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Water Pipit, Skateraw, Lothian,
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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.

Annual membership rates*

Adult (aged 18 and over)	£ 36.00
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For non-UK addresses, there is a £15.00 supplement to all categories to cover postage. Rates valid until end of August 2019 (1.31 December 2019), subject to change thereafter.

For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk



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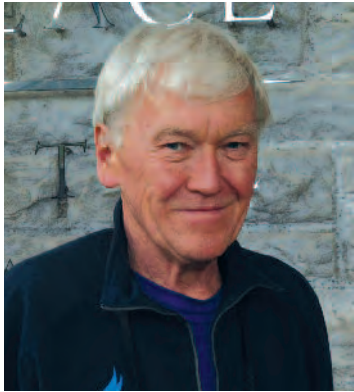


Plate 229. James Main, Pitlochry, October 2017. © Doreen Main

President's Foreword

As I write this, we have just returned from our Annual Conference at Pitlochry. The theme this year was migration and the event was very successful with a series of excellent speakers (see pages 323–330). There was a well-attended AGM when the appointment of a new Council member was agreed. I am delighted that Will Cresswell will join Council replacing Alison Creamer who has made a very positive contribution to Council over the past four years. Alison continues her involvement in the running of the Young Birders' Training Course and as a member of the Lothian Branch Committee. I am delighted that David Heeley has agreed to serve a further term of two years as Secretary of the Club. He has contributed a huge amount to the management of the Club.

By the time you read this, SOC's new website will be up and running (see page 333 for more details). As some of you may be aware, there were serious technical problems with the website and a complete re-design was necessary. The site retains many of the features you will be familiar with but has been radically updated to bring it in line with current functional and technical requirements and indeed expectations of websites today. Leading nature photographer, Laurie Campbell and top wildlife artist, Darren Woodhead have kindly allowed the Club to use their images on the new site with beautiful results. I should like also to acknowledge Jane Cleaver's hard work and enthusiasm in making this happen! I hope you like it and enjoy using the new site, which can still be found at the same address: www.the-soc.org.uk.

I'd like to give you early warning of the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, which will be held at the SRUC Barony Campus, Parkgate, Dumfries on 17 March 2018. Plans are well advanced for this conference with our partners at BTO Scotland. The conference is a Donald Watson Centenary Special and programme details and a booking form are enclosed with this issue of *Scottish Birds*. I do hope you will be able to join us on what promises to be an exciting day.

This leads on neatly to SOC's participation at the Watson Birds' Conference, which was held over two days in September, in Edinburgh and Dalry. We are very grateful to Ian Poxton for giving a presentation on the Club's behalf entitled 'Merlins in the Lammermuirs'. The feedback from both conferences has been very positive indeed.

I should like to draw your attention to an exciting new development for the Club (see page 332 for more details in Alan Knox's article). Work is under way on a birdwatching mobile app in the form of a guide to top birding sites. This has been aided, in part, by legacy income. The project will be led by a small team with Moray & Nairn bird recorder, Martin Cook, as editor. In early 2018, Martin will be seeking the assistance of volunteers around the country to compile guides to sites within each area.

Finally, there is a very important piece of legislation which affects all charities and organisations and which comes into force in May 2018. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requires that every member must positively opt in to receive communications from the Club. You will be contacted about this in due course and, to continue to receive messages from us, you will need to complete a form and submit it to the Club.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and Good Birding in 2018!

James Main, SOC President



Plate 230. Carnan Mor, Tiree, Argyll, May 2017. © John Bowler

Passage passerine migrants on a west coast island: the Isle of Tiree, Argyll

J.M. BOWLER

The Isle of Tiree is the outermost of the Inner Hebrides (see Figure 1) and is roughly 17 km long and 3–9 km wide covering some 78.34 km². Its habitats are predominantly well managed and productive natural and semi-natural machair grassland developed on shell-sand with some central areas of grazed moorland, which have long been known to support nationally and internationally important numbers of breeding birds, notably Corncrakes *Crex crex* and wet grassland waders (e.g. Boyd 1958, Stroud 1989, Bowler & Hunter 2007), as well as nationally and internationally important numbers of wintering wildfowl and waders (e.g. Stroud 1989, Bowler *et al.* 2008). More recently, the importance of Tiree as a migratory staging point has become better known, including its discovery as a hotspot for vagrant Nearctic waders (Bowler 2015a). With increasing coverage by visiting and resident birders alike, especially at migration times, the Tiree bird list reached 300 bird species by 2015 and the island has gained an increasing reputation as a place to observe migration and to find scarce and rare migrants. Migration of passage passerines is dominated by returning summer breeders such as Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii* and Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* and by common non-breeding winter visitors such as Redwing and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*. However, a surprising number and variety of passerines pass through on passage for this west coast site, which neither breed nor winter regularly on the island. With increased coverage on the island, particularly since 2004, the pattern of occurrence of passage passerine migrants has become better known and several species that were formally regarded as vagrants have occurred on a regular basis, whilst many new vagrants have been recorded.

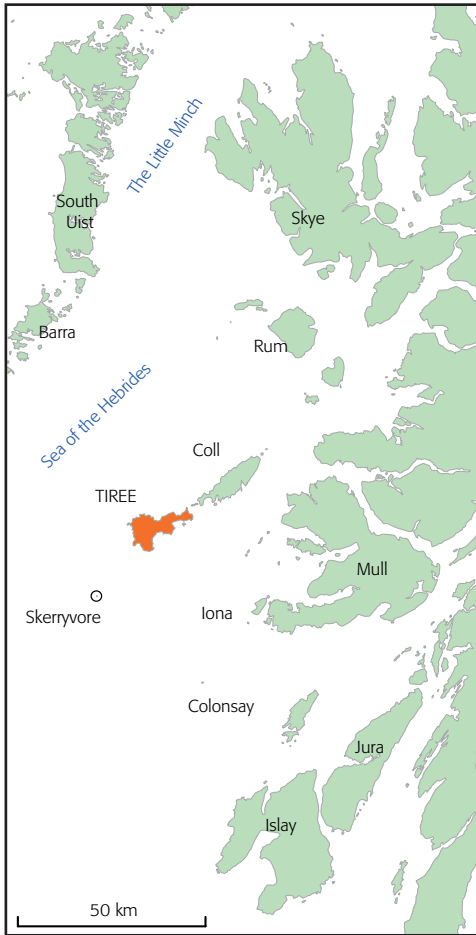


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Isle of Tiree (scale bar is 50 km).

Methods

The first records of passage passerine migrants in the area were in the late 19th and early 20th centuries from lighthouse keepers on the islet of Skerryvore, some 17 km south-west of Tiree, where birds were routinely collected around the light (see Tomison 1907). Very large numbers or ‘rushes’ of birds were found dead around the light during wet and stormy conditions giving a good indication of the strength of passage in the area. These were mostly common migrants such as Meadow Pipits, Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* and Redwings but included some of the earliest Scottish west coast records of species such as Hawfinch (Tomison 1904), Great Spotted Woodpecker and Yellow-browed Warbler. The islet is rarely visited these days by birders and changes in light technology mean that fewer birds are killed there now, although its ability to attract rare birds remains, including the first UK record of Blue Rock Thrush there on 4–7 June 1985 (Hume 1995) and the first Argyll record of Little Bunting on 27 September 1985.

Levels of bird recording on Tiree itself have varied over the years with detailed coverage at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century (e.g. Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1892, Anderson 1898, Anderson 1913), reduced coverage until the 1950s (Boyd 1958), improved counting on visits by professional ornithologists in the 1980s (Stroud 1989) and then routine detailed coverage by resident RSPB Scotland staff since the 1990s to the present day. RSPB Scotland staff have conducted regular survey work and recorded all migrants seen on the island. Since 2004, coverage of migrant birds in particular has



Plate 231. Redwings, Tiree, Argyll, October 2016. © John Bowler

increased further by the author, who also checks known migrant hotspots in the west of the island where he lives before and after work during migration time as well as checking other likely spots during the course of his survey work. There have also been regular visits by dedicated birders scouring the island for migrants in spring and autumn, in particular with twice-annual trips by Jim Dickson and Keith Gillon.

A thorough review of all records of all migrants on Tiree and the adjacent lighthouse islet of Skerryvore up to the end of 2006 was made in *The Birds of Tiree and Coll* (Bowler & Hunter 2007). More recent records have been catalogued monthly by the author, along with all other bird records from the island and forwarded to the Argyll Bird Club and to the relevant rarities committees (see relevant Argyll Bird Reports). Only records that have been accepted by relevant rarities committees have been included in the totals for rare and scarce species, although interesting earlier unpublished records are mentioned where appropriate. Arrival dates were taken to be the first date on which an individual bird was seen and individuals within groups were treated separately because group size sometimes increased during their stay. In all cases, numbers of individuals concerned each year for scarcer birds followed the ruling of the appropriate rarities committee, going with maximum numbers where more than one bird was thought to be present or where a range was given for larger groups.

For the purposes of this analysis, Woodpigeon, Turtle Dove and Swift have been included, since although non-passerines, their occurrence on the island mirrors that of passage passerines. Migrant passerines and near-passerines that breed regularly on Tiree including Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Skylark, Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, Swallow, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Wheatear, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*, Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*, Redpoll *Carduelis flammea* and Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* have been excluded from this study as their migration patterns are obscured by the presence of breeding pairs and their offspring, rendering their sightings data unsuitable for direct comparison with passage-only species. Similarly non-breeding species that regularly spend the winter on Tiree including Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, Robin, Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*, Redwing, Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*, Rook *Corvus frugilegus*, Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* and Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* have also been excluded because their migration patterns are obscured by wintering birds. This is unfortunate since these groups include some of the most numerous passage migrants on the island. However, all records of large arrivals of Meadow Pipits and Redwings were also collated separately to provide a broader comparison with those of other species. The distinctive races of 'White Wagtail', 'Greenland Wheatear' and 'Siberian Chiffchaff' were included in the analysis since none of them breed or winter on the island and particular effort was invested in identifying and recording these forms.

The remaining passage migrant passerines and near-passerines were divided into a) *common* - species which occur annually in small to large numbers b) *scarce* - species which have occurred between 10 and 110 times and c) *rare* - species which have occurred less than 10 times.

Results

Species: Numbers of 15 commoner passage migrants are detailed by year from 2004 in Table 1. Annual count totals will to some extent reflect observer coverage in any one year but comparisons between species totals for the whole period should reflect overall relative abundance. The most numerous of these passage migrants was 'White Wagtail' followed by 'Greenland Wheatear'. 'White Wagtail' was almost twice as abundant as Goldcrest, the third most numerous species. The fourth and fifth most numerous species were Swift and Snow Bunting, although the Swift total was dominated by a massive influx of some 521 birds on 12 August 2004, which accounted for some 66% of all records. The sixth to eighth commonest species: Blackcap, Lapland

Bunting and Chiffchaff had similar count totals, although the Lapland Bunting total was dominated by a very large influx in autumn 2010, which accounted for some 75% of the total. House Martin was the ninth most numerous species with a third more records again than the tenth and eleventh species: Spotted Flycatcher and Brambling. Over half of the Siskins, the 12th most numerous species, occurred in an influx in autumn 2007, whilst the 13th to 15th most numerous species, Crossbill, Whitethroat and Woodpigeon all had less than 135 records and thus were only just out of the “scarce” category.

