell, March 2017. © David Palmer www.photoscot.co.uk

ically for birds that breed in the UK (and other parts of Europe) and winter in Africa, making the arduous journey between the continents twice a year. These birds fly incredible distances. For example, the Cyprus Wheatear winters in places such as Sudan and Eritrea, with one bird recorded flying 2,538 km in only 50.4 hours, a staggering average of 42.1 km/hour!

Much of his talk focussed on Will's Whinchat work, with birds caught in their Nigerian wintering grounds in spring traps or mist nets, colour-ringed and fitted with tiny geolocators to track their (broad-scale) movements. Incredibly, these birds return to the same c.40 m x 40 m wintering area every year, even to the very same bush they left the winter before! The species has a high over-wintering survival rate, but despite this the population is still in decline. This is likely due to very large-scale habitat changes across much of the wintering range. The birds are spread over a large part of the continent, buffering against localised changes, but the scale of, for example, agriculture intensification is so wide that the impacts are being felt at a population level, which leads to birders in Scotland recording fewer Whinchats. We are monitoring Africa's birds as a whole through our migratory species, and the picture, sadly, is looking a little bleak.

But we can help! Will is working with the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI) on the ground in Nigeria, fostering a new generation of ornithologists to help monitor, and hopefully reverse, the population declines of many of Africa's bird species. Any donations, particularly of optics, are very welcome. Please contact Will at wrlc@st-andrews.ac.uk if you would like to donate.

Eilidh McNab



Plate 107. Kathryn Cox and Jane Cleaver on the SOC stand, March 2017. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

After the morning session, a self-service hot buffet and selection of home-made desserts awaited delegates in the venue's spacious and well-managed restaurant. This was also prime time for socialising, browsing the exhibitor stands and buying raffle tickets! This year's top prizes included a voucher for a trip to the Isle of May (Isle of May Boat Trips/IoM Bird Observatory), a copy of the new Fife bird atlas (Fife Ornithological Atlas Group) and an attractive cask of 'Crail Ale' (St Andrews Brewery), with a selection of other tempting items, kindly donated by exhibitors and Fife branch members.



Plate 108. David Steel, March 2017. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

Terns on the Isle of May - past, present and future

David Steel (Isle of May Reserve Manager, Scottish Natural Heritage)

With perhaps the unenviable task of giving the first post-lunch talk, David ensured the audience was paying attention by taking a photo of everyone from the stage! David has been the reserve's manager since February 2015. The island has been a National Nature Reserve since 1956. It covers approximately 96 hectares, is home to 100,000 pairs of nesting seabirds (46,200 of which are Puffins) and currently hosts the east coast's largest Grey Seal colony.

David explained that it was important to look at the bigger picture when studying terns - in addition to the Isle of May, the biggest tern colonies on the east coast are at Forvie, the Forth Islands and Leith Docks, the Farne Islands, Long Nanny and Coquet Island (the last three in Northumberland). There are four species of tern breeding in the UK, so David summarised the status of each on the Isle of May.

Arctic Terns would be due back to the island from early to mid-April and expected to be sitting on nests with 2–3 eggs by mid-May. With an incubation of 30 days, the first chicks should arrive around mid-June. Towards the end of the season, the birds will start heading south at the end of July or beginning of August to the Southern Oceans. As these birds have a 30-year life-span it is amazing to think of the mileage they must

cover in that time. Lately, the island's population has been increasing, but previous years have been bad due to predation and weather.

Common Terns winter off West Africa and it can be extremely challenging to identify them from Arctic Terns, particularly at the start of the breeding season. It gets easier towards late summer. Unlike Arctic Terns, Common Terns will nest on inland waters. The Isle of May currently supports 19 pairs, with the biggest colony being on Coquet Island.

Sandwich Terns will begin arriving from late March to early April, having also wintered off West Africa. They have a chequered history with the island, having only just started nesting in 2016 for the first time in 14 years with 21 pairs.

The tern that David really wants, but doesn't currently have on the Isle of May, is Roseate Tern. There haven't been any since the mid-1990s. In 2016, there were 104 pairs of Roseates on Coquet Island and mixed pairs where a Roseate bred with a Common Tern both under the Forth Bridges and in Leith Docks.

David explained about the work being undertaken by SNH on the island to improve breeding grounds and chances of survival for the terns. Long canes are set into the ground around nests which help to break up the fighting pattern of Lesser Black-backed and Great Black-backed Gulls, giving some protection to chicks. Simple boxes are provided which help protect chicks from rain as it does not take much time for a young tern chick to perish in poor weather. It was found on Coquet Island that Roseate Terns used nest boxes to lay their eggs, so nest boxes are also now being provided on the Isle of May on a large terrace created by David. Although the primary aim was to increase Arctic Terns, Sandwich Terns nested on the island and their chicks were found inside the boxes.

For the future, David has plans for further habitat improvement, which includes expanding the terrace and providing more nest boxes. He ended his talk telling us "The future's bright, the future's Rosey!"

Alison Creamer



Plate 109. Owen Selly, March 2017. © David Palmer www.photoscot.co.uk

Coming home: the future of Sea Eagles in East Scotland

Owen Selly (Sea Eagle Officer, RSPB Scotland)

The standard of lectures at this conference was very high. This was no exception, it was well delivered, very well illustrated, and interesting throughout.

Owen gave the audience a detailed history of this species in Scotland: How it became extinct (so sad to see again that image of the last female on Shetland), the re-introductions elsewhere in Scotland and finally, the classic east coast re-introduction of 85 Norwegian birds in Fife.

The first breeding attempt in Angus from this re-introduction was in 2013, when, shamefully, the tree was cut down. In Fife, there has been success since that year with the young birds not making it past their first winter until now! This is not an atypical pattern for a large breeding raptor; it does take a while for such birds to establish themselves. The potential for Sea Eagle in the UK was clearly illustrated by the late Richard Evans' work where he cleverly used place names to show what the distribution of this species once was.

Diet is always an area of interest in raptor studies and again Owen illustrated well the wide diet of this species. In the east, deer carcass and Mountain

Hare are very important. This took us on to another interesting point: the *Fife* male is often seen hunting in *Angus* - Owen illustrated this with a superb image. In fact, it is my understanding that he was watching the male at the same time as experienced volunteers were watching the female in the breeding area - in *Fife*! Owen paid tribute to the volunteer network, so important these days on programmes like this. Cricket analogies are very 'in' these days with ornithological commentators so I will join the club; when I came to *Fife* in the winter of 1995/96, it was a 'minor county' in terms of breeding raptors. This has changed; from Goshawk to Sea Eagle, from Osprey to Marsh Harrier, *Fife* is on the way up and there is more to come.

Lastly, let's not forget where we have come from with this species; the extinction, the failed re-introduction, success at last, the iconic image of Madders and Sexton wardening successful birds on Mull in 1985, worries over the long-term future of the population, further re-introductions, a growing population in the west, and now breeding in the east, after 200 years ... in *Fife*! It is quite a story and a story well told.

Ken Shaw



Plate 110. John Calladine, March 2017. © David Palmer www.photoscot.co.uk

Changes in Scotland's breeding birds

John Calladine (Senior Research Ecologist, BTO Scotland)

John spoke about the BTO Scotland project involving the use data from the Bird Atlas 2007–11, which presents information at a national level, to examine and analyse it against regional and local broad habitat types - upland, lowland and mixed.

The project is still in its early stages, but some conclusions are already possible. The final aim is to produce specific information for local/regional planners and policy makers regarding habitat associations for individual species and how changes to current land use would affect them. Results will also help direct future studies. Several species have a notable Scottish element in their breeding distribution, such as Goldeneye, Crested Tit, divers, Greenshank, Ptarmigan, Capercaillie, Snow Bunting, Redwing and Arctic Skua are of particular interest.

Comparison of data from the 2007–11 Atlas and its predecessor indicates several species, including both residents and migrants, and associated with very different breeding habitats have increased at the 10-km square level. The top five 'winners' are Greylag Goose, Stonechat, Blackcap, Raven and Grasshopper Warbler. By contrast, others have declined notably, with biggest losses seen with Redshank, Short-eared Owl, Whinchat, Yellowhammer and Grey Partridge. An alternative way to measure change is to look at differences in the proportion of (Scottish) 10-km squares occupied. Top-five winners here are Red Kite, Nuthatch, Little Ringed Plover, White-tailed Eagle and Canada Goose - two getting a helping hand from re-introduction schemes, two natural colonists and an introduced species spreading from the south. Corresponding losers are Yellow Wagtail, Corn Bunting, Whimbrel, Pied Flycatcher and Willow Tit - two residents and three migrants. The diversity of breeding habitats for these birds and presence of residents and migrants indicates the underlying reasons for gains and losses will be complex and involve several different factors.

Examination of distributions with respect to upland, lowland and mixed landscapes (habitat types) confirms this and shows many species are increasing or decreasing across all landscapes, but with some notable exceptions e.g. Cuckoo - increasing in uplands but decreasing in lowlands. The number of species doing better in uplands is similar to the number in lowlands, with half of the species examined (8/16) faring better in uplands being waders, while those doing better in lowlands were scavengers/predators (e.g. gulls) or woodland and shrub species (e.g. warblers).

Work is now focussing on species association with eight habitat types (montane to urban) and how this differs in NE, NW, SE and SW Scotland. Two examples shown were Curlew and Redstart - the former negatively affected by intensive agriculture, woodland and urban habitats, slope direction and altitude and positively by grouse moor management. Modelled effects of changes to amounts of grouse moor cover, woodland and intensive agriculture were shown. For Redstarts negative factors were intensive plantations and slope, with positive ones being native woodland and regenerating understorey and models of changes in conifer forestry and understorey vegetation were shown.

John's presentation was extremely informative and delivered in his customary clear and relaxed style, as those who were there, or who have heard him speak before, will attest.

Stuart L. Rivers

A temporary technical hitch with the venue's equipment resulted in a slight amendment to the running order of the programme, with the raffle draw being brought forward while the problem was being resolved. The draw was carried out in the usual jovial fashion by Waterston House staff who invited front row attendees to draw numbers 'live' for a selection of the prizes, with the remainder of the winning numbers having been drawn in advance. Thanks to the generosity of attendees, this year's raffle generated funds of £381, with all proceeds going to SOC Fife branch for a number of planned projects. With the equipment back up and running, the stage was set for the final speaker and the audience was in for a real visual treat.

My Fife birds

John Anderson (photographer)

As I am not in contact with Fife birders regularly, John Anderson was somebody whose name and reputation were completely unknown to me. Talking to people at the conference who know him, and after hearing (and seeing) his presentation, I am now so very impressed by what can be achieved in one's 'home patch'.



Plate 111. John Anderson, March 2017. © David Palmar/www.photoscot.co.uk

It was a fitting and entertaining end to the conference after the more technical 'graphic' presentations, leaving people to go home with the urge to try something like this for themselves.

His time in the field had produced some wonderful shots of rarities; the Great White Egret at Kilconquhar Loch, the Black-winged Stilt on the Isle of May, the Red-flanked Bluetail in Denburn Wood... the list goes on. How he had captured the shots of Eiders, Little Auks, gulls and Razorbills in storm and waves, I shall never understand. But his shots of the attack by a Mink on a young Gannet were electrifying and deserve all the publicity they have received.

As a parting shot to anyone whose attention was flagging after a full day of presentations would have received a huge wake-up kick by the final full-on close-up of the Shore Lark on Tentsmuir beach! http://www.pbase.com/craib_birder.

Roger Gooch



Plate 112. Little Auks, Fife Ness, Fife, January 2016. © John Anderson

Chris Wernham closed the conference, complimenting all the speakers for their excellent presentations but at the same time apologising for feeling compelled to single out one in particular. Chris explained how David Steel's evocative and enthusiastic account of his work on the Isle of May took her right back to her own wonderful time on the island as a young student, ringing her first Puffins and generally falling in love with the place. Returning to the present day, Chris urged the audience to get involved in monitoring, with a variety of opportunities available, citing projects such as the BTO Heronry Census as described by Norman Elkins in his talk. Chris finished her usual warm, entertaining and motivational summary by recommending that Breeding Bird Survey volunteers 'watch this space' for upcoming developments set to make that task much easier!

Some delegates making a weekend of the conference joined BTO staff and local Fife SOC committee members for a post-conference meal - one at nearby Apricot, reportedly Dunfermline's top Indian restaurant, and the other over in St Andrews at the popular Italian eatery, Prezzo.

Three outings were organised by BTO Scotland and SOC Fife branch for the Sunday, which turned out to be a pleasant spring day. The outing to Ruddon's Point was led by SOC Fife committee member, Rob Armstrong. While waiting for latecomers at the meeting point, a fine Yellowhammer kept the group entertained as it sang from the bushes by the car park at Shell Bay Caravan Park. The walk down through the caravan site produced a smart adult Lesser Black-backed Gull. Walking out to the point there were several Skylarks and a pair of Grey Partridges burst from cover. With a falling tide and strong winds, viewing conditions at the point were always going to be difficult. Eiders were much in evidence, with some nice breeding plumage Cormorants, a small number of Common and Velvet Scoters and a pair of Gannets, but it was difficult to get people on to a lone drake Red-breasted Merganser. At the mouth of the Cocklemill burn were several Wigeon, and waders such as Sanderling and Redshank. A pipit seen well by some was identified from photos as a nice *littoralis* Rock Pipit. The marsh held half a dozen Snipe and a

few Reed Buntings. The group then moved on to Lower Largo in the hope of better sea conditions but this proved unfruitful and only after most of the participants had departed did the cloud cover lessen allowing Rob to find a couple of Red-throated Divers and a Slavonian Grebe. It had been a rather frustrating outing but with plenty of fresh air!

Meanwhile, BTO's Ben Darvill kindly led an outing at RSPB Loch Leven. Centre staff gave the group of six a warm welcome and all enjoyed close views of a broad range of species around the visitors centre, including excellent views of Tree Sparrow. The hides down on the reserve provided welcome shelter from a strong and cold wind and afforded good views of a range of species including Barnacle Geese in the distance and facilitated useful discussion on aspects of duck identification. The final hide produced the best views of the trip, with Whooper Swan, Pintail, Shoveler and a Little Egret, showing well, plus a couple of Black-tailed Godwit. With the wind behind them, rapid progress was made back towards tea and cake at the centre's excellent café, halted only to watch a Kestrel hunting and then return to a dedicated nest box!

Eighteen attendees met at Birnie Loch for an outing led by SOC Fife Branch Chair, Paul Taylor. The group walked around Birnie and Gaddon Lochs seeing Siskins, Bullfinches, a Barnacle Goose and hearing Chiffchaffs. At Angle Park, they saw pairs of Shoveler and a flock of 30 Curlews. At The Wilderness, Pintail and Shelduck were added to the list. Letham Pools produced a Greenland White-fronted Goose among more than 1,000 Pink-footed Geese. In all, a total of 49.



Plate 113. Scanning Birnie Loch, Fife, March 2017.
© Paul Taylor

NEWS AND NOTICES



Plate 114. Daphne Peirse-Duncombe (centre) with youngest son, Richard, and daughter, Sue, Waterston House, Aberlady, Lothian, 2006. © Keith Morton

New members

Ayrshire: Mrs M. Ross, **Borders:** Dr G. Paterson, Mr & Mrs P. Rowberry, **Central Scotland:** Miss I. Guthrie, Dr A. Hosking, Miss E. Kenicer, Miss A. Phillip, Mr S. Reid, Mr & Mrs I. Robertson, Miss D. Russell, **Clyde:** Mr K. Boyle, Mrs A. Cook, Mr J. Coyle, Mr S. Lawrence, Mr J. Mitchell, Mr J. Patterson, Dr S. Petty, Mr S. Satish, Mr J. Turlewicz, **Dumfries:** Miss E. Haining, Mr M. O’Kane, **Fife:** Mr R. Duncan, Mr & Mrs K. Dunion, Dr H. Wade & Mr J. Grecian, Mrs V. Wootton, **Highland:** Mr D. Barnett, Mr A. Oram, Mrs Y. Scott, **Lothian:** Mr S. Adam, Mr & Mrs D. Adam, Mr D. Binnie, Mr D. Boyd-Otley, Miss I. Carter, Ms M. Charvat, Mrs J. Clark, Mr T. Cole, Mr & Mrs D. Dickie, Mr T.H. Dowsett, Mr & Mrs J. Ford, Ms S. Graham, Mrs G. Grant, Mrs C. Hargest, Mr H. Henderson, Mr S. Jones, Ms D. Larios, Mrs E. Macdonald, Dr D. MacFadyen, Mrs M. McLaggan, Ms F. Mitchell, Ms Y. Monteiro, Ms P. Neilson & Mr C. Adams, Ms C. Peters & Mr A. Murray, Mr & Mrs B. Sandford, Mr H. Saunders, Miss A. Schofield, Dr F. Sinclair, Mrs B. Smith, Mr Z. Thatey, Ms S. van Mesdag, **Moray:** Mrs S. Anderson, Mr P. Elford, Ms S. Mawson, Mr & Mrs I. Rennie, **North-East Scotland:** Mr D. Low, **Orkney:** Mr D. Otter, **Stewartry:** Mr H. Connick, **Tayside:** Dr J. Blain, Mr I. Henderson, Prof H. Jakubowicz.

A tribute to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe - farewell to the 200 Club

After 28 years of dedicated work, SOC Honorary Member, Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, retired from her organising role in the 200 Club in May. It was her husband and former Club Secretary, Alastair, who initiated this most successful fundraising venture, which has contributed so much to the welfare of the SOC. Prizes amounting to £1,000 each year have been won by members with another £1,000 going to Club funds. The yearly membership remained at £12 from the start. When Alastair died in 2002, Daphne took over the management of the scheme, assisted by fellow Borders branch member, Vicky McLellan. Vicky has also opted to stand down at this time.

Daphne had always been enthusiastically active in securing new members to the scheme and the massive generation of funds (£66,000 in total, including prize money) meant that all sorts of equipment, fittings and furnishings could be acquired for Waterston House. Owing to a few health problems, Daphne felt that now was the right time to retire. The Club owes a huge debt of gratitude to Daphne for all her work over the years and we wish her every happiness

spending more time in her garden at Gattonside, which she loves so much.

As communicated to 200 Club members in April, details of any resurrection of the SOC 200 Club, or similar fundraising scheme, will be publicised in *Scottish Birds*.

Jimmy Maxwell

Goodbye, Karen

After eight years as the Club's Librarian, we said goodbye to Karen Bidgood in May. She is relocating to the Lake District with her family and the commute to Aberlady seemed a bit unreasonable. Karen had been working part-time with us since 2009 and was a key member of the Waterston House staff, carrying out duties that included the day-to-day running of the library and supervising the library volunteers - as well as keeping the Library Committee in line. She was also responsible for organising all the book reviews for *Scottish Birds*. We will miss her professionalism and good humour and wish her well in her new life.

Alan Knox, Chair, SOC Library Committee



Plate 115. Karen Bidgood, Isle of May, 5 July 2014.
© *Stuart Rivers*

Remembering former members

A new page on the SOC website brings together biographical information on over 130 former Club members including Baxter and Rintoul, Frank Fraser Darling, Maury Meiklejohn, George Waterston, Vero Wynne-Edwards and Jeff Watson. The site provides links to digitised obituaries from *Scottish Birds* where readers can explore the lives of a diverse range of past members and their changing social and ornithological environments from the earliest days of the 20th century through to today. Visit the site at www.the-soc.org.uk/obituaries.

Edinburgh honours

The following people, well-known in Scottish ornithology, have recently been elected Fellows of the Royal Society of Edinburgh:

Prof Jeremy Wilson, Head of Conservation Science in Scotland for RSPB and Club Vice-President.
Prof Jane Reid, of Aberdeen University.
Baroness (Barbara) Young of Old Scone, former Chief Executive of RSPB and of The Environment Agency, former President of BTO. Currently Chairman of the Woodland Trust.

Many congratulations to them all.

Branch updates

Borders recorders: Council welcomes David Parkinson (Tel. 01896 822028) and Martin Moncrieff (Tel. 01835 822398) who have jointly taken up the recording baton, replacing Ray Murray, who sadly passed away in September last year. David and Martin can also be contacted via email at bordersrecorder@gmail.com. Also, Tom Brewis has volunteered to become editor of the Borders Bird Report.

2017 SOC Annual Conference & AGM

20–22 October 2017, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. Programme, AGM agenda and booking form enclosed with this issue.

2018 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

Saturday 17 March, SRUC, Barony Campus, Dumfries. Programme and booking information will be included with the December issue of *Scottish Birds*.

Waterston House

Art exhibitions

Lucy Newton: until Wednesday 26 July 2017

Robert Greenhalf and John Hatton: Saturday 29

July to Wednesday 13 September

Keith Brockie: Saturday 16 September to

Wednesday 15 November

All exhibitions are open daily 10:00–16:00.

Discover Moths (Free event)

Thursday 3 August, Aberlady, 09:00–11:00. Join East Lothian Council countryside ranger, John Harrison, for this outdoor event where you will learn all about the amazing variety of moths to be found in HQ's garden. Come and marvel at the range of shapes and colours in the moth world as John assists with identification - allowing attendees to study them close up before setting them free from the overnight moth trap. No booking required.

Aberlady Goose Watch

Tuesday 3 October & Thursday 12 October, 17:30, £6.00 (£4.00 child/SOC member). John Harrison (see above) returns to Waterston House to give his popular illustrated talk on the migrating Pink-footed Geese that overwinter in nearby Aberlady Bay. Places are limited so advance booking is essential.



Plate 116. Kittiwake. © Keith Brockie

Optics Demo Day (Free event)

Sunday 15 October, 10:00–16:00. A wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free, friendly expert advice. If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know and we will do our best to have these available for you to try at the event.

Up-to-date details of all forthcoming events at Waterston House are available at www.the-soc.org.uk



Plate 117. Goldfinches & Evening Primroses. © Robert Greenhalf



Plate 118. Red Squirrel. © Lucy Newton

Plate 119. Avocet siesta. © John Hatton



Membership subscription rates

The last increase in membership subscription rates was in September 2013 and was notified to members in the June 2013 mailing of *Scottish Birds*. The SOC Council agreed previously to review subscription rates every two years and this they have done. As the result of such a review, it was decided that there was to be no increase in rates in 2015.

At a Council meeting in March 2017, I advised Council that, in consultation with others, I proposed to review the current level of subscriptions and would make a recommendation to Council at their next meeting in mid-June 2017.

Any changes in subscription types or rates which are agreed by Council at that meeting will be published in the inside cover of the September issue of *Scottish Birds* and will take effect from 1 September 2017. Renewal reminder notices will also state any revised rates. If you pay by Direct Debit, you will only be notified if there is a change in your current rate.

Andrew Thorpe, Honorary Treasurer



Argyll Bird Report 2015

Volume 27 of the Argyll Bird Report covering 2015 and edited by Jim Dickson has recently been published. Copies are available to non-Argyll Bird Club members priced £10 plus £2 p&p to a UK address. These are available from Bob Furness, The Cnoc,

Tarbet, Arrochar, Dunbartonshire, G83 7DG.

Arran Bird Report 2016

The latest report includes information on all species seen on Arran, a month-by-month summary of what was around last year, the impact of weather on birds, information on ringed birds and reports on some of Arran's bird projects. The uniqueness of Arran is reflected throughout the report, including the number of UK protected birds that inhabit the island, as well as the differences between Arran and the adjacent mainland.

A limited number of hard copies of the report have been produced this year and can be obtained by mail order (£5.00+£1.50 p&p to UK addresses) from the Arran Natural History Society, c/o Lindsey & Robert Marr, Tiree, Brodick Road, Lamlash, Arran KA27 8JU or email marr.tiree98@btinternet For more information, visit: www.arranbirding.co.uk

Alexander Wilson Commemorative Plaque in Paisley

To celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Alexander Wilson (1766–1813) in Paisley, a bronze plaque was unveiled on the wall of the old Laigh Kirk on 24 February 2017, where he had been baptised.

Wilson was universally known as the 'Father of American Ornithology' and as part of Paisley's bid for City of Culture in 2021 written support for this project had been made by the SOC, RSPB, Glasgow University and Hunterian Museum. I was asked by Nicola McIntyre, Curator of Natural History at Paisley Museum, to perform the unveiling on behalf of the SOC. After being introduced by Morag Macpherson, Head of Cultural Services, Renfrewshire Leisure, I gave a short overview of Wilson's life before the assembled group moved outside where the plaque was unveiled.

David Clugston

Plate 120. David Clugston and Morag Macpherson unveiling the plaque to commemorate the birth of Alexander Wilson, Paisley, Clyde, 24 February 2017. © Macdonald Media





Plate 121. Rona village and lazy beds, North Rona. © *Stuart Murray*

Hen Harrier Day Highlands, Boat of Garten, 6 August 2017

A wide range of issues related to the conservation of Hen Harriers will be addressed and ways that their fortunes in the Scottish Highlands and the general UK upland landscape can be reversed will be discussed.

Andy Wightman MSP, Allan Bantick OBE, Brian Etheridge and Ian Thomson will be among the speakers when Boat of Garten Community Hall hosts Hen Harrier Day Highlands on 6 August, organised by Let's Get Mad for Wildlife who are representing Birders Against Wildlife Crime (BAWC) on the day.

BAWC launched Hen Harrier Day in 2014 to raise awareness of the serious persecution suffered by these spectacular birds of prey. Despite full legal protection since the early 1950s, Hen Harriers remain absent from vast swathes of the UK. They are now almost extinct as a breeding species in England, and parts of eastern and southern Scotland, primarily because of illegal persecution on intensively managed areas of upland grouse moor.

This year's indoor event will consist of talks, stalls to browse and a raffle including a DVD signed by Chris Packham and Sir David Attenborough amongst others. It starts at 1 p.m. on Sunday 6 August 2017, so come along and be a part of conservation history!

For updates see: www.facebook.com/events/1880748768809776

Request for information

'The Birds of North Rona and Sula Sgeir' (Benn, Murray & Tasker 1989) was the first published list giving details of both the breeding species and migrants that had occurred on both islands. Since then, much has been done with the breeding seabirds and we have good population figures for all of them, including the small petrels. I am in the process of updating the list, with a view to publication in late 2017. I would be interested in hearing from anyone who may have visited the islands in the last 30 years and holds unpublished notes of the birds they saw, to include in this review. All records would be acknowledged.

Stuart Murray

Email: murraysurvey@yahoo.co.uk

Amendment

"A new wintering population of White-billed Divers in Scotland?" *Scottish Birds* 37(1): 84–85. As White-billed Diver is a species assessed by SBRC, the caveat "subject to acceptance by the relevant committee" should be added to this article.



Plate 122. Listening to speeches from the bridge, m.s. Devonia, July 1966. © C. K. Mylne

50 years on: the Scottish Bird Islands Study Cruise revisited

On a calm sunny day in July 1966 the cruise ship Devonia steamed slowly down the Clyde with over 900 ornithologists on board. They were from all over the world, on a memorable tour of Scottish bird islands, planned by the SOC. Nearly 400 of the passengers were delegates to the International Conference on Bird Preservation and to the 14th International

Ornithological Congress held in Cambridge and Oxford before and after the cruise, which was the official excursion for both these gatherings. This is an edited version of the account Nancy Gordon wrote at the time. It provides a glimpse of an earlier era in ornithology and the Club's history but also reminds us of the important role SOC has played over the years.