Annual totals of each of the 15 commoner passage migrants varied considerably as already noted above but most species were recorded annually since 2004, with just 1–2 blank years for Swift, Brambling, Siskin and Crossbill. The annual occurrence of most of the commoner passage migrants was much higher from 2004 onwards as would be expected from the improved coverage but high relative percentages of pre 2004 records for Crossbill (72%) and Snow Bunting (51%) suggest that these species may have declined in occurrence. Conversely there were very low relative percentages of pre 2004 records for ‘Greenland Wheatear’ (5%), Blackcap (9%), Chiffchaff (13%), Siskin (2%) and Lapland Bunting (4%).

Annual totals of 23 scarce passage migrant species from 2004 are given in Table 2. The most numerous of these was Waxwing with 103 records, although 57% of these occurred during a large irruption in autumn 2010 and a further 20% occurred in autumn 2012. Other scarce species that were also irruptive in occurrence included Long-tailed Tit with 59% of all records occurring in autumn 2012 and Tree Sparrow with 74% occurring in spring 2015. None of these species was recorded in every year from 2004, although there was only one blank year for Garden Warbler, in 2005, which was by far the poorest year for scarce migrants on the island. As with the commoner passage migrants, the annual occurrence of most of these species was much higher from 2004 onwards as would be expected from the improved coverage but high relative percentages of pre-2004 records for Turtle Dove (43%), Tree Pipit (60%),

Table 1. Numbers of commoner passage migrants recorded on Tiree to 2016 (* records with full date information only, ** records of known breeding pairs removed from analysis, *** includes *abietinus*-type birds and records of known breeding pairs removed from analysis).

Species	<2004*	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Woodpigeon	18	1	4	2	3	5	10	6	10	17	3	21	5	13	118
Swift	146	535	7	14	0	23	10	5	3	9	23	3	16	3	797
House Martin**	93	15	9	17	4	17	47	16	24	18	21	22	6	11	320
‘White Wagtail’	329	88	100	149	23	92	120	41	67	142	146	226	271	109	1,903
‘Greenland Wheatear’	77	18	22	205	44	26	74	85	94	122	215	167	107	238	1,494
Whitethroat	23	9	3	5	3	14	9	11	5	13	2	14	5	16	132
Blackcap	56	25	20	35	28	26	50	47	81	59	50	58	41	69	645
Chiffchaff***	79	45	21	30	31	21	88	44	65	31	24	44	46	29	598
Goldcrest	305	55	116	54	37	38	18	24	38	65	48	64	46	90	998
Spotted Flycatcher	44	2	3	7	4	31	11	22	6	25	15	12	18	17	217
Brambling	35	1	0	0	2	1	12	14	8	7	8	99	7	14	208
Siskin	3	6	0	1	84	2	4	17	3	13	8	5	10	8	164
Crossbill	96	1	2	0	1	1	14	0	2	7	6	2	1	0	133
Lapland Bunting	26	1	2	2	6	0	13	465	10	34	11	4	4	37	615
Snow Bunting	389	55	37	4	3	26	22	55	97	15	45	12	5	7	772
Total	1,719	857	346	525	273	323	502	852	513	577	625	753	588	661	9,114

Table 2. Numbers of scarce passage migrants recorded on Tiree to 2016 (*records of breeding birds excluded prior to 2003 when breeding ceased, **bred in late 19th century).

Species	<2004	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	22	1	0	5	0	4	3	1	1	1	2	7	0	3	51
Tiree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	10
Grey Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	6	2	1	2	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	25
Waxwing <i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>	2	9	0	0	0	5	0	59	1	21	1	0	1	4	103
Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	8	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	15
Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	9	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	3	3	3	2	1	1	25
Whinchat* <i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	25	1	1	0	0	4	2	2	2	2	3	0	1	1	47
Ring Ouzel <i>Turdus torquatus</i>	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	3	0	1	1	2	18
Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	8	1	1	0	0	2	4	3	0	0	10	2	2	2	35
Barred Warbler <i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	3	0	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	1	2	4	1	0	17
Lesser Whitethroat <i>Sylvia curruca</i>	3	2	0	1	3	4	10	1	0	0	2	8	1	4	47
Garden Warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i>	17	3	0	5	5	5	6	3	3	7	5	7	4	6	76
Yellow-browed Warbler <i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	4	0	0	0	4	2	4	3	1	3	11	3	6	12	53
Wood Warbler <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	2	10
'Siberian Chiffchaff' <i>P. collybita tristis</i>	4	0	1	2	3	0	2	1	0	3	1	4	2	3	25
Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	6	2	0	0	0	2	2	4	1	5	4	2	1	5	34
Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	6	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	38	11	0	0	0	65
Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	20	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	28
Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>	16	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	22
Coal Tit <i>Periparus ater</i>	15	3	0	0	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	3	27
Carrion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i>	52	1	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	61
Tiree Sparrow** <i>Passer montanus</i>	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	17	2	23
Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrurus</i>	2	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	3	3	0	3	0	1	16
Total	162	26	9	20	22	43	40	78	25	101	58	43	42	55	724

Table 3. Rare passerines and near-passerines on Tiree to 2016 - arrival dates only (S = Skerryvore, 1 also undated records from 19th century).

Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1 Jan 2009						
Roller <i>Coracias garrulus</i>	20 May 1992						
Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	28 Apr 1998	26 Apr 2000	24 Apr 2010	30 Sep 2011	8 Sep 2012		
Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	28 Oct 1899s						
Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	12 Aug 2008	2 Oct 2010					
Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>	19 May 2014						
Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	19 Nov 2013						
Buff-bellied Pipit <i>Anthus rubescens</i>	27 Sep 2012						
Yellow Wagtail ¹ <i>Motacilla flava</i>	2 Jun 1996	20 May 2005	9 Oct 2010	5 May 2011	4 Oct 2014		
Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>	27 Sep 2012						
Cedar Waxwing <i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	21 Sep 2013	10 Jun 2015					

Table 3.continued.

Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Dipper <i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	4 Nov 1986	16 Oct 2010					
Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	4 May 2004	3 Sep 2011					
Bluetroat <i>Luscinia svecica</i>	1 Jun 2009	5 Oct 2010					
Blue Rock Thrush <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	4 Jun 1985 ^S						
Swainson's Thrush <i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	22 Sep 2016						
Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	28 May 2012						
Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	2 May 2004	24 Sep 2013	15 May 2015	11 May 2016	3 Sep 2016	22 Oct 2016	
Blyth's Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	3 Jun 2008	19 Sep 2011					
Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	8 Jun 2007	28 May 2012	28 May 2014	4 Jun 2016			
Booted Warbler <i>Iduna caligata</i>	20 Sep 1998	31 Aug 2006					
Icterine Warbler <i>Hippolais icterina</i>	2 Jun 1987	9 Jun 2016					
Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>	18 Sep 2014						
Western Bonelli's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>	8 Sep 2006						
Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	10 Oct 2010						
Red-breasted Flycatcher <i>Ficedula parva</i>	14 Oct 2012	20 Oct 2012	6 Jun 2014	19 Jun 2014	30 Sep 2014	8 Oct 2014	22 Oct 2016
Collared Flycatcher <i>Ficedula albicollis</i>	27 May 2014						
Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>	10 Sep 1989	12 Nov 2008	3 Oct 2013	29 Jun 2015			
Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	27 May 1969	6 May 2008	5 Jul 2008	28 May 2012			
Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>	12 Nov 2008						
Lesser Grey Shrike <i>Lanius minor</i>	6 Aug 2008						
Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>	2 Oct 2006	17 Sep 2007	9 Oct 2011	26 May 2014			
Brown Shrike <i>Lanius cristatus</i>	22 Oct 2011						
Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>	19 May 2013						
Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>	3 Jan 1986	30 Mar 2016					
Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1 Oct 2015						
Chough ¹ <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	1886	1985	23 Oct 1987	30 Mar 2014			
Rose-coloured Starling <i>Pastor roseus</i>	28 Aug 1998	8 Jun 2002	8 Sep 2003	25 Oct 2014			
Red-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	9 Oct 2008						
Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	16 Apr 2000	16 Oct 2004	16 Nov 2004	19 Apr 2008	19 Apr 2008	8 Oct 2014	
Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	28 Apr 1904 ^S	11 Nov 1906 ^S	25 Oct 1959	10 May 2004			
Northern Parula <i>Parula americana</i>	25 Sep 2010						
White-throated Sparrow <i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>	10 Jun 2016						
Yellowhammer ¹ <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	19 Nov 1888	Jun 1912	23 Mar 2013				
Rustic Bunting <i>Emberiza rustica</i>	4 Jun 1987	21 May 2014	2 Jun 2014				
Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	27 Sep 1985 ^S	23 Oct 2007					
Yellow-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza aureola</i>	5 Sep 1981						
Black-headed Bunting <i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	3 Jun 1999						



Plate 232. White-throated Sparrow, Tiree, Argyll, June 2016. © John Bowler

Whinchat (53%), Wood Warbler (40%), Blue Tit (71%), Great Tit (73%), Coal Tit (56%) and Carrion Crow (85%) suggest that these species may have declined in occurrence. Conversely there were very low relative percentages of pre-2004 records for Waxwing (2%), Lesser Whitethroat (6%), Yellow-browed Warbler (7%), ‘Siberian Chiffchaff’ (0%), Long-tailed Tit (9%), Tree Sparrow (6%) and Common Rosefinch (12%).

Arrival dates for all rare passerines and near-passerines observed less than ten times on Tiree are given in Table 3. A total of 48 of these “rare” species have been recorded, including 28 species newly recorded for the island in 2004–16. Six species of Nearctic passerine were recorded, namely Buff-bellied Pipit, Cedar Waxwing (2), Swainson’s Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula and White-throated Sparrow, all since 2004, whilst the Blue Rock Thrush on Skerryvore was the first record of this species from the UK (Hume 1995).

The dates and size of peak counts of Meadow Pipits and Redwings in spring and autumn 2004–2016 are given in Table 4. Spring peak Meadow Pipit counts ranged from 25 to 180 (mean 107) over the period 30 March to 1 May, whilst autumn peak counts ranged from 60 to 560 (mean 173) over the period 30 July to 8 September. There was also an exceptional count of 2,000 Meadow Pipits between Balemartine and Balephuil on 10 September 1989. Spring peak Redwing counts ranged from 25 to 400 (mean 199) over the period 8 March to 19 April, whilst autumn peak counts ranged from 360 to 3,500 (mean 1,312) over the period 18 October to 17 November, although there were exceptional spring Scottish counts of 1,000 on 1 April 1990 and 1,500 on 17 April 1997.

Table 4. Peak counts of Meadow Pipits and Redwings on Tiree, 2004–16.