The huge success of the venture may be summed up by one delegate's remark: "I have attended the Congress; but I have lived the Cruise." Add to this the many verbal thanks and over a hundred letters, some quite lyrical, which flowed in afterwards, praising the planning and the friendly atmosphere on board. "To describe the excellence of the planning and organisation to those who were not there would be almost impossible," as David Wilson put it in *BTO News*. The burden borne by Irene Waterston could best be illustrated by a photograph of her hard at work behind a typewriter, stacks of letters, a card index and numerous files, seen dimly through a haze of (pipe) smoke late at night in the basement office at Regent Terrace.

It was James Fisher who first thought of the cruise, back in 1962 when Britain was chosen as the venue for the next International Ornithological Congress. It was hoped that the Congress might be held in Edinburgh, but later that year Oxford was chosen and the SOC agreed to organise a water-borne excursion for the delegates, later extended to include a day in Edinburgh and a reception at the University. By the end of 1962 the British India Company had been approached and *m.s. Devonia* provisionally booked for mid July 1966. By January 1965 an official Cruise Committee had been formed from SOC Council members, with Irene Waterston as secretary, Joe Eggeling as chairman and cruise leader, and George Waterston, Maxwell Hamilton, Ian Pennie, Alastair Macdonald, Chris Mylne and Ian Munro as members. They were assisted by Dougal Andrew, Charles and Marjorie Waterston, and others. Meetings were held on average once a month, but in the early days and in the end towards C-Day, there were meetings two or three times a week, and even on a Sunday. Financing the cruise was the main worry, but a solution was found by floating a Limited Liability Company (SO Cruise Ltd) in August 1965 with guarantors from within the Club. Prices had been decided: £30 for dormitory; £54 to £75 for cabin passengers, and a good deal of work had been put into preparing a leaflet about the cruise. This brochure, printed free of charge by Oliver & Boyd Ltd, publishers of many fine bird books, bore an attractive vignette of St Kilda on the cover. Copies were posted in April 1965 to

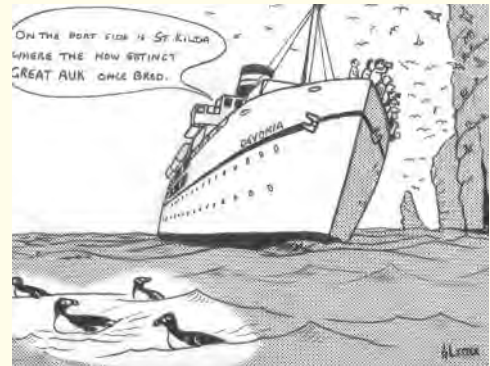


Plate 123. Cartoon. © I.J.H. Lyster

Oxford and New York, where the Audubon Society kindly agreed to handle distribution and replies. From then on the bookings rolled in; priority was given to Congress delegates and overseas applicants, but several hundred other ornithologists were needed to fill the ship. By October all 200 cabin places were booked and about half the dormitory ones; the others soon filled and about 140 applicants were disappointed. The day before the cruise there was still a waiting list of 40 who were prepared to take a last minute cancellation. One headache was the sorting of people into cabins and dormitories, and choosing dormitory leaders and sleeping companions.

There was a slight panic at the time of a seamen's strike, until it was confirmed that, as an educational cruise, *Devonia* would not be affected. The worst struggles were with the various transport arrangements, not only fleets of buses to Greenock from Leith, on excursions, and to the reception, but also rail transport to the Congress after the cruise, for which special overnight sleepers were needed. This requirement led to a two-year struggle, the train being satisfactorily guaranteed only one month before the cruise, after the committee had taken the matter to their local Member of Parliament.

So much for the 'before' and 'after', and even then only some of it. The rest can be told only by the organisers, by 16 fat box files, and by the bills for paper, telephone calls, cables and stamps.

At 5 p.m. on the eve of C-day an advance party left SOC HQ in Regent Terrace for Greenock with

a van load of books and an assortment of equipment and exhibition boards, much of this loaned by the National Trust for Scotland. Eight persons slept that night in various corners of the SOC headquarters and were joined by other staff on board the coach at 6.30 a.m. on the 16th, leaving Alastair Macdonald in charge of the fleet of buses from Edinburgh. The staff arrived at Greenock in time for their first orders from George Waterston. Armed with coloured flags, they began the task of welcoming and sorting the passengers into cabin and dormitory queues, and in little more than an hour all 900 were shepherded on board and consuming coffee.

At noon, we slid down a calm Clyde towards Ailsa Craig, in brilliant sunshine. George Waterston opened the batting from the bridge with a commentary over the Tannoy as we passed the Cumbraes, after which the coastline and islands of Scotland continued to unfold before our eyes accompanied by relevant (though occasionally irreverent) commentaries from the bridge on birds, other wildlife, geology, landforms, archaeology, vegetation, land use and history, given by James Fisher, Joe Eggeling, Charles Waterston, Ronald Miller, Sandy Fenton, George and Irene Waterston, James MacGeoch, Nancy Gordon and Tom Huxley, with others chipping in. Two of our overseas guests, Walter Thiede and Raymond Lévêque, gallantly undertook translations into German and French of nearly all the commentaries. A few spicy

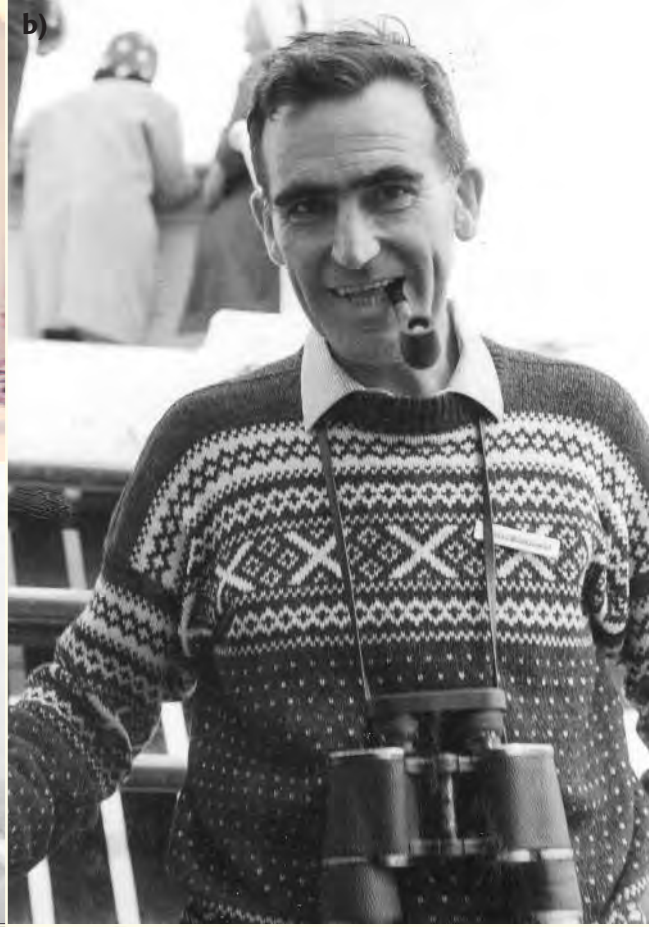
words were added here and there by the Captain, as when he hinted at the alternative name chosen for the Muckle Flugga by his fellow seamen, lying off that treacherous headland in submarines during the war. All this information, over the loudspeakers and in the cruise booklet, was some compensation for being unable to land on many of the enticing islands: Ailsa Craig, Soay, Canna, St Kilda, the Flannans, Sula Sgeir, North Rona, Foula, Unst, Fair Isle, the Isle of May, the Bass Rock and other Forth islands. However, we had excellent views of most of these and saw a large proportion of Britain's seabirds, some of them concentrated in huge cliff-nesting colonies: Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills, Kittiwakes, Fulmars, gulls, terns, skuas and six of the eight Scottish Gannet colonies, which represented half the world population of this species. Many other birds were seen, even the most common giving pleasure to overseas visitors who had never seen, for instance, a Skylark. Most of the seabirds were fairly unconcerned about the presence of an outsized

Plates 125 a–h (opposite); a) Kai Curry-Lindahl & Finnar Gudmundson. © Shirley Briggs. **b)** James Fisher & Roger Peterson. © Raymond Lévêque. **c)** George Waterston & Valerie Thom. © M. F. M. Meiklejohn. **d)** Peter Scott & Dr Erwin Stressemann at Oxford. © Shirley Briggs. **e)** Jean Delacour & George Waterston. © C. K. Mylne. **f)** Horace Alexander. © Dr U. N. Glutz von Blotzheim. **g)** Nancy Gordon, Roger and Mrs Peterson & James Fisher. © Dr U. N. Glutz von Blotzheim. **h)** Prof M. F. M. Meiklejohn. © W. Brotherston. All July 1966.



Plate 124. *m.s. Devonian* in Lerwick, July 1966. © C. K. Mylne





Gannet peering at them with 1800 eyes; a greater response was evoked from the inhabited islands, especially from lighthouses, which answered *Devonia's* foghorn salute with waved handkerchiefs and hoisted flags.

Sunday dawned sunny and warm for the first shore excursion, to the Isle of Rhum. All went ashore in the ship's boats, assembled in front of the massive Kinloch Castle, and dispersed on excursions varying in energy from the ascent of Hallival and Askival to a snooze on the castle lawns. Kinloch Castle, with its period furniture, fantastic baths and mechanical organ, proved a great attraction. Next morning, in thick mist, we suddenly saw a fantastic sight, great rock stacks rising five or six hundred feet sheer out of the water in the middle of nowhere. To many of us this was our first view of the St Kilda group, and the swirling mist made it memorably impressive. The huge seabird colonies, especially the world's largest single colony of Gannets on Boreray and nearby stacks, were just visible and easily audible.

Gannets formed a welcoming party, hundreds following *Devonia* as she circled the stacks and squeezed through the narrow gap between Stac Lee and Stac an Armin. Long after the last Gannet had returned to its ledge we sighted the Flannan Isles and were told the grim story of the mysterious disappearance of three keepers from the lighthouse soon after it was built in 1899. We saw a variety of sea birds on the islets, rocks and stacks, but not the rare Leach's Petrel which nests there. Towards dusk the ship passed a third Gannet colony on the rocky island of Sula Sgeir where the men of Ness from Lewis have an annual expedition to collect young 'gugas' for food. James MacGeoch, who has been on several of these expeditions, gave us fascinating accounts of both this and the next island, North Rona, which we approached at dusk. It was still light enough to see some of its Grey Seals, numbering about 7,500 in the breeding season - one seventh of the then world population.

By breakfast on Tuesday morning we were nearing Shetland; the magnificent 1,200 foot cliffs of the Kame of Foula loomed out of the mist, and those who were stationed at the stern of the ship were rewarded with the sight of hundreds of Great Skuas following the wake as we circled the island. Cruising up the west coast of Shetland we saw the hump of Ronas Hill, the highest point of these islands, with its steep and barren cliff slopes; then as we passed the sharp

Plates 126 a–g (opposite); a) W. Brotherston. © Mrs M. K. Hamilton. **b)** George Waterston. © Dr U. N. Glutz von Blotzheim. **c)** Dr Karel Voous & James Fisher. © M. F. M. Meiklejohn. **d)** Bobby Tulloch (centre), Noss. © W. Brotherston. **e)** Dr D.A. Bannerman & J. H. B. Munro. © R. T. Smith. **f)** Dr Joe Eggeling, Prof V.C. Wynne-Edwards, Mrs Ian Munro & W. Brotherston. © M. F. M. Meiklejohn. **g)** Dr W. R. P. Bourne & Dr David Jenkins. © C. K. Mylne. All July 1966.



Plate 127. A party on Askival, Rum, with NCC officer ringing a young Manx Shearwater. July 1966. © R.T. Smith

Ramna Stacks, lying off the north tip of Mainland, James Fisher ordered all binoculars to be trained on the largest, where for several years he has been eagerly awaiting proof of nesting by the small group of Gannets which has been frequenting them. Alas, he would have to wait at least another year. By the time we reached Hermaness, its wonderful sea bird cliffs were completely shrouded in thick mist; even the top of Muckle Flugga lighthouse was invisible. It was the same when we rounded the Noup of Noss, where we could hear and smell the Gannets, Kittiwakes and Guillemots but could not see them. At 8 p.m., as we dropped anchor in the fog, three of us and the First Officer were lowered in one of the ship's boats to reconnoitre the Noss shore for the landing of 250 passengers next morning. This feat depended entirely upon the weather and the efficiency of a floating platform of planks and barrels roped to the shore by Tom Moncrieff of the Bressay Ferry Service.

Meantime our guide to Noss had come out to *Devonia* from Lerwick with the Lord Lieutenant, the Editor of the *Shetland Times*, and a group of musicians. Next morning over 600 passengers disembarked at Lerwick, where they had a chance to explore its shops, the new museum and the nearby Clickhimin Broch. A fleet of buses took off for a tour of the south Mainland. While all this was going on, *Devonia* had gone across to Noss and, in ideal weather, the crew carried out a most efficient transfer of 250 passengers onto the beach. Everyone had a good view of the seabird colonies on the Noup, the Great and

Arctic Skuas on the moorland; some saw Red-throated Divers on the hill lochan. *Devonia* lifted anchor at 5.30 p.m. By the time we had finished dinner she was circumnavigating Fair Isle, where the islanders were out to welcome us with flares at the South End. Later, beside a magnificent bonfire near the bird observatory, Roy Dennis and visiting bird watchers waved from the cliff edge and received a message of thanks from George Waterston over the Tannoy.

Thursday dawned another sunny day for our visit to Orkney, but a stiff breeze and our distance from Kirkwall made the journey in the ship's boats rather wet and bumpy. Buses carried 450 people on a tour of Mainland in the morning and another 450 in the afternoon. Everyone had a chance to see some of the prehistoric sites, also Puffins, Kittiwakes and Guillemots on the cliffs of Marwick Head, and Pochard on the Loch of Skail. Orkney's RSPB Warden, Eddie Balfour, stopped some of the buses near a Hen Harrier's nest on the moorland edge, and a number of people had excellent views, both of nearly fledged young and of the parent birds in flight. The return trip to the *Devonia* was if anything wetter and windier than in the morning, and many rushed to seek internal central heating in the bar.

As the final day of the cruise dawned we were approaching the Bell Rock in thick mist, which began to lift as we reached the Isle of May, where Joe Eggeling gave us a lively account of the island's history and birds, and we were greeted by the lighthouse keepers and the occupants of the bird observatory. Then, in brilliant sunshine, the Bass Rock, teeming with Gannets, loomed ahead, and now we had seen the six main Gannet colonies of Scotland. After passing the Forth islands - Craigeleith, the Lamb, Fidra, Inchkeith, Inchmickery - with their varied seabirds especially



Plate 128. m.s. *Devonia*, July 1966. © R.T. Smith

Plates 129 a-i (opposite); a) Dr Salim Ali. © C. K. Mylne. b) Dr David Lack & Dr Charles Sibley at Oxford. © Shirley Briggs. c) Sir Landsborough Thomson. © C. K. Mylne. d) Alastair Macdonald, Nancy Gordon & Jeffery Boswall. © Raymond Lévêque. e) Richard and Maisie Fitter. © Finnur Gudmundson. f) John Melrose, Bobby Smith, Jimmy Maxwell & Stan Laybourne. © R.T. Smith. g) Dr U. N. Glutz von Blotzheim. © Shirley Briggs. h) Jimmy McGeoch & Derek Ratcliffe. © R.T. Smith. i) Alastair Macdonald, Mike Everett & Eddie Balfour. © W. Brotherston. All July 1966.



terns, Shags and Puffins, we sailed under the two Forth bridges, *Devonia's* mast seeming to clear the centre spans by only a few millimetres, and slowly turned to make for Leith. At this point all passengers were mustered on the foredeck and Joe Eggeling gave votes of thanks to all the organisers and helpers, the ship's captain and crew, and the lecturers, commentators and translators, each of whom in turn took a bow from the bridge. Thanks on behalf of the delegates and passengers were expressed by Roger Tory Peterson, Jean Delacour and Karel Voous in American, French, Dutch and German.

As James Fisher remarked: "What impressed me more than anything else was the complete unselfishness and cooperation of members of the SOC in establishing such a splendid atmosphere of friendliness on board." A great deal of thought had to be given to the timing of meals, lectures and commentaries. Nearly every day there was a staff meeting to decide the details of the next day's programme, when to sell excursion tickets, when to fit in a repeat of a popular film, how to speed up meal queues, when to open the bookshop, and so on. Each evening, the next day's programme had to be stencilled for issue to all passengers.

A typical day in the life of a dormitory passenger began with 'lights on' at 7 a.m. and the muted strains of Tchaikovsky or of Sibelius's *Finlandia* floating over the Tannoy. Some of the taller passengers were quite glad to get out of bed because of the cramped conditions and the proximity of their neighbour's feet or face, otherwise all were comfortable. In fact, several cabin passengers were heard to complain that they were missing all the fun by not being in a dormitory. The meal system was a study in itself; the dormitory passengers had to be divided into four sittings for each meal in the cafeteria, so were issued with grey, red, yellow and pink cards, each colour called to the meal (in a different order each day) by the Tannoy, with SOC helpers marshalling the queue at each meal. The meals were good and very substantial, the courses neatly fitted into the compartments of a metal tray, served by a row of cheery Indian crew. Packed lunches were equally large; I was still consuming accumulated Kit-Kat, apples and biscuits several days after the cruise.

Of the facilities on board, one of the most popular was surely the bar, where some distinguished ornithologists found their true habitat, and were seldom seen to migrate to other parts of the ship.

DID YOU KNOW?

...that the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, with a paid Staff of two, and the enthusiastic assistance of a large number of members who volunteered their services, made arrangements to charter the British India Company's 12,800 ton M. S. DEVONIA at a cost of £26,000 and organised a week's cruise round Scotland - The Scottish Bird-Islands Study Cruise - in July 1966, as the main excursion of the 14th International Ornithological Congress.

The DEVONIA carried 900 birdwatching passengers of which more than 400 were from overseas - from 32 different countries.

The Cruise was the most ambitious, largest, and most imaginative Birdwatching Tour ever carried out anywhere.

Plate 130. Extract from the Club's photograph album of the cruise from which most of the photos in this article have been taken. Note: £26,000 in 1966 is equivalent to something like £500,000 today.

The swimming pool proved very popular after the first brave venturer had established that the water was not near freezing, but nearer boiling point.

It took time to discover good vantage points; the stern deck and rails proved ideal for watching and photographing birds following the ship; the bows were good for watching the sea; the foredeck plethora of ropes, funnels and pipes, for seeing over people's heads; the bridge for watching other people watching the bridge; the bar for observing the true character of ornithologists; and the cruise office for watching an endless sequence of heads in small square holes. There was a full programme of lectures and films, all of which were very well attended, and covered just about every aspect of the life of the Scottish highlands and islands, and many other topics. Nearly all the speakers had to repeat their lectures, and the halls were compulsorily emptied after each talk, to overcome the tendency of passengers to stay (or sleep?) in the same seat throughout an evening. There were two sessions of Any Questions, and a Brains Trust held in the cafeteria, which frequently lapsed into unseemly frivolity.

SOC staff and helpers manned the Cruise Office all day long. The SOC bookshop did a roaring trade in postcards and sold £1,000 worth of books. Quite a number of the authors were on board, and it is not surprising that Peterson's European Field Guide was a best-seller, followed closely by Scottish books on St Kilda, Fair Isle and the highlands and islands. Bookshop staff, Ruby and Jim Smillie, Cathie MacGeoch and Evelyn Fenton, also enrolled nearly 50 new members for the SOC. Next door the RSPB, BTO, Nature Conservancy, National Trust for Scotland, Seabird Group, and Royal Naval Birdwatching Society had exhibits and sold their wares or spread their gospel.

The end of the cruise came with our arrival in Leith on Friday evening. Many passengers left, much unloading was done, but the Congress delegates did not disembark until 7 a.m. on Saturday except one passenger who was found fast asleep in one of the dormitories by the cruise leader doing the rounds to collect lost property.

Tom Delaney, Peter Slater and helpers were preparing in Edinburgh for the invasion of delegates. The Assembly Rooms were decorated with exhibitions; binoculars and cameras were on display; and there were exhibits from the Glasgow Museum and Aberdeen University. Excursions round the city had been organised, and several groups were taken to the border hills to see Red Grouse. In the late afternoon, a programme of country dancing and singing was followed by dinner in the Assembly Rooms when Irene and George Waterston were each presented with a pair of Leitz Trinovid binoculars. There was then a mass migration to the University's magnificent Upper Library (with Audubon's *Birds of America* on display) for an official reception by Professor Michael Swann, at which the Senior Past President of the IOC, Dr Stresemann, gave a vote of thanks on behalf of delegates, just before they all left for Waverley Station and the trains to Oxford.

Unfortunately, it has seemed kindest to the victims to suppress all the funniest stories and most remarkable 'quotes,' but everyone who took part in the cruise will have his own memories to add between the lines.

Of the 905 passengers, 392 were conference delegates about 400 were from overseas from 37 countries. Every country in Europe was represented, including Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. There were about 200 visitors from America, and others from India, Venezuela, Chile, Egypt, Israel, Bermuda, Hong Kong, Japan, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. There could be no finer tribute to the success of the cruise, nor greater reward for all who worked so hard to achieve it, than the pleasure it gave to so many people.

Nancy Gordon, East Lothian.



Plates 131 a–f (above & opposite). Wren, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, March 2017. © Frank Gibbons

Sunshine and shadow

F. GIBBONS

Under a dark canopy of willow branches, protected by a wall of thick brambles, I waited for the Water Rail to appear. I had sat from first light watching for an orange-red beak lifting the leaf litter in a quick flick, on its familiar purposeful ramble. This species had captured my imagination at an otherwise dull time of year. Crying out to be heard some days and on others living as a silent recluse. I had hoped it would come towards me whilst inspecting under every leaf for larvae or worm. I had waited so long that even a glimpse of blue-grey travelling at breakneck speed would have lifted the spirit.

Suddenly, an overcast morning was transformed as the sun escaped the cloud. The dark hollow where the Water Rail occasionally wandered was illuminated. The sun flooded the gaps in the canopy and I knew then that the rail was not going to appear. It was no longer a shadowy avenue. Just then, a Wren captured my attention, lying motionless on a mossy log, its head lying on the moss - dead for all the world (Plate 131a).

What I witnessed next was odd. The bird raised its head and spread its wings, raising the feathers from its neck, back and rump (Plate 131b). I realised it was not in distress but was sun-bathing. I took a series of photos over a period of 3–4 minutes (Plates 131c–e). The sun bathing concluded when the Wren suddenly jumped to its feet and held its wings up, driving out the dampness from every feather (Plate 131f). It then returned to feeding and perhaps it is only my interpretation, but it really looked invigorated.

From what seemed quite a depressing day, there was suddenly something new from an unexpected source. I had never before witnessed a Wren exhibiting this behaviour, but I also reflected that I would normally never have sat patiently in such a dark and dank area. The sunshine in the shadow had brought a small but beautiful and intimate finale to the day.

Frank Gibbons

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Fair Isle's long-term migration dataset - digitisation and recent analyses

W. MILES

In 2011, the SOC gave a generous grant to Fair Isle Bird Observatory to enable digitisation of its migration census log books, dating back to 1936. Digitisation of all historical data for all years was completed in 2013, and since then FIBO staff and volunteers have kept the digital record up-to-date on an annual basis. The resultant complete dataset is a phenomenally rich digital resource, comprising over a million records of 400 species, spanning more than 80 years.

In September 2016, the results of the first major statistical analyses of the fully digitised dataset were published, in the international science journal *Global Change Biology*. This first study was a collaboration between Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust and the University of Aberdeen. It focused on 13 species of songbird that breed in Northern Europe, winter in sub-Saharan Africa and are commonly recorded on Fair Isle on migration in spring and autumn.

The results revealed complex long-term patterns of, simultaneous advancements, stability and delays in the spring and autumn migration timing of trans-Saharan migrants. In most species in both seasons, the earliest migrating individuals got earlier through the years and/or the latest migrating individuals got later (often by a magnitude of several weeks), but the timing of the 'core phase' of the migration period changed little. This complexity was only detected because migration timing was measured using ten different metrics spanning the entire migration period of each species in spring and autumn each year (e.g. Fig. 1).

These results have broad implications. Namely, that existing evidence of long-term changes in seasonal, biological events detected using only one or two metrics (such as 'first date' and/or 'mean date') should be interpreted with caution, because this approach may fail to detect divergent changes occurring simultaneously.



Plate 132. Willow Warbler, Fair Isle, September 2012. © Ian Andrews

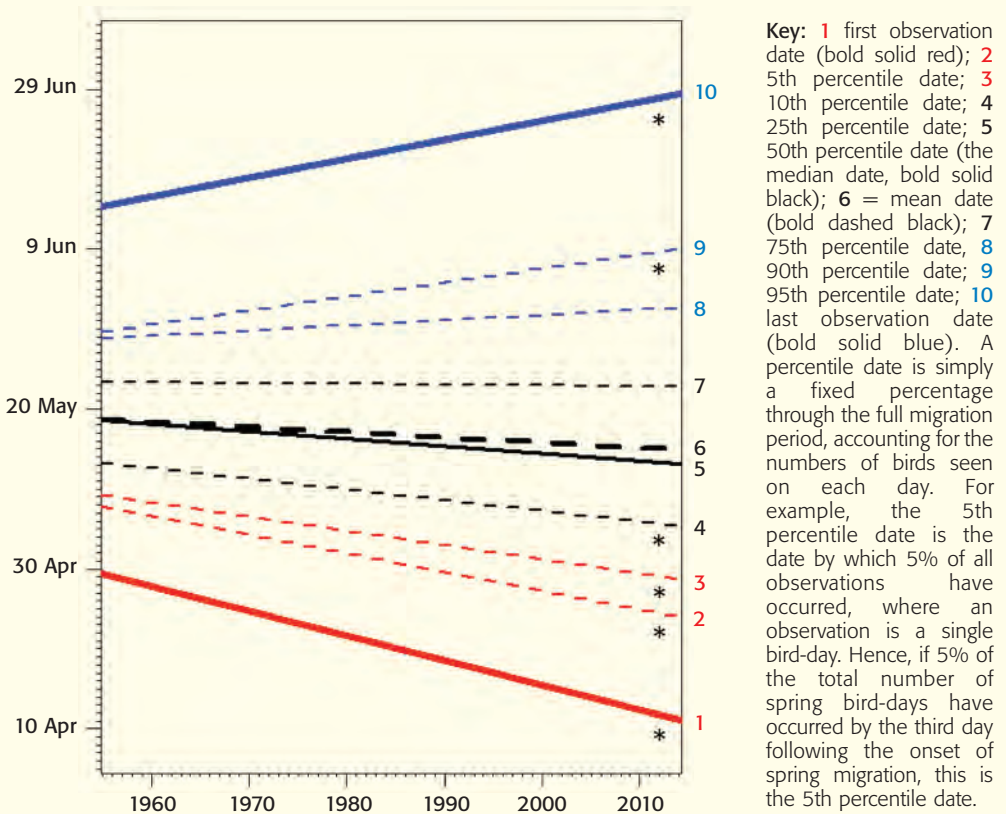


Figure 1. Changes in the migration timing of Willow Warbler in spring on Fair Isle (Miles *et al.* 2016). Migration timing was measured using ten phenology metrics (see key above). Lines represent the linear trend of each metric from 1955 to 2014 (linear regression of date on year, with raw data points omitted to improve clarity). Lines with negative ('downhill') slopes show that migration timing became earlier across years, lines with positive ('uphill') slopes show that migration timing became later. The ten metrics collectively span the full migration period. For Willow Warbler, the full migration period in spring has lengthened across the study period, due to simultaneous advancements in the timing of the early migration phase (red) and delays in the timing of the late migration phase (blue). The timing of the core migration phase (black) has remained relatively stable across years. *Denotes a statistically significant change in migration timing across years ($P < 0.05$).