Year	Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i>		Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
2004	25 11 Apr	90 30 Jul	300 11 Apr	3500 29 Oct
2005	170 26 Apr	560 5 Sep	400 4 Apr	1500 30 Oct
2006	40 30 Apr	130 21 Aug	25 8 Mar	2000 21 Oct
2007	120 1 Apr	300 8 Sep	240 6 Apr	1000 12 Nov
2008	80 13 Apr	130 26 Aug	150 3 Apr	1000 31 Oct
2009	35 5 Apr	60 3 Sep	20 21 Mar	1500 23 Oct
2010	40 7 Apr	90 5 Sep	200 16 Mar	1000 3 Nov
2011	100 1 May	90 4 Aug	400 8 Apr	1200 16 Nov
2012	180 28 Apr	95 12 Aug	80 13 Apr	360 18 Oct
2013	135 11 Apr	150 29 Aug	120 19 Apr	800 22 Oct
2014	160 2 Apr	120 1 Sep	250 18 Mar	1500 17 Nov
2015	70 30 Mar	150 1 Sep	300 16 Mar	1000 28 Oct
2016	75 15 Apr	280 4 Sep	200 11 Mar	700 29 Oct

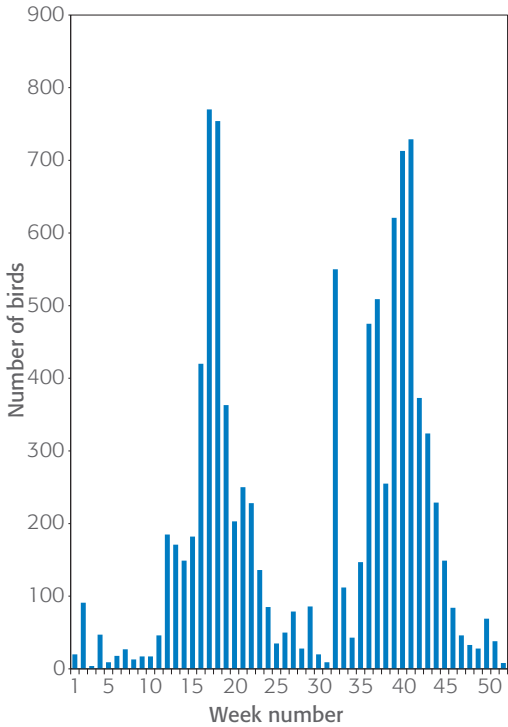


Figure 2. Arrivals of passage migrant passerines and near-passerines through the year on Tiree by week (N=10,047).



Plate 233. Greenland Wheatear, Tiree, Argyll, October 2016. © John Bowler

Timing

Figure 2 shows the arrival of all 10,041 dated records of passerine and near-passerine passage migrants on Tiree. Although there were arrivals in every week of the year, there were two distinct peaks in arrivals, as might be expected, one in spring, peaking over weeks 17–18 (23 April to 6 May) and the other in autumn peaking in weeks 40–41 (1–14 October). These two arrival peaks were very similar in size at 700–800 birds per week, whilst the 3,977 birds that arrived in spring (27 February to 1 July) was broadly similar to the 4,715 birds that arrived in autumn (2 July to 2 December). A large and unexpected peak in week 32 (6–12 August) in between the main spring and autumn peaks was the result of an unprecedented influx of 521 Swifts on 12 August 2004. Apart from this, there were few new arrivals (<110 per week) in the mid-summer period between weeks 24 and 34 (11 June to 26 August) or in the winter months between weeks 49 and 8 (3 December to 26 February).

Table 5 shows spring and autumn arrival dates for all common and scarce passage passerine and near-passerine migrants on Tiree. The only species to arrive regularly during the winter months were Mistle Thrush, Carrion Crow and Snow Bunting, often in response to prolonged freezing spells on the adjacent mainland. The earliest typical spring migrant was Goldcrest with birds arriving from 1 March and this was one of ten species in which spring arrivals (59%) were higher than in autumn. Other common and scarce species with predominantly spring arrivals were Woodpigeon (92%), Turtle Dove (59%), House Martin (86%), Tree Pipit (60%), ‘White Wagtail’ (89%), Whitethroat (84%), Wood Warbler (90%), Spotted Flycatcher (88%) and Tree Sparrow (82%). Five species never occurred in autumn: ‘Siberian Chiffchaff’, Yellow-browed Warbler, Barred Warbler, Long-tailed Tit and Waxwing. Other species which occurred more frequently in autumn than in spring included Grey Wagtail (92%), Ring Ouzel (78%), ‘Greenland Wheatear’ (88%), Chiffchaff (60%), Blackcap (71%), Garden Warbler (68%), Lesser Whitethroat (85%), Pied Flycatcher (71%), Blue Tit (73%), Great Tit (61%), Coal Tit (67%), Brambling (99%), Siskin (75%), Crossbill (97%),

Table 5. Arrival dates of common and scarce passage migrants on Tiree (*recorded all summer, ** recorded all winter).

Species	Earliest spring arrival	Peak spring arrival	Earliest autumn arrival	Peak autumn arrival	Latest date seen	Notes
Woodpigeon	11 Mar 2016	4–10 June	27 Jul 2008	1–7 Oct	21 Dec 1897 ^S	1 on 26 Jan 2006
Turtle Dove	9 May 1987	11–17 Jun	4 Sep 1993	24–30 Sep	3 Nov 1953	
Swift	3 May 2008	11–17 Jun	*	6–12 Aug	17 Nov 1893 ^S	
House Martin	27 Mar 2005	21–27 May	9 Aug 2008	13–19 Aug	30 Sep 2001	
Tree Pipit	21 Apr 2013	7–13 May	8 Aug 1989	20 Aug–2 Sep	21 Oct 1998	
Grey Wagtail	6 Apr 1996	28 May–3 Jun	20 Aug 2006	1–7 Oct	28 Nov 2001	
'White Wagtail'	13 Mar 2005	23 Apr–6 May	13 Aug 2007	10–16 Sep	31 Oct 2015	
Waxwing	-	-	16 Oct 2010	22–28 Oct	21 Nov 2015	1 on 8 Jan 2011
Black Redstart	19 Mar 1893	26 Mar–1 Apr	14 Oct 1961	22–28 Oct	16 Nov 2015	1 on 2 Feb 2008
Redstart	15 Apr 2014	23–29 Apr	24 Aug 2008	1–7 Oct	15 Oct 2011	
Whinchat	22 Apr 1898	21–27 May	22 Aug 2005	10–16 Sep	20 Oct 1996	
'Greenland Wheatear'	13 Apr 2002	23–29 Apr	3 Aug 2014	10–16 Sep	5 Nov 2005	
Ring Ouzel	7 Apr 2003	16–29 Apr	15 Sep 1898	8–14 Oct	20 Nov 2011	
Mistle Thrush	6 Jan 2010	13–19 Feb	8 Oct 2008	22 Oct–11 Nov	16 Dec 2001	
Barred Warbler	-	-	28 Aug 2006	3–9 Sep	16 Nov 2012	
Lesser Whitethroat	10 May 2009	10–27 May	27 Jul 2008	1–7 Oct	16 Nov 2012	
Whitethroat	14 Apr 2003	21–27 May	14 Aug 2004	10–16 Sep	25 Sep 2011	
Garden Warbler	2 May 2011	28 May–3 Jun	21 Aug 2007	10–30 Sep	2 Nov 1997	
Blackcap	23 Mar 2011	30 Apr–13 May	2 Sep 2008	15–21 Oct	13 Dec 1997	
Yellow-browed Warbler	-	-	16 Sep 2015	1–7 Oct	7 Nov 2016	
Wood Warbler	3 May 2011	14–20 May	30 Aug 2011	30 Aug	30 Aug 2011	
Chiffchaff	14 Mar 2016	23–29 Apr	7 Aug 2012	1–7 Oct	16 Dec 2001	1 on 27 Jan 2006
'Siberian Chiffchaff'	-	-	7 Oct 2015	19–25 Nov	10 Dec 2007	1 on 16 Jan 2007
Goldcrest	1 Mar 2012	19–25 Mar	27 Jul 2008	8–14 Oct	19 Dec 2016	
Spotted Flycatcher	29 Apr 1894	28 May–3 Jun	15 Aug 2004	24–30 Sep	25 Oct 2012	
Pied Flycatcher	2 May 2012	21–27 May	15 Aug 1996	27 Aug–2 Sep	24 Oct 2010	
Long-tailed Tit	-	-	28 Sep 2001	8–14 Oct	15 Nov 1997	
Coal Tit	27 Feb 1997	27 Feb–5 Mar	8 Oct 2008	8–14 Oct	27 Dec 1997	2 in Jan–Feb 1998
Blue Tit	7 Mar 1998	12–18 Mar	6 Oct 2016	8–14 Oct	20 Nov 1997	3 in Nov 97–Mar 98
Great Tit	7 Mar 2012	12–18 Mar	9 Oct 2014	9–25 Nov	5 Dec 1999	2 in Oct 97–Feb 98
Carrion Crow	15 Jan 1948	13–19 Feb	15 Jul 1955	15–21 Oct	20 Dec 1998	
Tree Sparrow	21 Apr 2009	21–27 May	4 Sep 2012	29 Oct–4 Nov	4 Dec 2012	
Brambling	15 Apr 2006	15 Apr	26 Sep 2011	8–14 Oct	12 Dec 1898	
Siskin	11 Apr 2008	4–10 Jun	19 Sep 2010	15–21 Oct	15 Dec 2001	
Crossbill	7 Jun 1990	25 Jun–1 Jul	*	13–19 Aug	21 Oct 2012	1 on 15 Jan 2002
Common Rosefinch	28 May 2014	4 Jun–10 Jun	5 Sep 2012	5–9 Sep	6 Oct 2009	
Lapland Bunting	20 Mar 2007	16–22 Apr	1 Sep 2010	1–7 Oct	31 Dec 2012	5 birds 20 Jan–6 Feb
Snow Bunting	**	12–18 Mar	16 Sep 2015	1–7 Oct	30 Dec 2012	

Common Rosefinch (81%), Snow Bunting (89%) and Lapland Bunting (97%). Species which occurred more or less equally in spring and autumn were Mistle Thrush, Redstart, Black Redstart, Whinchat and Carrion Crow. Swift and Crossbill were unusual in that they occurred weekly in moderate numbers throughout the mid-summer period, despite not breeding on the island.

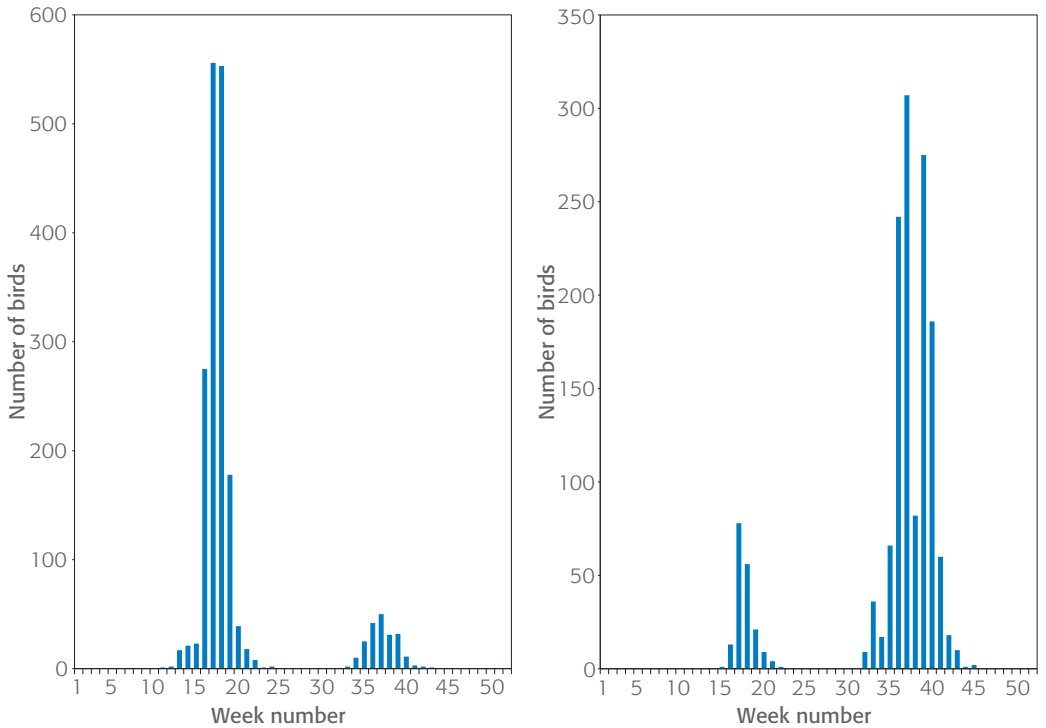
Passage migrants were found all over the island but there were obvious hot-spots depending on the species. 'White Wagtails' favoured the coastal bays and loch-sides, whilst many of the warblers favoured more bushy habitats on this largely treeless island, particularly at Balephuill, Carnan Mor, Scarinish and Vaul.

Discussion

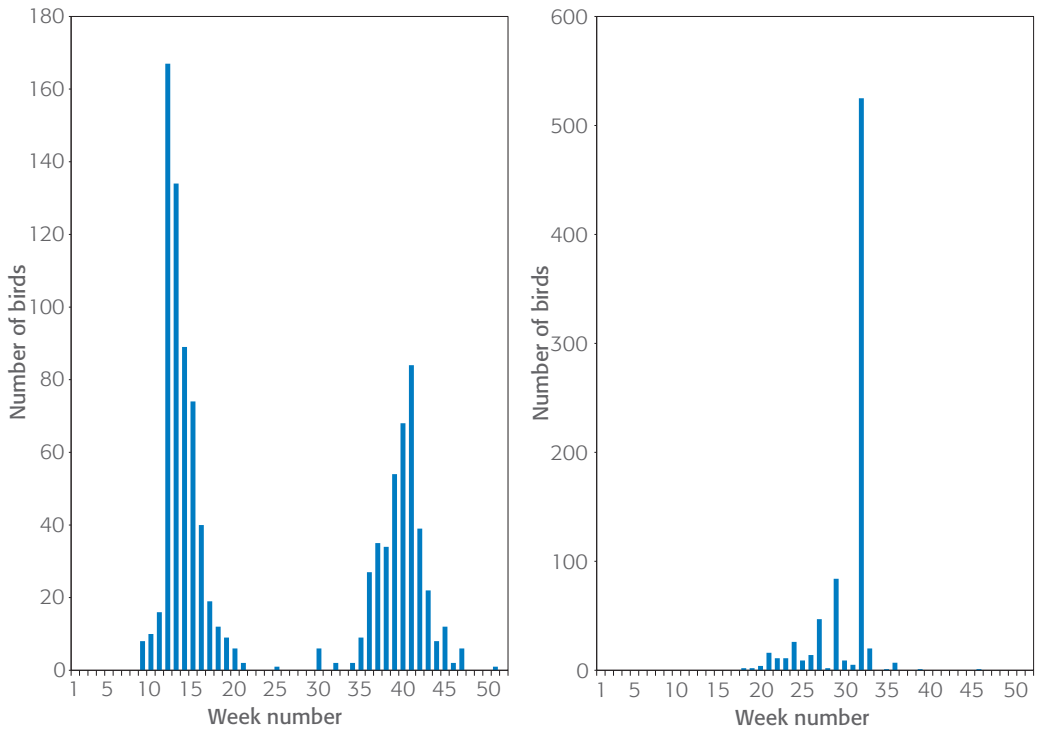
'White Wagtail' and 'Greenland Wheatear' were the most numerous passage passerine migrants and these are both common migrants on the western seaboard of Scotland, particularly in spring as these birds head north to their breeding grounds in Iceland (both species) and Greenland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). 'White Wagtails' are less readily identified in autumn, particularly as the island holds large numbers of Pied Wagtails at the same time and it is likely that 'White Wagtails' are under-recorded on autumn passage (Figure 3). Other west coast sites also show higher numbers in spring than in autumn, whereas detailed observations at North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory reveal much larger numbers in autumn, perhaps giving a better indication of the true scale of autumn passage (Forrester *et al.* 2007), or alternatively highlighting differences in migration patterns between Icelandic and Fennoscandian birds. 'Greenland Wheatear' numbers conversely were larger in autumn than in spring (Figure 4), contra to the typical situation elsewhere in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Spring migrants are perhaps easier to identify than in autumn and certainly most pre-2004 records on Tiree were in spring. More detailed recording on Tiree since 2004 has revealed much larger numbers in autumn, albeit with considerable annual variation in totals seen. This annual variation accords with Snow (1953) who revealed that birds follow a different route in autumn when birds pass over the Atlantic Ocean to make landfall on mainland Europe rather than passing through the British Isles, but that when conditions force a landfall, large numbers may be observed. Counts of up to 60 birds on Tiree are not uncommon following the passage of depressions bringing rain-bearing fronts off the Atlantic in September including a count of 35 together in one small field at West Hynish on 7 September 2013, whereas less than 20 birds in total are recorded in some autumns such as 2005, when clear skies under high pressure predominated.

Goldcrest at number three in terms of numbers is more surprising, since it is less obvious where these birds are heading, particularly in spring. Spring birds on Tiree form a continuation of a large-scale movement up the Irish Sea in March and April (Forrester *et al.* 2007) and a similar passage in spring is also noted in the Northern Isles (Shetland Bird Reports and Forrester *et al.* 2007), so it would appear that some of these birds at least may relate to returning Fennoscandian breeders. Numbers in the Northern Isles however, are much higher in autumn than in spring, unlike on Tiree where most birds appear on spring passage (Figure 5) and the autumn passage of Fennoscandian birds would thus seem to be more tightly focussed down the Scottish east coast (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Numbers of the fourth most numerous species, Swift, were dominated by an unprecedented arrival of some 521 birds on 12 August 2004 (Figure 6), part of a record influx to the Outer Hebrides and other Argyll islands, which resulted from a static weather front with heavy rain over much of Scotland (Bowler & Hunter 2007). A similarly unprecedented influx of Lapland Buntings in autumn 2010, presumably from the Greenland breeding population was part of a Scotland wide invasion (Rivers & Forsyth 2012) and accounted for just over 75% of the total recorded, making it the seventh most numerous passage passerine on the island. The influx of Siskins to Tiree in autumn 2007, which accounted for just over 50% of all records, was also noted elsewhere in Britain including the Scilly Islands and the Outer Hebrides (Rabbits & ap Rheinallt 2010).



Figures 3–4. Arrivals of 'White Wagtail' (N=1,903) and 'Greenland Wheatear' (N = 1,494) on Tiree by week.



Figures 5–6. Arrivals of Goldcrest (N=998) and Swift (N = 791) on Tiree by week.

The high proportion of pre-2004 records of Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Crossbill and Snow Bunting suggests that these species may have declined in occurrence. None of these species has declined conspicuously elsewhere in Scotland over this period however (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Balmer *et al.* 2013), so it could be that being attractive and conspicuous species they were recorded more often on the island than other less conspicuous species in the past. A similar high proportion of pre-2004 records for Turtle Dove, Tree Pipit, Whinchat and Wood Warbler however, also suggests that these long distance migrant species have declined in occurrence and this tallies with on-going UK-wide and broader European declines in all four species (Balmer *et al.* 2013, EBCC website). The high proportion of pre-2004 records for Carrion Crow is harder to explain since this race has if anything become more widespread in Argyll in recent decades (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2007, Balmer *et al.* 2013). It is possible that some earlier reports of all-black corvids on Tiree, particularly a flock of 17 on 15 February 1953 and a flock of eight on 28 January 1987, may have confused this species with immature Rooks, which also disperse in groups on occasion to the island.

The very low proportion of pre-2004 records for Blackcap and Chiffchaff, suggests that these species have increased in occurrence and this is borne out by increasing breeding populations of both species both in Argyll (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2007) and in Scotland (Balmer *et al.* 2013 and BBS report 2015). The apparent similar increase in 'Greenland Wheatears' was probably an artefact of improved recording from 2004 onwards, since most early observers reported this form, particularly in spring, but rarely provided details of numbers or dates. Apparent similar increases in Siskin and Lapland Bunting were however largely the result of the one-off unprecedented influxes detailed above, although numbers of Siskins breeding in Scotland generally have increased since 1995 (BBS Report 2015). Apparent post-2003 increases in the occurrence of scarce migrants such as Lesser Whitethroat, Yellow-browed Warbler, 'Siberian Chiffchaff', Tree Sparrow and Common Rosefinch are most likely due to the increased coverage by knowledgeable observers, although Yellow-browed Warblers have also increased massively in occurrence throughout the UK in recent years (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Several of these species were previously thought to be only vagrants on the island but improved coverage has shown them to occur near-annually. The thin near-annual spring and



Plate 234. Spotted Flycatcher, Tiree, Argyll, May 2017. © John Bowler



Plate 235. Yellow-browed Warbler, Tiree, Argyll, September 2016. © John Bowler

autumn arrivals of Lesser Whitethroats on Tiree is mirrored in the Outer Hebrides (e.g. Outer Hebrides Bird Group 2008, Rabbits & ap Rheinallt 2010) but this Scottish west coast passage was not mentioned by Forrester *et al.* (2007). A similar low proportion of pre-2004 records for Waxwing and Long-tailed Tit, both conspicuous species, would suggest that the occurrence of both species has increased on the island and for Waxwing this ties in with a general recent increase in the frequency and size of Waxwing invasions in the UK (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Balmer *et al.* 2013).

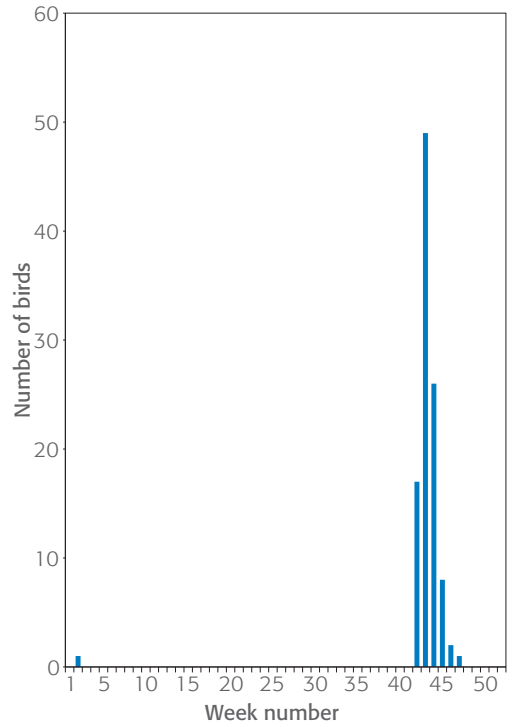
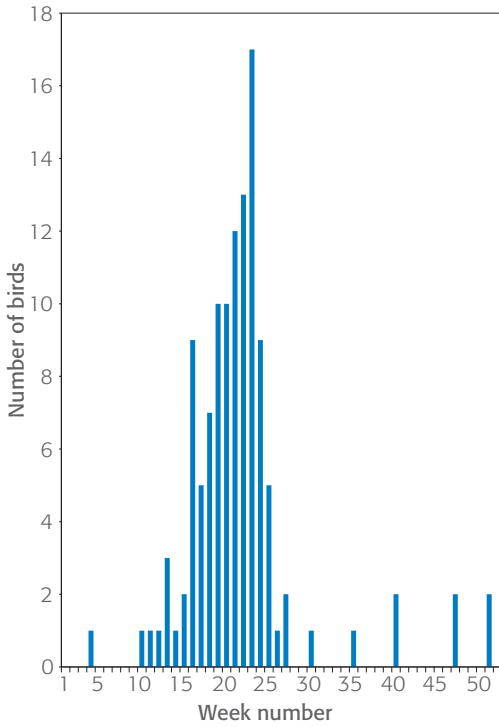
Improved coverage of the island at migration times since 2004 has seen an increase in the range and numbers of rare species recorded on the island. Most notable were the Northern Parula in September 2010 (Bowler 2011) which was the first record for Scotland, Cedar Waxwings in September 2013 (Bowler 2014a) and June 2015 (Gillon 2015), which were just the third and fourth British records, followed by the Brown Shrike in October 2011 (Bowler 2012) and Collared Flycatcher in May 2014 (Bowler 2014b), which were the first records of either species from SW Scotland. For 12 other species their Tiree records also represented the first documented records for Argyll including Short-toed Lark, Water Pipit (Bowler 2015b), Buff-bellied Pipit (Dickson 2014a), Citrine Wagtail (Dickson 2014b), Swainson's Thrush, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Booted Warbler, Subalpine Warbler (Bowler 2014c), Western Bonelli's Warbler, Little Bunting and Yellow-breasted Bunting.