The full scientific paper reporting the first analyses is published online (Miles *et al.* 2016). The complete story of Fair Isle's long-term migration dataset, from origins to digitisation to contemporary analyses, was published this summer in *British Birds* (Miles *et al.* 2017).

Huge thanks go to the SOC for enabling the Fair Isle dataset to be fully digitised. Without this crucial step, the first statistical analyses of the data would not have happened. The dataset is publicly accessible. Anybody wishing to use it for migration analyses should contact Fair Isle Bird Observatory at fibo@btconnect.com.

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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.

Isle of May

With limited coverage in the final couple months of 2016, no additions were made to the year list which ended with a phenomenal 180 species, smashing the previous record by 12 species. Late year, visits to the isle did suggest that up to three Black Guillemots were wintering offshore along with a Red-necked Grebe. There were late records of Great Skua and Manx Shearwater while a Mediterranean Gull and Snow Bunting were noted all on 11 November. Passerine numbers wintering were low perhaps due to the lingering Sparrowhawk and Merlin while up to nine Short-eared Owls were also present.

It was two weeks into 2017 before anyone set foot on the isle (14 January) but it did reveal a first-winter Glaucous Gull and five Whooper Swans over while Red-necked Grebe and 6+ Short-eared Owls were presumably lingerers. Over the next few days single Black Guillemot, Long-tailed Duck, Little Auk and five Sanderling were all notable as were 5+ Bottle-nosed Dolphins which passed the isle. Almost no coverage in February although an end of month visit proved the Glaucous Gull to still be present.

A visit on 4 March coincided with a brief easterly blow yielding a Black Redstart and a phenomenal 19 Stonechats (previous day maximum is six!). Clearing conditions the following day saw the Stonechats trickle away to zero by the afternoon although improved visibility brought a first winter Iceland Gull in the roost. It's has been a good winter for white-wing gulls down east coast and the island produced a spate of Glaucous Gull sightings in late March, all involving immatures with a single on 19, two on 27th with singles on 28th and 30 March.



Plates 133 a–b. Top Trap before (top) and after (bottom) rebuild, Isle of May, April 2017. © Mark Oksien



Plate 134. Black Redstart, Isle of May, March 2017. © Iain English

The first summer migrants started to filter through in late March with Chiffchaff from 23rd with 10 on 28th, Wheatear from 22nd and Ring Ouzel (five birds) on 28 March. Highlights during this period included four different Black Redstarts between 23rd and 31st (including a stunning male), an Osprey drifted over and an early White Wagtail on 30 March with seven Whooper Swans north on 31st. The latter day also produced a male Crossbill which brought a good month to an end.

The 'patio' area at the back door and concrete walkway around the extension are now complete, the latter wide enough to fit a bench plus telescope to sit on top. Two benches are now in place and Low Lighters can relax and seawatch in greater comfort, with cups of tea passed out through the bedroom windows! The main focus for the dedicated band that forms the work party in 2017 has been the start of the programme to rebuild the Heligoland traps. Work commenced with the Top Trap near the Main Light, under the expert guidance of the Obs Upkeep Manager, Mark Oksien. The first birds caught in the new version of the trap were two Chiffchaffs.

Mark Newell, Stuart Rivers & David Steel

Fair Isle

The start of this season has been overshadowed by the sudden death of Eric Meek, who had been chairman of the FIBO Trust from 2014 until a couple of weeks before he passed away. I had known Eric since we worked together for the RSPB in East Scotland and there is no doubt that his depth of knowledge, enthusiasm and ability to get his message across will be greatly missed by the ornithological community. Our sympathies go to Eric's family and friends.

Eric has been succeeded as Chairman by Douglas Barr, a well-known figure on the Scottish birding scene (and fans of crime fiction will recognise his name from Ann Cleeve's 'Blue Lightening' book!). Douglas has been joined on the FIBOT board by new directors Karen Hall and Kerri Whiteside, who will bring their own expertise to a very experienced team. The FIBOT directors recently agreed to make a substantial donation to the island's new electricity scheme, which will replace Fair Isle's two aging wind turbines (the first of which was

Europe's first commercially-operated wind energy scheme when it was installed in 1982).

At the Obs, we welcome back a team full of familiar faces. The 2016 domestic team of Orlando, Michael, Inessa and Sara are all back and the wardening team of Ciaran Hatsell, Richard Cope and Chris Dodd is the same one that broke the Fair Isle year list record (which had stood for 22 years) in 2014. Although the spring has been (at the time of writing) fairly slow to start, a Glaucous-winged Gull and Blue Tit were both useful additions to the year list!

No doubt there will be more migrants to come (there'll hopefully have been a few goodies by the time you read this) and we are hoping for another decent year for seabirds. After some very poor seasons for productivity, the last three years have produced a few better results and some glimmers of hope. This year we'll also be joined by researchers from the BTO who will be investigating feeding and wintering areas of Arctic Skuas. Last year's visiting researchers (the Obs has research facilities available that we are keen to attract more people to take advantage of), included a team from the RSPB who tagged Puffins and a group who came in to study the lichens of Fair Isle, with the results of both written up in the 2016 FIBO Annual Report.

This year is set to be another busy one for visitors and bookings are already well underway for 2018. We're also pleased to have a large number of volunteers booked into the Obs to help out during the season. A number of the volunteers have benefitted from grants from the John Harrison Memorial Fund and Simon Aspinall Bursary Fund. Both of these have been set up to enable birders under the age of 25 to visit Fair Isle and get a taste of the work of a Bird Observatory (volunteer vacancies are advertised during the winter for the following year) and it's always good to see previous FIBO volunteers making their way in the conservation world.

If you're not able to join us on Fair Isle this year then don't forget you can follow us on Facebook and Twitter, as well as getting regular sightings updates on the FIBO website.

David Parnaby, FIBO Warden



Plate 135. 'Eastern Black Redstart', Torness, Lothian, December 2016. © Sam Northwood

'Eastern Black Redstart', Torness, Lothian, December 2016 - first record for Scotland

I.J. ANDREWS & J.L. MCINNES



Plate 136. 'Eastern Black Redstart', Torness, Lothian, December 2016. The emarginations on primaries P3–P6 (primaries numbered ascendently) are visible. © Dave Pullan

At 14:30 hrs on 1 December 2016, rather than finding the Black Redstart he was looking for, John McInnes found an elusive red-bellied redstart sp. amongst the concrete 'dolos block' that make up the sea defences at Torness Power Station in East Lothian. From what he could see, it looked like a male Common Redstart, but the views were very brief, it was getting dark and he didn't manage a photograph. When the news went out, alarm bells started to ring and the need to check for 'Eastern Black Redstart' was highlighted. Early next morning, Mervyn Griffin and Geoff Morgan confirmed the identification as a 'paradoxus' type first-winter male 'Eastern Black Redstart' *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*. Although there had been 11 previous records of this subspecies in England, including five this autumn, this represented a first for Scotland.

Identification

Though clearly reminiscent of a male Common Redstart, the bird eventually showed well enough for MG and GM to see the characteristic features of 'Eastern Black Redstart': a dark grey throat extending onto the upper breast, some pale grey (but no white) in the forehead, no obvious white panel in the closed wing and solidly orange underparts (with no white belly) extending to the undertail-coverts. Away from the black face mask the upper breast feathers were all mottled with pale grey streaks. The crown, nape and mantle were mainly blue-grey. The underparts were orange with a slight reduction in intensity towards the undertail coverts. The orange underwing coverts were striking and the slightly darker orange tail was emphasised by two black central tail feathers.

A first-winter age is deduced due to the presence of faint olive tones on the lower mantle and the moult contrast in the buff-fringed greater wing coverts. The distal dark shaft streak on the outermost tail feather was long which fits with an immature.

From the literature, it appears that c.90% of first-year male 'Eastern Black Redstarts' are indistinguishable from females - known as '*cairei*' type

- (and hence also almost indistinguishable from female 'Western Black Redstarts'). But, thankfully, in a small number of cases - in what is known as '*paradoxus*' type plumage - the immature males are distinguishable.

While the spectre of hybrids (Redstart x Black Redstart) dogged past records, in recent years, the occurrence of a several well-watched and well-photographed vagrants has enabled the field criteria to become better established (e.g. Steijn 2005, Stoddart 2014). In addition to clear plumage features, the wing formula, specifically the ratio of P5–P6:P6–P7 and the presence of an emargination of P6 have also proved diagnostic. In Plate 137 there is a significant gap between the tips of P6 and P7 which results in a P5–P6:P6–P7 of approximately 1:2.5. The wing tip is formed by P4, which is very slightly longer than P5 (Plates 137–138). Plate 136 shows the emarginations on P3–P6. These features of the wing formula are incompatible with both Common Redstart and a Common x Black Redstart hybrid (see Steijn 2005). The P6 emargination is difficult to measure, but appears to be relatively short (Plates 136–138). The emargination length ratio of P4:P6 looks to be about 1:0.5 (it should be more than c.0.55) which in itself doesn't appear to rule out a hybrid (Steijn 2005).

Plate 137. 'Eastern Black Redstart', Torness, Lothian, December 2016. The wing formula is visible with the wing tip at P4, and the wide gap between P6 and P7. The moult contrast in the greater wing coverts can also be seen. © Ian Andrews

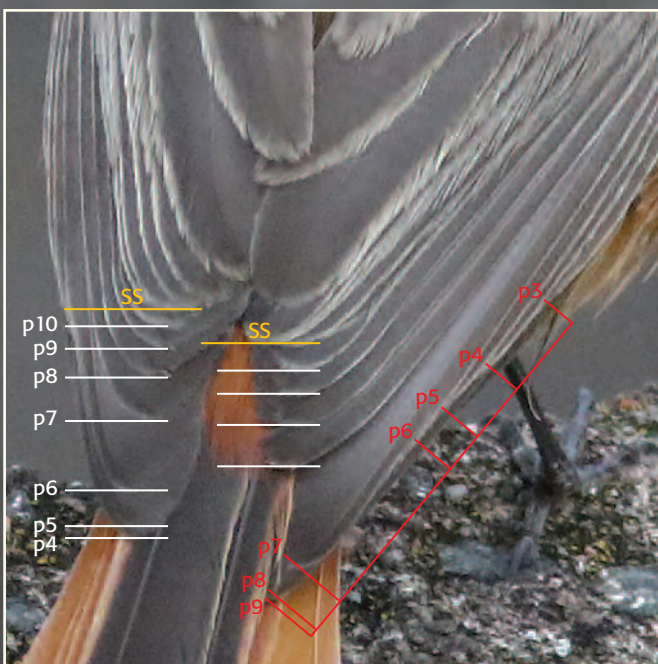




Plate 138. 'Eastern Black Redstart', Torness, Lothian, December 2016. The rounded wing tip is formed by similarly lengthed P3 to P5. © Geoff Morgan

During its stay, this stunning bird was much appreciated by many visitors. The bird spent most of its time feeding between the 'dolos stones', at times being extremely elusive and at others fly-catching in the open. It moved up and down the sea defences and was only rarely seen 'inland'. At first-light on 3 December, it was first seen at the northern end of the power station buildings where it may have roosted. The bird was last reported on 22 December.

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John McInnes, Edinburgh

The UK status of 'Eastern Black Redstart'

The six previous accepted British records have been assigned to the phoenicuroides/ rufiventris/ xerophilus group of subspecies (Stoddart 2015):

- Dungeness, Kent, 7–8 November 1981; Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, 9 November 2003; Foreness Point, Kent, 11–17 November 2011; Holy Island, Northumberland, 16–21 November 2011; Scalby, North Yorkshire, 29 November to 3 December 2014; St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 30 November 2014 to 12 January 2015.***

The 2016 records are as follows: Easington, East Yorkshire, 25 October; Skinningrove, Cleveland, 27 October into January; Donna Nook, Lincolnshire, 26–28 October; Hartlepool Headland, Cleveland, 3–15 November; Cayton Bay, North Yorkshire, 7–11 November; Ripple gravel pits, Worcestershire, 6 December; and probably the same, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, 8–11 December; Mousehole, Cornwall, 18 December into January.



Plate 139. Hooded Merganser (second from left) with Goosanders, Kilbirnie Loch, Clyde, November 2016. © Steve Curtis

Hooded Merganser, Barr Loch, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 7 October 2016 into 2017

R. ALLISON

We returned from our trip to Spain late on Wednesday, and Thursday was spent with all the usual after holiday chores, so with Friday being the last day of our holiday we found ourselves down at RSPB Lochwinnoch (our local patch) for a catch-up on what we had missed while away. There had been Marsh and Hen Harriers and even a Yellow-browed Warbler in the reserve car park, but Ho Hum! I never check on what's happening when I'm away, as hearing that something exotic has landed on your home turf can ruin a perfectly good holiday!

Lochwinnoch, as far as birding is concerned is made up of three main areas, Castle Semple Loch with its rivers, waterways and adjacent woodlands, Aird Meadow, where the RSPB centre is situated, and the Barr Loch. All of these are shallow, especially the Barr Loch which by autumn is choked with plant life and heaving with wildfowl, and if it wasn't for a layer of thick silt you could probably wade from one side to the other. All this,

coupled with the much deeper Kilbirnie Loch a few miles up the road in Ayrshire and the surrounding moorland of Muirshiel Country Park makes for a varied and rewarding birding environment.

I have potted in and around these lochs for most of my life and can remember, as a wee boy, on freezing cold winter mornings catching the early train from Paisley to spend the day shivering in my kagool trying to entice unwary fish to take my bait. Forty-odd years on nothing much has changed, I've just swapped from rods to bins. Anyway, we popped into the centre for a quick blether and a look at the sightings board then headed out to make the rounds of our favourite places.

Our last port of call was the Barr Loch, which lies across the road from the centre. To think we nearly went for a coffee instead. We had only walked up the access trail 100 metres or so when I noticed a small group of Teal winding their way through the thick nearside vegetation.

I motioned Christine to stop as they broke from the rushes into a small clear area. I could not believe my eyes as following in their wake swam a drake Hooded Merganser. "Hooded Merganser" I said to Christine, who looked a bit blank. I remember the days she used to believe every word. "Positive" I reiterated. It really was as easy as that to identify, I mean what else could it be? I might have struggled over a female or juvenile for a while, but this was a drake in all its resplendent glory. I had never seen one in the flesh but it is just one of those birds that sits in the back of your memory, seen while poring over the bird books of your youth.

It moved left and temporarily out of view and heart in mouth we hurriedly scuttled along to the next opening in the reeds, me fumbling for my camera. Unfortunately, it or its companions had got wind of us and had veered at an angle out into the middle reaches of the loch, still, I managed to capture a few hurried identification shots. Phew! Our next step was to contact the centre, and with it only being minutes away it wasn't long before the word got around. First on the scene were good friends Eddie Williams and reserve volunteer Billy, I've never seen Eddie's trademark baseball boots move so fast along the bank, he was more excited even than myself and Christine. As others started to arrive we put the news out.

The bird hung about in the middle of the loch for a while giving reasonable views before drifting over to the far bank some 400 metres distant. Where it stayed mostly hidden for the duration of its four-day stay. It disappeared for a month before being relocated by Angus Murray on the adjacent Kilbirnie Loch, much to the delight of the Ayrshire fraternity. It returned to Lochwinnoch in mid-December and is still present at the time of writing, still being elusive but being enjoyed by all.



Plate 140. Hooded Merganser, Lochwinnoch RSPB Nature Reserve, Clyde, October 2016. © Robert Allison



Plate 141. Hooded Merganser, Kilbirnie Loch, Clyde, November 2016. © Sam Northwood

It goes without saying that the shadow of the bird being an escapee crossed all our minds. On 16 October, after being advised, I forwarded the details to the BBRC for assessment. A lot of knowledgeable birders have seen it now, with the general consensus being that the shyness and the lack of any apparent captive ring or other physical signs stands it in good stead for being deemed wild. Here's hoping as it would be great for the reserve not to mention myself and Christine.

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Status of Hooded Merganser in Scotland

This Nearctic species has two separate breeding populations, The smaller western portion breeds from western British Columbia south to northern California and east to west Montana and north Idaho. The main population breeds east from central Saskatchewan to Nova Scotia and south to eastern Louisiana and Georgia. The northern part of this population is migratory and birds winter from the Missouri River and eastern Nebraska through the southern Great Lakes to Rhode Island and south through Kansas and Texas to the Rio Grande and east to Florida. The eastern population is presumably the source of genuine vagrants reaching Europe, and is believed to be increasing in recent decades, with numbers exceeding one million (in Reeber, 2015).

This species is very common in wildfowl collections in Britain and Europe and breeds well in captivity. This has resulted in occurrences of birds in the wild in Britain being viewed as escapes. Historically the only British record given any credence as a possible genuine vagrant was a first-winter male 'obtained' in the Menai Straits, Gwynedd in winter 1830/31. Three records from Ireland are believed to relate to genuine vagrants: a male and female shot in Cork Harbour, Co. Cork in December 1878; one shot in the Shannon Estuary, off Ballylongford, Co. Kerry in January 1881, and a female/immature male at Acton Lake, Co. Armagh on 21 December 1957.

A female/first-winter was discovered on a small lochan at Oban Trumisgarry, North Uist, Outer Hebrides on 23 October to 1 November 2000.

Much debated, and strongly promoted, in the birding press it was eventually accepted by BBRC, and constitutes the first accepted British record. Since then a further six records have been accepted as relating to wild birds, with two of these in Scotland:

2002 Northumberland, first-winter at Newbiggin -by-the Sea, 7–25 March

2005 Kent, adult female at Chilham, 4–10 December

2006 Shetland, adult male at Haroldswick /Burrafirth, Unst, 15 April to 2 May

2008 Fife, female at Tayport/River Tay on 26 October to 15 November

2012 Kent, adult female at Whetstead GP on 10 February to 6 March

2012 Sussex, first-winter at Pagharn Harbour on 30 October to 17 November

The longest staying individual is the 2012 Kent bird at 26 days, with the 2008 Fife being present for 21 days. The seven records do not give a highly-defined window for find dates, but appear to be consistent with birds arriving in autumn and lingering over the winter, though the 2006 Shetland bird may have been displaced in its northward migration that spring.

Since 2000 a number of birds of 'unknown' origin have been found in the wild in Britain, with escapes generally identifiable by the presence of plastic rings, clipped wings or overtly confiding behaviour (Hooded Merganser is typically a wary, secretive species).

Reference

Reeber, S. 2015. *Wildfowl of Europe, Asia and North America.* Christopher Helm, London.



Plate 142. Siberian Accentor, Mossy Hill, Scousburgh, Shetland, October 2016. © Hugh Harrop

Siberian Accentor on Shetland, 9–10 October 2016 - the first British record

J. HUNT & H. HARROP

Sunday 9 October 2016 dawned clear and exceptionally calm with the just the lightest of east winds. We spent the morning birding with our Shetland Wildlife group close to home at Hillwell notching up a few Yellow-browed Warblers, several Goldcrests and a noticeable increase in numbers of Robins and Bramblings. Clearly a few new birds had arrived but pickings were thin. We looked for the Ortolan which had been found by Hugh on Friday but were distracted by news of a pod of Orcas off Sumburgh Head and decided to go and pin them down so that fellow guide David Fairhurst and our autumn birding group could hopefully catch up with these very special creatures. We located the Orcas west of Scatness and were soon enjoying good views.

News then broke of a possible Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler not far from where we had been birding in the morning, so we decided to go and see the bird and found Simon Mitchell



Plate 143. Siberian Accentor, Mossy Hill, Scousburgh, Shetland, October 2016. © Hugh Harrop

waiting for us. After several views in flight, all present established it was a 'Groppe' but nevertheless it was a good shout from Simon to get more eyes on the bird and nail the identification. *Locustellas* giving poor views in large Shetland iris beds are *not easy*.

With very little news of birds elsewhere we decided to return to Sumburgh Head to search for more cetaceans which proved fruitless, so thought we'd head up to the higher points of the south Mainland to look for Snow and Lapland Buntings. Mossy Hill is a favourite spot of ours for Snow Buntings at this time of year so we drove to the summit before continuing north.

As we approached one of the large quarries a Redwing flew out and up popped a Redstart. Clearly a few birds were around and as Hugh sat watching the Redstart, Judd ventured in to the quarry. A couple of Meadow Pipits, a Wheatear and a Robin were present and then the fun started.

A movement 10 m in front of Judd caught his eye and upon raising his binoculars, he was greeted by the unbelievable sight of what was obviously a rare accentor! As the bird turned face-on, he could see that the throat was clearly unmarked - HOLY MOLY - or words that the effect.

Retreating several metres back towards Hugh to move out of the bird's line of sight, Judd then put Usain Bolt to shame and sprinted the 20 or so metres back to the car in what can only be described as a blind state of panic: "I've just found a rare accentor and I think it's a Siberian!". This comment was greeted by a temporarily incredulous Hugh until the look on Judd's face and his eagerness to grab a camera were more than apparent!

As we stood by the road, the bird popped up high on the quarry rocks in full view around 50 m from us. WOW! Judd fired away on the camera to ensure we got some images and Hugh watched the bird through binoculars. The bird continued to flit around actively and at one stage worryingly reached the highest point of the quarry before dropping back in out of sight from where we were standing. A quick check of the images taken compared to the illustration on the Collins iPhone 'app' (the only 'literature' we had with us!) confirmed that the throat was unmarked, the supercilium was rich buff and the mantle was full of beautiful rich tones. Gulp - we had just been watching a stunning Siberian Accentor - the first for Britain!

Plate 144. Siberian Accentor, Mossy Hill, Scousburgh, Shetland, October 2016. © Josh Jones





Plate 145. Siberian Accentor, Mossy Hill, Scousburgh, Shetland, October 2016. © Mark Rayment

At this point the enormity of the event became a reality. Hands were trembling, hearts were thumping and brains were fizzing. We were understandably in total disarray but soon composed ourselves, walked slowly back in to the quarry and anxiously waited for the bird to reappear. We soon picked it up right in front of us feeding in a rank stretch of grass cuttings no more than 10 m away. It gave amazing views in the warm sunshine and appeared totally unperturbed by our presence. We continued watching and photographing the bird for around five more minutes and then reached for our mobiles to get news out. Problem - no signal on the Vodafone network!

Fortunately, Hugh carries a spare emergency mobile on the EE network and on turning on the phone we found we had contact with the outside world. The news was put out to David and the Shetland Wildlife birding group, the local Shetland grapevine and national message services with detailed directions to this pretty obscure site.

We continued to watch and photograph the bird and it took just ten minutes for the first birders to arrive. Numbers gradually increased and by the end of the day, over 100 birders had enjoyed stunning views of this beautiful first for Britain.

Judd Hunt & Hugh Harrop, Shetland Wildlife, Quendale, Shetland
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Status of Siberian Accentor in Scotland

This Palearctic species has a breeding range in boreal and sub-Arctic zones north of 65° N, from NW Siberia east of the Ural Mountains (from 57° E) to NE Siberia as far as the Bering Sea. The entire population is migratory and winters from SE Mongolia and Korea to NE China to about 30° N.

There had been no records of this species in Britain prior to 9 October 2016, but 24 records from Europe (11 in Finland, eight in Sweden and singles in Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Denmark and Norway: in Lawicki et al. 2016). The latter gave hope to British birders that one day we would get one, but nobody expected the events of autumn 2016 when the following were discovered (how many more went unfound?):

- Shetland**, Mossy Hill, Scousburgh, Mainland, 9–10 October
- Yorkshire**, Easington, 13–19 October Cleveland, Saltburn-by-the-Sea, 15 (& 17th) October
- Co. Durham**, Hendon Dock, Sunderland, 16–18 October
- Northumberland**, Holy Island, 18th & 25 October
- Fair Isle**, Troila Geo, 20 October
- Fair Isle**, Kim o' Skroo (new bird), 22 October
- Shetland**, Lund, Unst, 22–27 October
- Orkney**, Sandside Bay, Deerness, Mainland, 24–28 October
- Shetland**, South Dale, Fetlar, 26 October
- Northumberland**, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, 29–30 October
- Highland**, Knockmuir Wood, Avoch, Black Isle 6–13 November

In addition, there were also 'probables' seen briefly at Seahouses, Northumberland on 16 October and at Thorntonloch/Bilsdean, Lothian on 20 October.

Plates 146 a–g (opposite). Photographs of all the Scottish individuals recorded during the autumn of 2016. **a.** Troila Geo, Fair Isle, 20 October. © Lee Gregory. **b.** Kim o' Skroo (second bird), Fair Isle, 22 October. © Deryk Shaw. **c.** Lund, Unst, Shetland, 22–27 October. © Dave Cooper. **d.** Sandside Bay, Deerness, Mainland, Orkney, 24–28 October. © Ian Cunningham. **e.** South Dale, Fetlar, Shetland, 26 October. © Brydon Thomason. **f.** Knockmuir Wood, Avoch, Black Isle, Highland, 6–13 November (in field). © Chris Griffin. **g.** Knockmuir Wood, Avoch, Black Isle, Highland, 6–13 November (in hand). © Dave Tannar.



Nought to 12 in 29 days - a truly spectacular way for a species to arrive on the British List! The window of find dates is now defined as 9 October to 6 November, with the longest stay (eight days) achieved by the Avoch bird, though three others remained for a week.

Britain was not alone in hosting Siberian Accentors in autumn 2016, with an unprecedented 212 logged in Europe between 4 October and 6 November (Lawicki et al. 2016). There does not appear to be a food-shortage or bad-weather factor to lead to the mass movement of birds into Europe, and it seems it may well result purely from the persistent long-range easterlies which were in place across northern Europe for much of the autumn. There are currently several birds still present in Northern Europe, and early

speculation suggested the possibility of an overwintering bird being found in Britain, but hopes are starting to fade.

We await the next few autumns with particular interest. Will this prove to be a glorious one-off or the start of a regular trickle of records similar to the change seen with Red-flanked Bluetail and Siberian Rubythroat?

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Plate 147. Siberian Accentor, Lund, Unst, Shetland, October 2016. © Robbie Brookes



Plate 148. 'Daurian Shrike' Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, October 2016. © Andrew Whitehouse

'Daurian Shrike', Girdle Ness, 18–20 October 2016 - the first North-east Scotland record

F. CARTER

Last year I moved from deepest-darkest Devon to work in Aberdeen. My new job means I'm lucky enough to get a full hour of birding almost every lunch break, normally at Girdle Ness, an exposed headland only 10 minutes' walk from the city centre. The pedigree of the area is well-known and even in the short period I've been here I've managed to see Common Rosefinch, White-rumped Sandpiper, Red-backed Shrike and Glaucous Gull to name a few. On 17 October, my walk around Girdle Ness had produced numerous Chiffchaffs, several Goldcrests and a few thrushes, along with a Tundra Bean Goose on Nigg Bay football pitch.