Numbers and timing of peak counts of Meadow Pipits on Tiree were broadly similar to those on North Ronaldsay with a lower peak in April compared to that in autumn, although the timing of the autumn peak was clearly later on North Ronaldsay than on Tiree stretching from September to October (Forrester *et al.* 2007). High counts on Tiree in late July and August may refer to post-breeding gatherings of local birds as opposed to migrants from elsewhere. Timing of peak counts of Redwings on Tiree were very similar to those on North Ronaldsay (Forrester *et al.* 2007), although the spring counts on Tiree were proportionately higher, which presumably reflects the more westerly spring passage of Icelandic breeding birds, since return passage of Fennoscandian breeders takes a more easterly route than in autumn, mostly avoiding Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

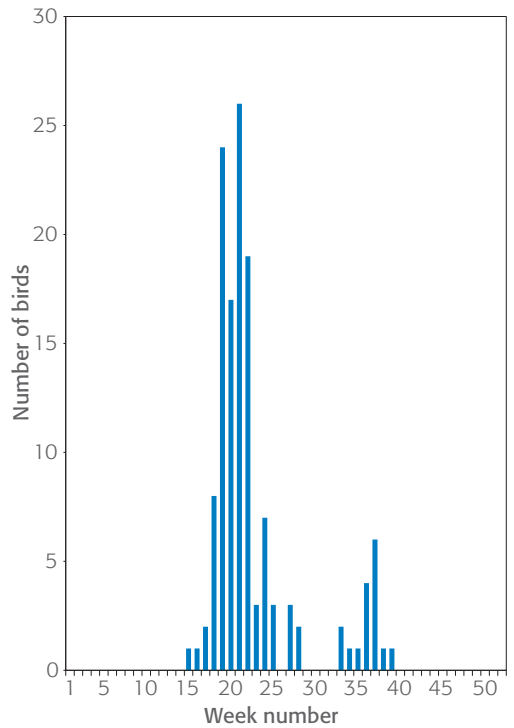
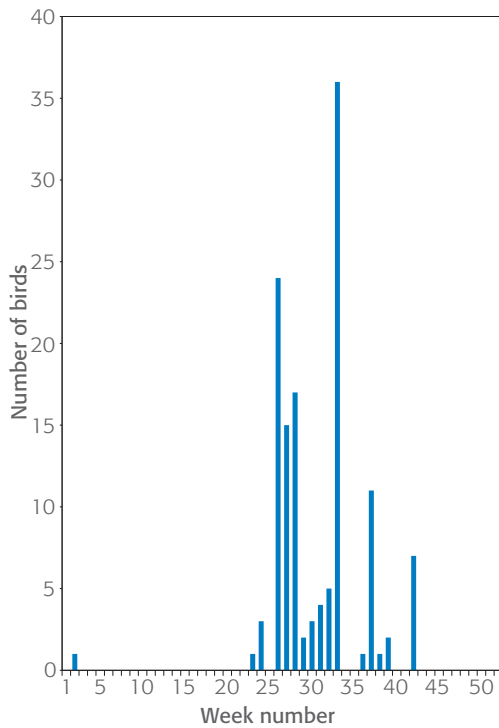
The timing of the peaks in spring and autumn arrivals on Tiree are broadly similar to those experienced elsewhere in Scotland. One might expect larger numbers of birds in autumn, as this will include both native birds reared that summer as well as returning adults. It may be that differences in the species composition of spring and autumn passage can at least partly account for this. For example spring migration was dominated by 'White Wagtails', the most numerous species in the study but far fewer of this species were recorded in autumn (Figure 3), either as a result of identification issues or a genuine difference in migratory routes taken in spring and autumn. Other species which occurred in greater numbers in spring than in autumn included Woodpigeon, Turtle Dove, House Martin, Tree Pipit, Whitethroat, Wood Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Tree Sparrow. This was also the case for House Martin, Whitethroat, Spotted Flycatcher and Tree Sparrow on North Ronaldsay and for Turtle Dove in Scotland but not for Tree Pipit and Wood Warbler on North Ronaldsay (Forrester *et al.* 2007) suggesting that these species may also have different migratory routes in spring and autumn. The annual spring passage of Woodpigeons through Tiree, although smaller, mirrors a similar spring passage in the Northern Isles (Forrester *et al.* 2007). This thin spring passage also continues through the Outer Hebrides (Outer Hebrides Bird Group 2008, Rabbits & ap Rheinallt 2010) but this west coast passage was not mentioned by Forrester *et al.* (2007). These birds are presumed to be mostly returning and overshooting Scottish breeding birds that have wintered to the south of Scotland rather than Fennoscandian breeders, since there are very few ringing records to substantiate a connection with Fennoscandia (Wernham *et al.* 2002). Unlike on the Northern Isles however, return passage in the autumn on Tiree was rare (Figure 7), highlighting the more easterly bias to Woodpigeon migration through Scotland in autumn (see Forrester *et al.* 2007).

A broader range of some 22 species were more numerous in autumn than in spring including five species that were never recorded in spring. Of the 17 species which occurred more frequently in autumn than spring, all but 'Greenland Wheatear' showed a similar pattern of occurrence on North Ronaldsay or on the Northern Isles (Forrester *et al.* 2007), although Grey Wagtail, Lesser Whitethroat and Brambling occurred far more frequently there in spring than on Tiree. The five species that were never recorded in spring included several 'drift' migrants with breeding ranges centred well to the east of the UK such as Barred Warbler, 'Siberian Chiffchaff' and Yellow-browed Warbler, which are all very rare on spring passage in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007) as well as Waxwing and Long-tailed Tit. As on Tiree (Figure 8), Waxwings are extremely rare on North Ronaldsay outwith the autumn (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The occurrence of Long-tailed Tits on Tiree in the autumn may relate to post-breeding dispersal following good breeding years on the mainland, as is also noted on North Ronaldsay but less commonly further north on Shetland, suggesting a Scottish source for these birds (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Spring and autumn arrival dates were broadly similar for most species to those from elsewhere at similar latitudes in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). However, the House Martin at Loch a' Phuill on 27 March 2005 was the earliest to date for Argyll, whilst the Spotted Flycatcher at Balinoe on 24–25 October 2012 and the Barred Warbler at Balephuill on 16 November 2012 were the latest records for either species in Argyll and were amongst the latest ever Scottish records for these species (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2007, Forrester *et al.* 2007). The pattern of regular mid-summer records of Swift (Figure 6) was similar to that on North Ronaldsay where breeding also does not occur (Forrester *et al.* 2007) and these presumably related to either non-breeding individuals or feeding birds ranging from their closest breeding colonies in mainland Argyll. The similar pattern of mid-summer arrivals for Crossbills (Figure 9) is typical summer dispersal of birds that have bred or been raised very early in the year and mirror similar arrivals in the Outer Hebrides (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Outer Hebrides Bird Group 2008). A few other species also appeared in small numbers in midsummer including singing male Whitethroats (Figure 10), which presumably had either bred or had failed to attract mates elsewhere nearby and were attempting to set up new territories. In contrast, there were no mid-summer arrivals of Whitethroats on North Ronaldsay (Forrester *et al.*



Figures 7–8. Arrivals of Woodpigeon (N=118) and Waxwing (N=103) on Tiree by week.



Figures 9–10. Arrivals of Crossbill (N=133) and Whitethroat (N = 132) on Tiree by week.



Plate 236 a–d. (a) 'White Wagtail', April 2015 (b) Red-breasted Flycatcher, October 2016 (c) Common Rosefinch, September 2016 (d) Turtle Dove, September 2016, all Tiree, Argyll © John Bowler

2007), which is more remote from traditional Scottish breeding areas. Arrivals of a Woodpigeon, a Lesser Whitethroat and six juvenile Goldcrests on 27 July 2008 and two more juvenile Goldcrests on 9 August 2008 (see Figure 5) were most unexpected and occurred during unusual foggy conditions with light easterly winds, which presumably grounded early migrants that had travelled further west than normal.

Continued bird observations on Tiree will no doubt shed further light on migration patterns on the island and indeed along the Scottish west coast. To this end, additional observer coverage on the island is always most welcome, particularly during the peak migration periods and at sites on the eastern half of the island, which is generally less well-covered than the west.

Acknowledgements

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Plate 237. Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll, July 2017. © Jim Dickson

Pied-billed Grebe breeding with Little Grebe in Argyll

D.C. JARDINE & J.M. DICKSON

Loch Feorlin nestles in the hills of mid-Argyll at a height of around 150 m above sea level (Plate 237). This mesotrophic loch has a south-west to north-east orientation and lies between an area of open sheep-walk to the north and west, and an area of coniferous, mainly Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis*, forest to the south and east. The loch is around 7 ha in area and while its depth is not known in summer around 20% of its area is covered in vegetation with the following species providing a degree of cover: Common Reed *Phragmites australis*, Club-Rush *Scirpus lacustris*, Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, White Water Lily *Nymphaea alba* and pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp.

This loch has been used by a male Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* since it was first recorded there from 30 May to at least 6 June 2014 by A.W. Lauder, N.T. Keough and S. Holloway. This was the third Argyll, and 13th Scottish, record and was assumed to be the same individual as one seen at Loch Thom, Clyde on 20–30 April 2014 and at Loch nam Feithean, North Uist, Outer Hebrides from 6 December 2013 to 19 April 2014 (Hudson *et al.* 2015). It is possible that the bird had been on the loch for some time prior to this date as the farmer, John Paterson, reported that he had heard it calling several years ago, but he did not know its identity until he was told what it was by Alan Lauder. John Paterson noted that it would leave the loch during the winter when the weather was hard and the loch frozen; he also believed it paired with a Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*.

There were no reported sightings of the bird at Loch Feorlin during 2015, but it was re-found there on 6 May 2016 when it was heard singing loudly at dawn by Duncan Cameron and Simon Lawrence. The bird, clearly a male, remained until 5 August. Lee Evans reported that it had a nest with a Little Grebe on 21 May in the central part of the reed-bed, but it is thought that this breeding attempt failed at an early stage as there were no further sightings or reports suggesting that eggs were laid or hatched.