The brisk easterlies that had brought in migrants that Monday had swung round to the west by Tuesday, and overnight and early morning drizzle looked like a promising combination for seeing migrants but provided a dreary walk to work. A look out of the window at lunchtime confirmed it was still wet. In addition, I found my

usual birding colleagues were either on holiday or stuck in meetings. This made me ponder whether to actually go out, or stay and have lunch at my desk. *'The fresh air will do you good'* I thought, so I decided to have a shorter, solo walk out to Greyhope Bay; a small shingle beach that has rocky outcrops at low tide.

A number of my co-workers are birders, so there's usually at least two pairs of eyes out at lunch. On our usual route at this time of year we would check all the trees and scrub that skirt Aberdeen harbour. However, I put on my blinkers and set off full-steam for Greyhope Bay. It was a good while before I had taken the rain cover off my binoculars to check a small bird jumping around in a Sycamore tree. It was a Chiffchaff. I carried on past the allotments and came to the northern edge of Balnagask Golf Course. A 10-metre wide buffer strip of long grass with intermittent islands of thorn bushes separates the road from the fairway. Being next

to a road and the golf course, this area is highly disturbed but is always worth a look. The previous autumn had seen a Red-backed Shrike turn up for a day, but the whole of Girdle Ness seemed devoid of birds this time.

Fifteen minutes into my lunch break and the search for the lingering Humpback Whale in Aberdeen Bay was getting more of my attention than any birds were. Just as I lifted my binoculars to scan the sea, a plump, yellowy-buff bird appeared in the corner of my eye. It was perched atop one of the thorn bush islands in the buffer strip, 40 m east of where the Red-backed Shrike had been. I swung my binoculars round to face the bird, but by the time I had focused, I only had a split second to view it before it dropped down out of view. I stood there scanning the bushes but couldn't relocate it. That short glimpse did yield some detail; it was smaller than a thrush, belly and flanks pale-buff in colour, long tailed, and had a faint eye stripe along with a chunky, stout bill. '*Shrike!*' I said out loud and began scanning every thorn bush along the buffer strip.

Twenty minutes passed with no luck, but I was sure the bird had not left the vicinity as I would have seen it fly away. Another five minutes passed and I still hadn't seen any movement. I

knew that when this bird reappeared I would need other sets of eyes to help with the ID but after calling and messaging my colleagues in the office I'd had no reply.

I flicked through the shrike section of the bird guide on my phone and tried to filter out unlikely species based on my brief glimpse. As soon as I put my phone back in my pocket, something caught my attention from where I'd been standing on the other side of the road. There it was! As soon as it had landed it was off again and was flying in my direction. As it reached the buffer strip it tracked west and alighted 20 m away on one of the thorn bushes.

The bird was facing away from me showing its long rust-red tail and warm brown upperparts. It was watching something over to its right, which let me view its partial bandit mask and pale lores. I checked my phone: still no word from my colleagues in the office. I quickly opened my phone bird guide onto the shrike section again. The bird I was watching had no barring on its upperparts so I ruled out juvenile/first-winter Red-backed Shrike. The next bird in the guide was Isabelline Shrike. I read the description and studied the pictures, cross-checking with the bird in front of me. Bingo!

The bird was still in the same place so I took my chance to try and get a record shot. I began to line up the camera in the phone with my binoculars, a task which usually takes ages and the result is often useless. However, this time my first attempt rendered a pretty decent record shot. I sent the picture with the caption '*is this what I think it is?*' to Mark Lewis who was on holiday at the time. Within seconds I had a reply, confirming that the bird in front of me was something special.

Mark kindly offered to put the word out on the birding grapevine whilst I attempted to get some more pictures and keep track of its whereabouts. This gave me plenty of time to admire and study the bird. The light chestnut mask and pale borders to its wing feathers suggested it was a juvenile or first winter bird. Its overall smooth, warm auburn appearance with a lack of harsh contrast between its upper and underparts gave the impression that this bird



Plate 149. 'Daurian Shrike' Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, October 2016. © Fraser Carter

was of the race *isabellinus* ('Daurian Shrike') as opposed to *phoenicuroides* ('Turkestan Shrike'). Subspecific identification of Isabelline Shrikes is not always possible due to variability within both *isabellinus* and *phoenicuroides*, but the overall plumage tones, the rather rusty coloured flank markings and buffy tones around the face all favoured *isabellinus*.

Within 20 minutes the first birders arrived. I checked my watch and realised I was soon due back at the office. I managed one final look at the bird, but felt I hadn't given it nearly enough time. Luckily it decided to hang around the same patch for a few days. What an incredible lunch break that was!

Fraser Carter, Aberdeen.

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Status of Isabelline Shrike in Scotland

Isabelline Shrike was formerly treated as a subspecies (*Red-tailed Shrike*) within the *Red-backed Shrike* complex, or as a subspecies of *Brown Shrike* (Voous 1979). It was elevated to full species status by British authorities in 1980



Plate 150. 'Daurian Shrike' Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, October 2016. © Tim Marshall



Plate 151. 'Daurian Shrike' Girdle Ness, North-east Scotland, October 2016. © Pierre Foulquier

(BOU, 1980), with four subspecies recognized. There was a further complication requiring revision of allocated scientific names (Sangster et al. 2004) and the current accepted taxonomy is for two groupings: 'Turkestan' Shrike comprising *Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides* and the more easterly 'Daurian' Shrike comprising *L.i. isabellinus*, *L.i. arenarius* and *L.i. tsaidamensis*, the latter two typically referred to as 'Chinese' Shrike. A fifth form *L.i. karelini*, breeding at lower altitudes within the range of *phoenicuroides*, is recognised by some authorities. ** see also note at end.

Isabelline Shrikes of the westerly group (*phoenicuroides*) breed from NE Iran and NW Pakistan to southern Kazakhstan and north-westernmost China and are entirely migratory and winter in southern Arabia and eastern Africa. Nominate *isabellinus* breeds in southern Russia from the Altai Mountains east into northern China and Mongolia. It is entirely migratory and winters in southern Arabia and central and eastern Africa. The subspecies *arenarius* and *tsaidamensis* breed in northwest China and are entirely migratory, wintering in southernmost Iran, Pakistan and NW India.

The first British record was of an adult male in winter plumage on the Isle of May on 26 September 1950 (as 'Red-tailed Shrike'). From then to 2004 there were 16 records of Isabelline Shrike in Scotland out of an overall total of 66 in Britain, with two ascribed to *isabellinus* (Orkney 1991, Shetland 2002), two to *phoenicuroides* (Fair Isle 1960 & 1994) and 12 as 'race undetermined' (contra Forrester et al. 2007, Slack 2009). Since 2004 there have been a further 11 birds in Scotland, and the overall total of birds in Britain is 107 to the end of 2015:

- 2005 Angus & Dundee one, Maryton, Old Montrose, 22–28 October
- 2006 Orkney first-winter, Carpaquoy, Eday, 20 September to 10 October
- 2006 Outer Hebrides first-winter, Bru, Lewis, 22–29 September & presumed same, Brevig, Barra 30 September to 1 October
- 2010 Shetland adult female, Scousburgh, Mainland, 12–17 October
- 2011 Shetland first-winter, Levenwick, Mainland, 2–5 October
- 2011 Shetland adult female, Hillwell/Brake, Mainland, 6–29 October
- 2011 Shetland first-winter, Sandwick, Mainland, 1 November
- 2012 Shetland adult female, Hestingott, Toab & Virkie, Mainland, 27 September to 5 October
- 2013 Shetland first-winter, Ham, Foula, 10–12 October
- 2013 Shetland adult female, Brough, Whalsay, 17–28 October
- 2014 Orkney adult female, Holland House, North Ronaldsay [trapped] 15–20 September (L.i. *isabellinus*)

These records occur within a window of find dates from 15 September to 1 November, which compares to an equivalent window of 23 August to 30 November for the pre-2005 Scottish records. The peak period for British finds is autumn, but there have been seven in spring (between 1 March and 3 June) including one in Scotland - a male on Fair Isle on 12–13 May 1960 (trapped 13th) ascribed to *Turkestan Shrike* (*phoenicuroides*) and thought probably to be *karelini*.

There has been a noticeable increase in records with six in the 1990s, six in the 2000s and eight records already in the 2010s. This may be a simple result of the greater observer coverage each autumn now happening on the Northern Isles, and Shetland in particular, and this is reflected in the fact that seven of the last eight records to the end of 2015 have come from Shetland, and the other one from Orkney.

There were nine other records of Isabelline Shrike in Britain during 2016, including one at Ham, Foula, Shetland on 17–22 September. Five have been recorded in Ireland to the end of 2015, with other records in NW Europe from France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Romania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Norway, Sweden and Finland (Slack 2009).

** A recent announcement by the BOU that they will adopt the taxonomic sequence, status and nomenclature of the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) World Bird List for birds in Britain from 1 January 2018 will result in *Daurian and Turkestan Shrikes* being given full-species status (BOU 2017).

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Scottish Bird Sightings

1 January to 31 March 2017

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 - Aysr; 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.

An overwintering Siberian Accentor was not perhaps surprising, but the Allen's Gallinule found dead on St Kilda in March was totally unexpected. Otherwise the species were typical of the period with the exception of a long-staying Cattle Egret near Stranraer and an overwintering duo of Woodlarks on Shetland.

'**Tundra Bean Goose**': small numbers noted throughout, mostly in the Northern Isles, but elsewhere singles at Golspie (High) on 22 January; Cotehill Loch (NES) on 25 January; near Wick (Caith) on 5 February; two near Forres (M&N) on 9 February; one at Stranraer (D&G) on 26 February; at Rattray Head (NES) on 2 March; two at Kingussie (High) from 12 March, and one at Collieston (NES) on 18 March. '**Taiga Bean Goose**': the regular Fannyside/Slammanan flock (Clyde/UF) had 216 birds on 2 January, and 140 on 6 February. Elsewhere there were two on Sanday (Ork) on 8 February; one at Crail (Fife) on 9th; two near

Thurso (Caith) and two near Cairngorm (High) on 10th; a tagged bird at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 15 February, and one near Bonar Bridge (High) on 23 March. **Snow Goose**: adult-white-morphs were at Loch Eye, near Tain (High) to 6 January, and nearby at Alness /Invergordon (High) on 13–16 February and 9 March. **Canada Goose: vagrant forms - Todd's (interior)**: three were at Drumlembie, Mull of Kintyre (Arg) on 5 February, with one still on 14 February, and one [probably this form] at Portnahaven, Islay (Arg) on 13 March. **Cackling Goose**: one was on Islay (Arg) on 16 January to 3 March. **Richardson's Cackling Goose (hutchinsi)**: at least one was on Islay (Arg) from 1 January to 29 March, with two on 16 February, and four on 3 March.

American Wigeon: single drakes from December 2016 were at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Reserve (NES) to 11 January; at Loch of Lintrathen (A&D) and at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) to 29 January; at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) to 1 February; near Inverness (High) to 3 March, and at Tain (High) to 5 March. Others were at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 4 January to end March; at Oban Trumisgarry, North Uist (OH) on 4 January; two near Loch Portain, North Uist on 21 January; singles were at Hunterston (Aysr) on 30 January to 23 March; at Woodend Loch (Clyde) on 3 February to 11 March; at Portmahomack (High) on 12–17 February; at Collessie (Fife) on 12–20 February; two at Loch of Harray (Ork) on 15 February, and one at Fairlie (Aysr) on 12–17 March. Hybrids (x

Wigeon) were at Alloa (UF) on 3–12 February; at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 12–14 February, and at Kirkwall (Ork) on 24 February. **Green-winged Teal**: there were 18 in January, 16 in February and 13 in March. Recorded from Orkney to D&G, P&K and A&D, all single drakes except for two at Loch of Lintrathen (A&D) on 21 January, and at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve, (D&G) on 20 February, with several long stayers. **Black Duck**: the returning drake (since 2011) was still at Strontian (High) throughout. **Ring-necked Duck**: drakes from 2016 were at The Cuilc, Pitlochry (P&K) to 28 March; at Carlingwark Loch (D&G) to 6 March; at Loch of Clumly, Mainland (Ork) to 29 January, with one also there on 3–4 March. There were also singles at Acharacle (High) on 21 January and 31 March; at Loch of Boardhouse, Mainland (Ork) on 26 January; at Milton Loch (D&G) on 10 February; at Loch of Skaill (Ork) on 18 February; at Linlithgow Loch (Loth) on 15 March, and at North Couston Quarry (Loth) on 30–31 March.

Lesser Scaup: a drake was at Loch of Boardhouse, Mainland (Ork) from 2016 to 11 March. **King Eider**: a drake was St Combs (NES) on 17 January; one at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 27 March, and off Fort George (High) on 30–31 March. **Surf Scoter**: the adult drake was off Musselburgh/Joppa (Loth) from 2016 to 19 March, and a first-winter male on 19 March; four drakes were off Tentsmuir Point NNR (Fife) on 6 January, with one still on 8th, one nearby at West Sands, St Andrews (Fife) on 9–20th, and two there on 15th, and one again on 3

February; one off Quanterness, Mainland (Ork) on 7–17 January, with two there on 16 January and three drakes and a female on 12 February; one in Bluemull Sound, Yell/Unst (Shet) from 15 January to 16 February; one in Largo Bay (Fife) from 29 January to 27 February; one off Seton Sands (Loth) on 8 February; two off Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 9 February, then Gosford Bay (Loth) on 12 February; two in Kirkwall Bay on 10 March, and one off Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 27–28 March. A female was off Musselburgh–Eastfield (Loth) between 14 January and 11 March.

Hooded Merganser: an adult drake was at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) from 2016 to 23 February. **Smew:** a redhead was still at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) from 2016 to 22 March, joined by a drake from 4–27 March; a redhead at Loch Eye (High) still from 5 January to 1 February; a drake on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 January to 22 March; a drake and a redhead at Loch Leven (P&K) from 2 January to 5 March, with four [two drakes] on 7th, five on 20 January and three on 23–24 January, 14 February and 5 March; a redhead at Lochore Meadows CP (Fife) on 2 January to 24 March; a drake on Sanday (Ork) on 7 January; a drake at Loch of Butterstone (P&K) on 8 January; a drake at Leven (Fife) on 8 January; a drake at Ferry Ness (Loth) on 14 January; a drake at Loch of the Lowes SWT Reserve (P&K) on 29 January; a redhead was at Auchenreoch Loch (D&G) on 1–12 February; a drake at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 6 February to 20 March; a redhead on Loch Scarmclate (High) on 11 February; a redhead at Thurso (Caith) on 16–21 February; a redhead on Milton Loch (D&G) on 16 February to 26 March; a drake at Loch of Lintrathen (A&D) on 1–25 March; a drake at Loch of Skene (NES) on 13 March; a

redhead at Barnshean Loch on at least 15–21 March; a drake at Blair Drummond GPs (UF) on 25–27 March, and a redhead on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 27–30 March.

White-billed Diver: singles were off St Margaret's Hope/Water Sound, South Ronaldsay (Ork) from 4 January into April; in South Nesting Bay, Mainland (Shet) on 23 January; off Mallaig (High) on 27 January; between Fetlar and Yell (Shet) on 30 January, and nearby in Bluemull Sound, Yell/Unst (Shet) on 22 February; off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2–11 February; off Ferry Ness, Gosford Bay (Loth) on 8–12 February and 1 March; at Sandwood Bay (High) on 14 February; six off Portsoy (NES) on 23 March, with four there on 24–30th, one off Cullen (M&N) on 23–30; one off Burghead (M&N) on 27 March, with two present on 30th, and one again off Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 27–31 March. **Pied-billed Grebe:** a presumed returning bird was at Loch Feorlin, near Minard (Arg) from 28 March.

Black-necked Grebe: one was at Whitesands Quarry, Dunbar (Loth) from 2016 to 25 March; one at Loch of Skail, Mainland (Ork) on 1–7 January; one in Gosford Bay (Loth) on 16 January; one off Gullane Point (Loth) on 19 February, and two at Gourrock Ferry terminal (Clyde) on 11 March.

Bittern: one was still at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 2016 to 5 March; at Reston (Bord) on 9 January, and at Auchenreoch Loch (D&G) on 24 February. **Cattle Egret:** one was near Stranraer (D&G) from 29 January to 12 March. **Little Egret:** poorly reported from the usual SW and central Scotland haunts; notable records included singles at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 3 January; at The Loons RSPB Reserve, Mainland (Ork) on 5 January; at North Ford, Grimsay (OH) on 19 January, and at Bea Loch, Sanday (Ork) on 13 March. **Great White**

Egret: singles were at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 2 January and nearby at Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 5th; at Loch Watten (Caith) in early January; near St Andrews (Fife) on 16th; at Wigtown (D&G) on 20 January; at Maybole (Ayr) on 5 March and Saltcoats (Ayr) on 18 March, and at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from 27 March into April. **Glossy Ibis:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from December to 28 February. **'Northern Harrier':** the regular male was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) again from 4 January into April. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was seen at Lochindorb (High) from 4–29 January. **Gyrfalcon:** single white-morph birds were near Kyles Paible, North Uist (OH) on 21 January; it or another at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 29 January; on the Isle of Harris (OH) on 5 February; at the Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 18 March; on Udal, North Uist on 22nd, and near Stornoway, Lewis on 28 March.

Allen's Gallinule: one found dead on St Kilda (OH) on 26 March is the first record for Scotland.

American Coot: one was at Loch nam Feithean, Balranald, North Uist (OH) from 2016 into April. **Crane:** on Orkney, the adult from December was seen at Loch of Harray, Mainland on 3 January, then Loch of Clumly, Mainland on 4–15th and 29 January, Mill Dam of Rango, Mainland on 22 January and 11 February, and one was at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 31 March. **Killdeer:** a first-winter was at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) from 2016 to 3 January.

Pomarine Skua: singles were at Westing, Unst (Shet) on 8 January; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 March, and at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 14 March. **Ring-billed Gull:** an adult was at Strathclyde CP (Clyde) from 2016 to 18 February; an adult at Caolis, Vatersay (OH) on 26–27

January; a first-winter at Loch Gruinart, Islay (Arg) from 15 February to 8 March, and a first-winter at Loch an Tiumpán, Lewis (OH) on 3–13 March.

Mediterranean Gull: very few reported away from the Firth of Forth or Ayrshire, but notable records elsewhere included an adult at Brora (High) from December to 8 February. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult was at Barassie (Ayr) on 20 January and 20 February, and a second-winter at Loch Ryan (D&G) on 27 January.

Iceland Gull: reported in good numbers throughout the region, mostly from the north and west and as singles. Higher counts involved: eight at Loch Kishorn (High) on 15–19 January, with seven there on 3 February, six on 10 February, five on 17–20 February; five at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 20–22 January, five to six there from 3–18 February, eight on 19 February, 10 on 22 February, seven on 25 February, eight on 1 March, and five on 3 March; seven at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 27 January; six at Tiumpán Head, Lewis on 31 January to 17 February, nine there on 18th and 12 on 19 February; six at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 1 February, 10 there on 4th and six again on 10th; eight at Butt of Lewis, Lewis on 10 February, and seven there on 9 March; six at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) from 20 February to 12 March; eight on Barra (OH) on 21 February, with seven on 4 March; six at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 26 February; eight at Port Nis, Lewis on 12–15 March, with 12 there on 16–19th, 10 on 20th, nine still on 25th, eight on 30th and six on 31 March, and six at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 15 March. **Kumlien's Gull:** a juvenile was at Scurrial, Barra (OH) on 1 January, and Ardmhor, Barra on 2nd; an adult at Duntuilim, Skye (High) on 9th; a juvenile at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 20 January and 13–15

February, with two there from 22 February and three on 3 March; a juvenile at Loch Kishorn (High) from 15 January to 20 February; at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 25 January; a second-winter at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 26th; a juvenile near Boisdale, South Uist (OH) on 28 January; a juvenile at Ormsary (Arg) on 5–14 February; a near adult at Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 15 February; a juvenile at Kilpheder, South Uist on 14 February; a juvenile at Ardveenish, Barra on 4 March; a juvenile at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist on 11 March; a juvenile at Tiumpán Head, near Stornoway on 12–19 March; a second-winter at Tangasdale, Barra on 14 March, and an immature at Braighe, near Stornoway on 20 March. **Glaucous Gull:** slightly less widespread than Iceland Gull but good numbers, again mostly singles, with higher counts of; 10 at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) from 9–23 January with 12 on 17th, 13 on 18–20 January and 16 on 21st; 12 at Skaw, 13 at Baltasound and eight at Burrarfirth (all Unst, Shet) on 9 January; 13 at Norwick, Unst on 10 January, 10 still there on 13th; 10 on Fair Isle on 12 January, with 14 on 20th; 18 at Belmont, Unst on 19th; 25 at Loch of Cliff, Unst on 24 January. Less numerous in February/March with higher counts of six on Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) from 20 February to 12 March and seven there on 3–9 March; six at Loch Bhasapoll, Tiree (Arg) on 23 February and seven at Kilpheder, South Uist (OH) on 1 March.

Little Auk: very few reported - with 10 past Buckie and nine past Lossiemouth (both M&N) on 1st January; two off Cleatt, Barra (OH), one in Staffin Bay (High) and three off Lossiemouth on 2nd, with two off the latter on 7th; two off Portknockie (M&N) on 3rd; one off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5th; one off Cullivoe, Yell and six off Lerwick (both Shet) on 7th; singles off Irvine (Ayr) on 10th; off Burghead

(M&N) on 12th; off Broadford, Skye (High) on 14th; off the Isle of May on 17th; off St Mary's, Mainland (Ork) on 17th and 22nd; off Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 23rd; two off Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 25th and one past Fife Ness (Fife) on 31 January. Three were off North Ronaldsay on 2 February; one past Burghead and one past Arbroath (A&D) on 8th, and one past Aird, Tiree (Arg) on 22 February. **Snowy Owl:** a female was on Westray (Ork) at the start of January, then Eday (Ork) from 7 January to 4 February, on Papa Westray early on 11th and Eday again from 11 February to 21 March.

Great Grey Shrike: singles were still at Forest of Birse (NES) from 2016 to 7 January; at Ashie Moor, near Inverness (High) on 1–20 January; near Loch Duntelchaig (High) on 15 January; at Loch of Park, Drumoak/Banchory (NES) from 18 January to 26 March; near Dunbar (Loth) on 21–24 January, with probably same near East Linton (Loth) from 30 January to 18 February; at Midmar Forest, near Meikle Tap (NES) on 6 February; at Flanders Moss NNR, near Kippen (UF) on 10 February; at Bridgend, Islay (Arg) from 15 February to 5 March, and near Avonvoggie, Islay on 29 March. **Firecrest:** one was at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 2 January. **Woodlark:** two were at Norwick, Unst (Shet) from 10 February to 8 March. **Shorelark:** up to 18 were still at Tynninghame (Loth) from 2016, rising to 23 on 19th, 20 from 22–27th, 25 on 29th, but dropping to seven on 30 January, seven still on 4 February, 20 or 21 on 11–19 February and two there on 30 March. Two were at Tentsmuir Point (Fife) from 2016 to 16 January, and again from 8 February. Elsewhere singles were on Papa Westray (Ork) on 8 January, at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 5 February, two on Westray (Ork) on 12 February, and one at Musselburgh (Loth) on 5 March.



Plate 152. Siberian Accentor, undisclosed site, near Invergordon Highland, February 2017. © Anon

Waxwing: reported widely from the eastern half of Scotland south of Inverness. Higher counts in January were - 600 in Aberdeen (NES) on 1st, 250 on 9–12th, and 230 on 15th; 180 in Dunblane (UF) on 1–5th, with 240 there on 7th; 180 at Longforgan (P&K) on 3rd, and 180 at Pilrig and 160 at Dalry, both Edinburgh (Loth) on 8 January. Fewer report in February with high counts of 100 at Gorgie, Edinburgh on 2 February, and 80 in Morningside, Edinburgh on 6th; 70 in Aberdeen on 3rd; 125 in Hamilton (Clyde) on 5th and 100 still on 9–10th; 60 in Coupar Angus (A&D) on 10th; 61 in Aberdeen on 12th; 72 in Kincardine (High) on 12th; 59 in Leuchars (Fife) on 16th and 68 in Elgin (M&N) on 24 February. Fewer again in March with peaks of 41 in Elgin (M&N) on 6th, 48 on 8th, 52 on 16th, and 55 on 22nd; 50 in Bathgate (Loth) on 6th and 52 there on 8th; 50 at Carluke (Clyde) on 9th; 77 at Rattray (NES) on 13th; 50 at Cumbernauld (Clyde) on 15 March; 50 in Glasgow (Clyde) on 15–17th; 60 at Abernethy (P&K) on 23rd; 44 at

Cults (NES) on 24th, and 49 in Inverness (High), 45 in Bonnybridge (UF) and 50 at Drumpellier CP (Clyde) on 30 March. **Siberian Accentor:** one was at an undisclosed site near Invergordon (High) on 8–14 February. **'Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll':** a first-winter was at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 19 March. **'Coues's Arctic Redpoll':** a probable was at Earnock, near Hamilton (Clyde) from 11 February to 1 March, with two on 14th, 21st and 28 February.

Snow Bunting: present throughout the period in low numbers with higher counts of 11 on Barra (OH) on 1 January; 13 at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 12 January, with 28 there on 3 March, 15 on 16th, 18 on 19th, and 31 on 23 March; 24 at Brora (High) on 14 January; 29 at Eoligarry, Barra on 28 January; 66 on Bernaray (North Uist, OH) on 1 February and 45 there on 23 March; 11 on Barra again and 30 at Caingorm car park (High) on 8 February; 50 at Nairn Bar (M&N)

on 12 February; 18 at Scoughall (Loth) on 4 March; 12 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15 March, with 16 next day and 15 on 28 March, and 18 on Fair Isle on 30 March.

Lapland Bunting: noted throughout in low numbers with five at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 2 January; three at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 3–5th; one at Fife Ness (Fife) on 14–15th, and seven there on 22 January; three at Eochar, South Uist on 5 February; and singles at Aberlady Bay on 9 February; at Clachan, Tiree (Arg) on 12th and at Barrapol, Tiree on 15 February; at Mull of Oa, Islay (Arg) on 2 March; at North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17th and 29 March; at Scoughall (Loth) on 18–20 March; two on the Isle of Rhum (High) on 24 March; five at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 26th; two on Fair Isle on 28th, with four there on 30th and five on 31st; one at Broadford, Skye (High) on 29th; one at Clingera, Unst (Shet) on 30th, and one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) and three at Ardnave (Arg) on 31 March.

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 153. Siskins are often the commonest bird in the planted forests around south-west Scotland during the breeding season; appearing regularly in my garden from early March, peaking at the end of that month. Currently, I am feeding about 150 Siskins and they spill as much as they eat from the feeders but do then clean up from the ground.

In dry weather they disappear. I believe they go to the forest where the cones open in dry weather, this has recently happened, but now that it's raining they are back in the garden again which will no doubt delight the local Sparrowhawk!

As you can also see, the feeder has been carefully arranged so it fills the sensor of my camera from where I'm positioned indoors.

Equipment used: Canon, 200mm f4 lens, Aperture Priority, ISO 4000, shutter 1/800, aperture f9.

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