Plate 238. Adult male Pied-billed Grebe with juvenile hybrid Pied-billed x Little Grebe, Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll, July 2017. © *Jim Dickson*



Plate 239. Adult male Pied-billed Grebe with juvenile hybrid Pied-billed x Little Grebe, Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll, July 2017. © *Jim Dickson*



Plate 240. Juvenile hybrid Pied-billed x Little Grebe, Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll, July 2017. © *Jim Dickson*



Plate 241. Juvenile hybrid Pied-billed x Little Grebe, Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll, July 2017. © *Jim Dickson*



Plate 242. Juvenile hybrid Pied-billed x Little Grebe, Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll, July 2017. © *Jim Dickson*



Plate 243. Juvenile hybrid Pied-billed x Little Grebe, Loch Feorlin, Mid-Argyll, July 2017. © *Jim Dickson*

Chronology of 2017 breeding attempt

In 2017, the male Pied-billed Grebe was first noted at Loch Feorlin on 21 January and is thought to have wintered there. On 11 May, the male was seen to be interacting with a Little Grebe, presumed to be a female, and on 14 June a chick was first seen. The chick was seen again on 28 June on its own and on 12 July being fed by the Pied-billed Grebe, when record photographs were achieved from a distance of 100 m (Plates 238–243). The chick was not seen by the authors on visits on 7 and 10 August and it was not subsequently reported by other observers, so it is not clear whether it had perished or moved away from the loch. At around this time Little Grebes were noted back in their wintering ground on the sea-lochs of Argyll, so it is possible it had dispersed from Loch Feorlin.

Description of hybrid chick

Size and structure: around 70% size of adult male, head not as large and chunky as adult male. Bill roughly the same length as adult male, but depth only c60% of adult male. Toes with large lobes.

Plumage: Forehead and crown dark brown/black, remaining head markings a very complex pattern (in places almost like camouflage patterning used on military clothing) of mainly dark brown/black and white lines and patches, but cream on nape (see photos). The feathers of the cream on the nape were longer and this area had a dark centre and was like a short 'Mohican' tuft.

Mantle, lower neck (front and back) dark brown merging into a slightly rusty dark brown on the breast and the forward flanks, caused by very short rusty tips to the feathers. The rear flanks were less rusty. Under-tail coverts very fluffy and palest immediately under the tail, merging quickly to grey and then to dark brown/black on the flanks. Belly not observed.

Upper wing: uniformly dark brown/black except for short white tips to tertials.

Under wing: underside of primaries and secondaries dark silvery grey and outer underwing coverts dark grey, but inner underwing coverts/axillaries pure white.

Bare parts: Iris pale grey, no visible eye-ring. Upper mandible dark brown/black with short pale tip and paler band at base which extended to nostril. The paler band appeared pink/flesh coloured in some light conditions, but also appeared straw yellow in others. Lower mandible dark brown/black with slightly longer pale horn tip and similar pale band at base. Slight indication of narrow paler cutting edges to both mandibles. Legs and feet black.

Discussion

It has been suggested that the Pied-billed Grebe at Loch Feorlin may be responsible for a series of sightings throughout the British Isles. Given that it was first definitively found at this site in 2014, but would have hatched in 2013 or before, and has been seen up to August 2017, it is now at least four years old. The report of the farmer that the bird was present prior to 2014 suggests it is possible that the bird seen at Salen Bay, Mull in spring 2011 by Ben Ofield and others (Hudson *et al.* 2012) was the same individual. If this is the case it could be at least seven years old.

The longest lived Pied-billed Grebe reported is a ringed bird in California which lived to an age of four years and seven months (USGS 2017). However, other small grebes have greater reported longevity: Little Grebe (17 years 6 months), Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* (13 years 1 month) and Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus* (7 years) (EURING 2014). So, it is possible that the 2011 record did involve the same bird.

The reported periods for nest construction (3–5 days before laying for Pied-billed Grebe) and incubation (23–27 days for Pied-billed Grebe, 20–21 days for Little Grebe) (Cornell Lab for



Plate 244. Adult and juvenile Pied-billed Grebe, Brazos Bend, Texas, USA, 2 April 2017. © Ian Andrews



Plate 245. Juvenile Little Grebe, Northumberland, September 2014. © Ian Fisher

Ornithology, Cramp & Simmons 1977) are consistent with the time noted between the interaction between the male Pied-billed Grebe and the Little Grebe on 11 May and the first sighting of a chick (35 days), particularly if the number of eggs laid was small. Cramp & Simmons (1977) note that Little Grebe fledglings become independent at 30–40 days and the fledging period as 44–48 days, but the age of first flight for Pied-billed Grebe is less well known (Audubon Society).

The head pattern of the chicks of Pied-billed Grebe and Little Grebe show considerable individual variation and therefore it is difficult to judge whether the hybrid is showing features of one or both (see Plates 244–245). The head pattern of the chicks of both species also changes as the chicks develop and moult out of their downy plumage into feathers. This moult appears to start on the forehead and crown and then extend over the remainder of the head. Examination of images of the young of both species suggests that the young of Pied-billed Grebes have slightly more white on the face, chin and throat.

The structure of the head and bill along with the angle of forehead and upper mandible appear to be the best ways to tell the chicks of Pied-billed Grebe and Little Grebe apart. Chicks of Pied-billed Grebe have a more sloping forehead and flatter crown, while Little Grebes have a more rounded crown and steeper forehead and a narrower base to an apparently longer bill. The hybrid chick was intermediate between the features of the normal chicks of each of the parents.

Forrester *et al.* (2007) hinted at the possibility of Pied-billed Grebe breeding in Scotland, especially as this species often remains in one locality for some time. The long-staying summer bird in the Outer Hebrides in 1983–85 became highly territorial (Evans 1994), and the bird at Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, then in breeding plumage, was reported as being very active during March (RSPB Loch of Strathbeg Annual Report 1977).

Hybridisation with Little Grebe has been observed once in England. A male Pied-billed Grebe, which had been present at Stithians Reservoir, Cornwall, or nearby, since 12 November 1992 (Rogers *et al.* 1994), paired with a Little Grebe in 1994, when two clutches were laid. The second clutch failed, but three young were reared from the first, one of which was seen there until March 1995 (Ogilvie *et al.* 1996, 1998).

There is one other reported possible occurrence of hybridisation of grebes in Scotland. In spring 1972, Eddie Maguire and Bob McMillan watched a Slavonian Grebe and Black-necked Grebe with a brood on the Dupplin Estate (Perth & Kinross), although as no obvious plumage differences were noted between the chicks and other Black-necked Grebe chicks at the site hybridisation was not confirmed (Dennis 1973).

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Plate 246. The first Oystercatcher nest recorded in the cemetery, near Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, 18 June 2007. © R. & B. Mearns

Oystercatchers nesting in a busy cemetery near Dumfries

Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* are known to nest in a variety of unusual situations (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Examples we have seen in Dumfries & Galloway include nests on the ground in building sites, on flat roofs in urban and rural habitats, in the hollowed-out tops of thick posts, on three roundabouts on the A75, in a garden rockery, and on a low branch of a large oak tree. Nevertheless, in 2007 it was a surprise to find a nest on a grave in a busy cemetery near Dumfries and to see birds nesting there for the next nine years, using at least five different graves (Plates 246–248).

The cemetery is relatively new with no graves older than 1973, those of young people sometimes decorated with nightlights, helium-filled balloons and plastic windmills. We often drove past it and would occasionally stop to watch from the car or enter the grounds. Stone chippings or natural gravel on graves provided easy places for the birds to form scrapes for eggs, and short turf between the graves offered a fertile feeding area for adults and chicks. Breeding success was not carefully monitored but five times we recorded clutches of three eggs and noticed large chicks in at least three seasons.



Plate 247. Oystercatcher nest site, near Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, 23 May 2012. © R. & B. Mearns



Plate 248. Oystercatcher nest site, near Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, 21 June 2014. © R. & B. Mearns



Plate 249. Gravestones provided useful lookout posts for Oystercatchers, near Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, 26 May 2013. © R. & B. Mearns



Plate 250. Two Oystercatcher chicks, one being fed by an adult, near Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, 26 May 2013. © R. & B. Mearns



Plate 251. Incubating adult Oystercatcher using the same grave as in 2012, near Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, 17 May 2015. Note the wreath around the sitting bird. © Edmund Fellowes



Plate 252 a–b. (a) Oystercatcher nest site, near Dumfries, Dumfries & Galloway, 1 May 2015. © R. & B. Mearns and (b) the same site on 16 May 2015 with a wreath added by a visitor. © Edmund Fellowes. This site was also used in 2012 (Plate 247).

The choice of nest site is less remarkable than the degree of disturbance that the birds tolerated year after year, especially when 250 m to the north-east there is an extensive sand and gravel quarry where other Oystercatchers, Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* have bred. Disturbance at the cemetery was intermittent but frequent, with people visiting graves during the day and most evenings, especially at weekends. When visitor pressure was highest and during grass cutting, grave digging and burials, the eggs would have been unincubated for more than an hour. The adults usually tolerated such disruptions without alarm calling and quickly returned as soon as visitors withdrew. The birds were well known locally but as far as we are aware were never interfered with, though a wreath was once placed around the eggs without harm (see Plates 251–252).

Nesting of Oystercatchers in Scottish cemeteries is not that unusual. They nest in some small rural graveyards in Highland, often on gravel paths (R. Swann pers. comm.) and have been reported from Aberdeen “at the base of a gravestone” (Duncan *et al.* 2001). An internet search also revealed photographs of a nest on a grave at Sandvoe, Shetland (Grace 2017) and nests in Lossiemouth Burial Ground (Moray & Nairn), one on bare earth between war graves (CWGC 2013) and another on gravel with no graves visible (Sharpe 2015). Overseas, they sometimes laid in the graveyard at Nesseby,

Varangerfjord, Norway, where the site was usually marked to prevent trampling (Ratcliffe 2005). There was no information on the degree of disturbance at these other sites, though the church at Nesseby is a tourist attraction.

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Ring-necked Parakeets successfully breed in Scotland for the first time

In April 2016, three adult Ring-necked Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* were observed prospecting a tree nest hole in Victoria Park, Glasgow (Clyde), the first time that the species had been reported attempting to nest in Scotland (McInerny 2016). However, young were not seen subsequently at the site in 2016, so it was suspected that breeding had not been successful. In April 2017, the three birds reappeared in Victoria Park. They were closely monitored by Susan Harris who, through daily observations, noted mating, nestlings in the tree hole on 22 May and a fledgling with an adult on 3 June (Plate 253). Subsequently, Jimmy Maxwell observed a minimum of six individuals on 10 June, with myself seeing similar numbers on 12 June of which three were young birds.

This observation represents the first confirmed breeding record of the species in Scotland.

Reference

McInerny, C.J. 2016. Ring-necked Parakeets potentially nesting in Scotland for the first time. *Scottish Birds* 36: 211–212.

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Postscript

Chris McInerny recorded 13 Ring-necked Parakeets at the breeding site in Glasgow on 15 October 2017. There were groups of nine and four birds. It is believed that this is probably the highest Scottish count of this species to date.



Plate 253. Adult male Ring-necked Parakeet with a recently fledged juvenile, Victoria Park, Glasgow, Clyde, 3 June 2017. © Susan Harris

Feeding habits and departure times of foraging Woodcock

My croft is situated on the north shore of Loch Carron, towards its seaward end. Between the south-east facing house and the shore, the closely-cropped croft land slopes down for about 75 m. Behind the house, a similar distance away, is a steep wooded bank. Further back, and to the east, are thicker plantations of pine.

On 8 January 2016, I noticed two Woodcocks *Scolopax rusticola* on the grass not far from the front of the house. I watched them in the half light as they foraged their way across the grass before taking off one by one and heading north over the house towards the woods behind [presumably to their diurnal roosting sites]. Over the following days, I grew more fascinated with certain aspects of their behaviour, and in particular the apparent regularity of their departure times. There were always one or two birds, with three on the 17th. By 23 January, I had set up a simple method of testing my newly formed hypothesis that their departure was light-related. I timed each departure and calculated how long it was before official astronomical dawn for the area, at the same time making an assessment of the general light conditions on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being heavily overcast, 7 a completely clear sky. I also tracked the direction of movement across the croft as they foraged, as this did not seem to be random. There were often up to four birds feeding, and although they stayed relatively close, it was very easy to miss one leaving in the poor light. There was no preamble to a departure - the bird was up and gone in a moment.

Birds were present until the 19 March and my first sighting for the next winter was on 1 December 2016. Over the course of the study I managed to time 56 individual departures, in a

full range of light conditions. Birds never departed other than individually. Typically, if there were more than one bird present, they departed at intervals of about one minute, occasionally longer. The 56 departure timings were made during observations on 27 mornings, with single birds present on only 12 occasions. So, on 15 mornings there were up to four birds.

For all 56 records, average departure time before dawn was 43.91 sd 4.13 minutes. I then looked at departure times relative to different light conditions. In order to give adequate datasets, I amalgamated departures in light values 1 to 3, and in light values 5 to 7 (Table 1).

A regression analysis of departure timing relative to light level is highly significant ($F = 25.8$; $df = 1 \text{ \& } 54$; $p < 0.001$) and explains a large proportion, around one third, of the overall variation (adjusted $R^2 = 31\%$).

BWP notes a study in Cornwall where Woodcock left nocturnal feeding grounds from minutes 23–57 minutes before sunrise with timing linked to cloud cover (G. Hirons quoted in Cramp & Simmons 1983).

I have just once seen a bird arrive in the evening on the neighbouring croft - exactly 45 minutes after sunset.

The second part of the study related to the way the Woodcock moved when feeding, and interactions between birds. In order to record their movements, I constructed an imaginary grid on the croft land. In total, 42 bird movements were tracked. Birds always moved more or less together. Almost invariably the movement was from west to east, and from the

Table 1. Departure times in relation to light levels.

Light level	Poor light (1–3)	Average light (4)	Good light (5–7)
Number of observations	24	16	16
Mean departure time before dawn (minutes)	40.02 sd 4.41	42.94 sd 5.57	48.12 sd 3.38
Range of departure times before dawn (minutes)	31–49	29–51	37–54

south to north. Out of the 42 records there were only two exceptions, both involving temporary backtracking. I wondered at first whether this was influenced by weather conditions, especially the prevailing south-westerly wind. I started to record wind directions and speeds, and concluded that there was no correlation. Even in strong easterly winds the movement followed exactly the same fixed pattern. I can offer no explanation for this.

When foraging, birds walked slowly, probing the pasture once or twice per second. Occasionally, they would run for a foot or two. Sometimes they stopped for up to half a minute; perhaps when feeling threatened. Whenever, I saw an individual bird run quickly for more than four or five feet, I could be sure that another bird had appeared. If more than one bird was present they would move towards each other, and always keep fairly close, within ten feet or so, but often just a couple of feet apart. However, apart from maintaining a level of proximity, I never saw any kind of overt interaction between birds. Although there were

up to four birds together, they could not be said to constitute a flock. Not only did they always depart individually, they often flew in different directions - either to the north-west towards the woods behind the house, or to the east towards the woods lying beyond the loch-side crofts.

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Ring Ouzel possibly breeding in Fife in the early 20th Century

In 1904, William Berry of Tayfield, Fife donated three locally acquired young birds to the Royal Scottish Museum (now one component of National Museums Scotland, and hereafter NMS). These were a Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*, a Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* and a Blackbird *Turdus merula*. The latter (accession number NMS.Z 1904.63.3) had been collected on 3 July 1904 at Tayfield, Newport. This 'Blackbird' remained uncritically examined in the collection for over 100 years, until Hein van Grouw from the Natural History Museum, Tring inspected all thrush skins for plumage abnormalities during a visit to NMS in December 2011. HvG suggested that the specimen was actually a young Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus*, and indeed it proved identical with another young Ring Ouzel skin in the NMS collection (Plate 254). In young Ring Ouzels, the feathers of the underparts are

dark with pale subterminal transverse bars, whereas underparts of juvenile Blackbirds have buff feathers with dark tips (Cramp 1988). The Tayfield bird has a wing length of 86 mm, indicating that it was approximately 14 days old and newly fledged (I. Simm, pers. com.).

Baxter & Rintoul (1953) wrote that the Ring Ouzel 'has not been recorded as breeding in Fife' and breeding records were similarly unknown to Smout (1986) and Elkins *et al.* (2016). Thom's (1986) reference to breeding 'sporadically in the Lomonds' is believed to relate to records from Kinross, rather than Fife.

Earlier claims of breeding in Fife were the somewhat vague statements by George Bruce (1895) in his book *The land birds in and around St Andrews*. He noted breeding at 'Priormuir, Denino and Kinaldy' though the dates



Plate 254. Juvenile Blackbird (Linlithgow, Lothian, 22 June 1992; NMS.Z 1992.117.1), the Tayfield Ring Ouzel (Fife, 3 July 1904) and juvenile Ring Ouzel (Durisdeer, Dumfries & Galloway, June 1943; NMS.Z 1970.76.1754) (from left to right). © NMS

apparently relating to these localities are June 1888, December 1892 and September 1857. The following cautionary remarks on Bruce were written by J.A. Harvie-Brown (1906) in his preface to *A Fauna of the Tay Basin and Strathmore*: “I have under several species quoted Mr George Bruce’s volume [...], exercising, however, my own judgment with regard to his accuracy, as the book is of unequal merit for the purposes of this fauna.” In the 1930s, Harvie-Brown’s library was incorporated into the library of NMS; the Bruce volume contains a number of Harvie-Brown’s comments and annotations – most of them critical. Rather pointedly, on the

first page of Bruce’s preface he had written “An absolutely silly production”.

Whatever the real value of Bruce’s claims, the specimen from Tayfield in 1904 appears to be the only firm evidence of Ring Ouzel breeding in Fife. There are hilly areas within 1–2 km of Tayfield rising to c.100 m asl, though historically Ring Ouzel was not restricted to upland habitats in Britain. For example, breeding was known in Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Norfolk and Surrey according to Holloway (1996), who also mapped it as ‘uncommon breeder’ in Fife, though without any specific details.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Hein van Grouw for drawing my attention to this skin.

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Partially white Sedge Warbler in Dumfries & Galloway

A Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* with white feathers on its head, rump and wings was caught by members of North Solway Ringing Group near Lochfoot, Dumfries & Galloway, on 14 June 2011 (Plates 255–256). The extent of wear on the flight feathers and the date of capture suggest that it was probably a one-year-old bird. What is interesting is that the two white coverts on each wing appear symmetrically on the bird; one is an inner greater covert and the other is the outermost one on both wings (Plate 255).

White feathers are the most common aberration in wild birds according to the BTO's Abnormal Plumage Survey* but Hein van Grouw of the Natural History Museum (pers. comm.) has helpfully explained that this is not solely caused by leucism. The BTO used the term leucism as an 'umbrella term' which covers many different aberrations with different causes. In leucistic birds, affected plumage lacks melanin pigment due to the cells responsible for melanin production being absent. This results in these

feathers being white, unless they contain carotenoids which may give the feather a yellow colour for example. However, this is a very rare mutation, and not the cause of the white plumage in this bird. The white feathers in this Sedge Warbler are the result of a phenomenon called progressive greying (see van Grouw 2013). The causes for this can be diverse, and most are still unclear. However, in all forms of progressive greying, the juvenile plumage is normally coloured and white feathers only develop in adult plumage. Sedge Warbler is not one of the most commonly affected species, though there are a number of striking images on the internet (magpiemick 2006, Hunt 2014, Wilson 2014). Sedge Warbler was also included on a list of species in which albinism has been recorded in the British Isles (Sage 1962). White feathers can also be caused by chromatophore (pigment cell) defects, rather than an absence of melanin-producing cells.

*www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw/about/background/projects/plumage



Plate 255. Sedge Warbler, Lochfoot, Dumfries & Galloway, June 2011. © Duncan Irving



Plate 256. Sedge Warbler, Lochfoot, Dumfries & Galloway, June 2011. © Duncan Irving

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Duncan Irving, 12 Great Eastern Drive, Glencaple, Dumfriesshire DG1 4QZ.

Revised ms accepted August 2017

Scotland's Bean Geese and the spring 2017 migration - errata

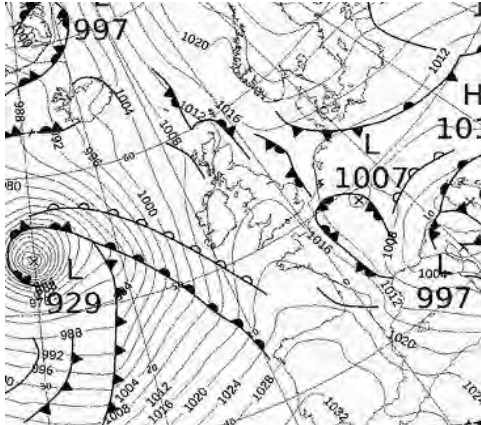


Figure 3a. Barometric chart for 6 February 2017 (00:00). Source www.wetterzentrale.de

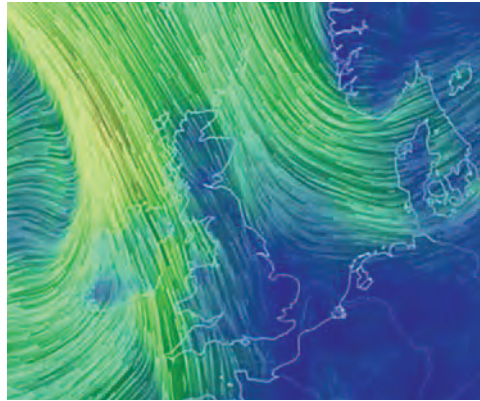


Figure 3b. Representation of surface winds 6 February 2017 (12:00). Blue, generally calm; wind shown by green/yellow lines. Source earth.nullschool.net

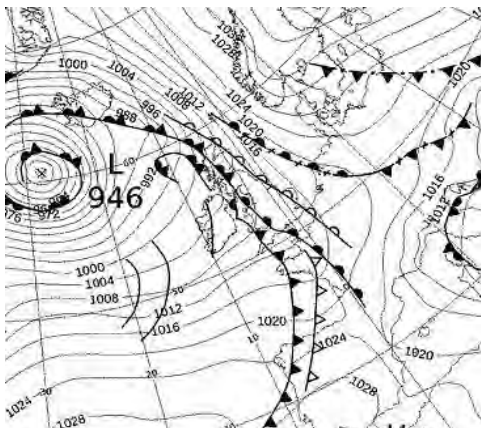


Figure 4a. Barometric chart for 7 February 2017 (00:00). Source www.wetterzentrale.de

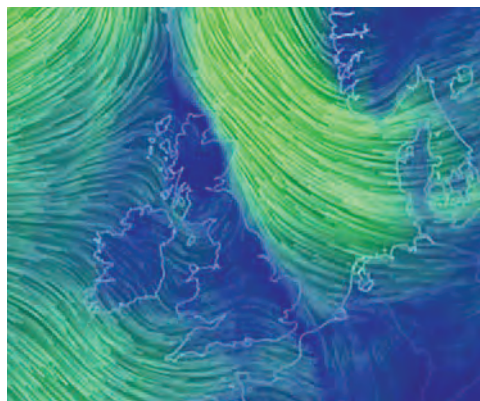


Figure 4b. Representation of surface winds 7 February 2017 (12:00). Blue, generally calm; wind shown by green/yellow lines. Source earth.nullschool.net

Some of the figures and figure captions in Mitchell *et al. Scottish Birds* 37: 221–224 contained errors. The caption for Figure 2 should read “Figure 2. Movements of *fabalis* Bean Geese with Tags 27 and 29 (solid line) from Slamannan to Denmark, 20–21 February 2017 and Tag 10 (dashed line) from Orkney to Denmark 2–3 March 2017.”

In Figures 3 and 4, all the figure captions referred to dates in March 2017, when they should have referred to the respective dates in February 2017. Although titled wrongly, the barometric charts shown in Figures 3a and 4a

were correct (they show synoptic charts for 6 and 7 February). The surface wind maps in Figures 3b and 4b were incorrect (they showed wind maps for March) and these should be replaced by two new figures from February. The corrected figures and captions are shown above:

My thanks to Norman Elkins and Clive McKay for pointing out these errors.

**Carl Mitchell, WWT, Slimbridge,
Gloucester, GL2 7BT.
Email: carl.mitchell@wwt.org.uk**



Plate 257. Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. © Jimmy Maxwell

SOC Conference

This was the Friday afternoon view of the Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry as viewed by a passing Goshawk. Delegates arrived at ground level, relieved that the rain forecast had not materialised and the autumn colours were in full splendour. This fine hotel provides spacious and comfortable surroundings and rooms offering every convenience, although at least in one case (see Plate 258) the fitments didn't really match the occupants! However having enjoyed a delicious evening meal, it was time again for everyone to gather in the conference auditorium where James Main, SOC President, welcomed us and introduced the first lecture. This took the unusual form of an armchair interview.

Flight of the Swans - Sacha Dench

Over the past 20 years, the estimated European population of Bewick's Swans has collapsed from 29,000 in 1995 to 18,100 in 2010. As in all biological changes, any number of factors may play a part. In the case of migratory birds, there may be changes in their breeding areas, their wintering areas and hazards along their migratory routes. Bewick's Swans breed in Arctic Russia and some winter in the UK.



Plate 258. Rosemary's riddle. © Gordon Riddle



Plate 259. In the armchairs - Sacha Dench with Ian Bainbridge. © Jimmy Maxwell

Sacha Dench, an adventurer with an astonishing CV of death-defying projects, hoped to follow the autumn migration route flying a microlight, a powered parachute wing. The presentation this evening consisted of an informal discussion with Ian Bainbridge. It was like two friends sharing reminiscences of a hair-raising holiday adventure.

In the desperately bleak area around Archangel, she established what appeared to be friendly contacts with local engineers and naturalists. The use of a microlight seemed hazardous, not least in the difficulties of escaping from the equipment in the event of losing power and falling into the sea. One particularly hard landing resulted in a dislocated knee which required hospital treatment and eventually this necessitated a change of transport.

The expedition was recorded more formally in the 'Flight of the Swans' film which won the Campaign of the Year in 2017. The judges commented on its high profile and international reach.

As usual on the first evening, the quiz now followed. This year Edmund Fellowes had concocted a varied array of testing questions for us. Most concerned identification of bird species, but in addition this time, we were invited to supply captions to suitably chosen action shots.

This interaction got the audience really loosened up and there were many and varying responses and much laughter. A good way to get the conference going and Edmund is to be congratulated for his ingenuity and hard work.

Saturday morning

Four walks were on offer this year - the usual Moulin Moor search for Blackcocks with David Jarrett, a local walk including Loch Faskally with Ben Darvill, Loch Moraig with David Merrie and the kindly offered chance to explore Cluny House Gardens by Wendy Mattingley. Here, a Red Squirrel posed beautifully for David Palmar. Several delegates explored the Tummel salmon ladder and dam where several fish were on the move.

Ivan Draper



Plate 260. Red Squirrel, Cluny House. © David Palmer

After lunch, the first lectures of the day commenced...

Arctic Terns in Northumberland - why are they here and what do they get up to when they are not - Dr Chris Redfern

Chris gave us a fascinating insight into the lifestyle of the Arctic Tern and how advances in technology have revolutionised the retrieval of data adding immensely to our understanding of this globe-trotting species. He began by describing the study areas on the Farne Islands where 100+ pairs of terns breed in the courtyard. They are seemingly not put off at all by the proximity of so many visitors. Lack of ground predators and a good local food supply are key factors in the breeding success there.

The terns are very faithful to their nest sites and this is a critical factor in making the study possible. Being an oceanic species, ringing returns were not frequent, but using geolocators and being able to recapture birds when they return to the Farnes, have shed light on their lives outside the breeding season. Data from the geolocators has given detailed information on their migration routes down to

Antarctica. The retrieval rate is very good, for example in 2015 of the 28 birds fitted with the devices, 23 were recovered.

Chris was able to follow the fortunes of individual birds in great detail. 'Green 82' travelled down the west coast of Africa, round the Cape, crossing the Indian Ocean to Australasia then down to the Antarctic continent - then returned by the same route. He was able to pinpoint the main feeding areas as they wintered round the coast utilising open areas in the ice cover called polynyas. The Farne Islands' birds were widely distributed round the continent.

The work has also revealed that the birds can make substantial overland movements for example flying directly from the Farne Islands to the Irish Sea. Another study has shown that remarkably, Arctic Terns cross the Andes, a trip of over 1,000 km in both spring and autumn. Chris illustrated perfectly the importance of the new technology in this stimulating and well-presented talk and we look forward to further revelations as the fieldwork progresses.

Gordon Riddle



Plate 261. Chris Redfern. © Jimmy Maxwell

Tales of the Unexpected - Chris Hewson

The talk covered the routes taken by Cuckoos, Swifts and Nightingales in their migrations from the UK to Africa and back. These species were chosen because they all show marked population declines in the UK. Most of the talk covered work on the Cuckoo, which was described as a model species. It has a declining population, is the largest 'small' nocturnal migrant and its migration is poorly understood. There has been only one recovery from conventional ringing, of a bird ringed in the UK and recovered in central Africa. The work centred on using tags attached to the birds. Geolocators which record time and light levels have been used but the birds have to be re-caught to retrieve the data. Miniaturisation has allowed the development of solar powered tags which transmit data via satellite thus obviating the need to recapture the birds.

Male Cuckoos were caught using mist nets, a stuffed female and female calls, and birds were tagged from nine locations in the UK - Skye and the Trossachs in Scotland, Tregaron in Wales and six locations across southern England. Birds from all locations apparently went first to northern Italy and then diverged. Those from

Scotland and Wales took an easterly route across the Sahara while the more southerly birds from England took a westerly route across Europe and then Spain. Those following the more westerly route showed a lower survival rate than those following the easterly route across the Sahara. Most of the excess mortality occurred in Europe. The decreasing rainfall in southern France and Spain is a possible cause. This difference in mortality combined with data from the Bird Atlases provided the first direct evidence that conditions encountered on migration affect breeding populations. After taking different routes to get there, the birds reunited on the wintering grounds in Western Congo. Interestingly, the birds leave and arrive within days of one another.

Alistair Duncan

Now a coffee and the chance to visit the various displays on offer. Organisations were represented by SOC, BTO, RSPB Scotland, JNCC and FIBOT. Lovely jewellery from Joanna Thomson and photographic excellence from Eric McCabe and David Palmar were joined by Second Nature books, Viking Optical and the Wader Quest charity with also a visual reminder display of the Isle of May young birders. The afternoon continued with the final lecture...



Plate 262. Chris Hewson. © Jimmy Maxwell

Osprey Migration: from rings to GSM - Roy Dennis

Roy began by highlighting the growth of Scotland's Osprey breeding population from the initial Swedish birds that colonised Speyside in the 1960s to the tremendous advance in technology in later years. In those early days it was a question of protecting the nests, the birds remaining unringed. The story developed with an increasing population and the eventual introduction of colour-ringing. This revealed the birds' winter quarters as being in West Africa, where Roy found only adults present when visiting the region in 1977 - the result of young birds being banished to suboptimal habitats. By 1999, the first satellite transmitters were able to determine the actual tracks of migrants. These showed the deviations birds made due to poor weather *en route*, with some being lost at sea. In 2007, a bird named 'Logie' was fitted with the first GPS and followed to West Africa, flying south for



Plate 263. Roy Dennis (left) with Melvin Morrison. © Jimmy Maxwell

over 5,000 km at 35 km/hour and photographed in winter quarters! Adults hurry to return to their favourite wintering site since it is familiar, with plenty of food. The average flight duration of adults is 22 days, but juveniles take 45 days.

Roy described the sequence of events at a successful nest in the Scottish breeding range, which enjoys 20 hours of daylight and provides plenty of fish. The adults raise the young most successfully if the female is aggressive and attentive, and her mate is a successful provider and later finds a good wintering site. The female leaves first, allowing the male to feed the young until they depart individually.

Considerable weight gains are necessary before departure, with a mainly overland route via Biscay; fewer cross the sea on the spring return. Some migrants are drifted off course by adverse winds and migration is partly nocturnal in a few. The fitting of more advanced satellite tags has given researchers added detail such as speed, altitude and orientation as frequently as every minute. Climbing, gliding and soaring take up 80% of flying time overland, but much less over the sea. Juveniles are more prone to drift in cross winds, when easterlies push them out to sea. Altitude data show that flight over the Atlas Mountains occurs up to 3 km. Dangers during the spring return can vary from flooding, when fish are difficult to find, to arriving late to find

their territory or mate usurped. The greater the population in the breeding area, the more likely are fighting, takeovers or even death. An increasing number of Ospreys now winter within southern Europe.

Roy showed that colour-ringing remains important, as individuals can be identified in the field. Time taken in checking breeding sites maintains good relations with landowners and hunters, while overseas contacts have led to re-introductions. The involvement of schools, both at home and in the wintering area, teaches children the value of conservation - Roy's overwhelming aim, and one which he conveyed successfully to his captivated audience.

Norman Elkins

The 81st SOC Annual General Meeting

President James Main opened proceedings by dealing with the 80th AGM minutes. There were no corrections and no matters arising. He then thanked all the contributors to the Annual Report, which was adopted subject to a minor correction.

In the Annual Accounts, Andrew Thorpe, Honorary Treasurer, explained that for the year 2016–17 there had been a surplus of £49,000. It was a good year and assets stood at £1,500,000. Investments were showing a healthy gain and were proving a valuable source of income.

Special mention was made of the fine legacy of £20,000 left to the Club by well-known Ayrshire SOC member Duncan Watt. The 200 Club had returned a considerable profit, thanks of course to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe but after many successful years it had been decided to wind it up. Much thought had gone into the raising of subscriptions and it was seen that this change had not adversely affected membership.

A Finance Committee has been formed this year which will consider issues such as budgeting how to treat legacies and also examine alternative funding solutions. Twenty applicants have been interviewed for the position of Finance Officer and seven remain for the final selection. The new person will have a

broader role than the present book-keeper, Jean Torrance, and will be involved in matters such as investments advice, etc. There were no questions concerning the Accounts.

Current SOC Council changes see the election of a new member in Will Cresswell and the retiring member, Alison Creamer was thanked for all her work. Thanks were also given to Honorary Secretary David Heeley who has agreed to continue in post and Independent Examiner, Sandy Scotland, who will carry on in that role.

Annual Conference Dinner and Dance

The dinner as usual was a pleasurable experience much due to the fine waitering service in this hotel. In fact, the serving staff throughout the weekend were remarkable for their careful attention and unfailing courtesy. Alba Ceilidh Band finished the evening off with a foot-tapping extravaganza of mainly group dances which kept people on the floor and sent all the more ancient spectators off to bed with the tin-whistle still ringing in their ears.

Sunday morning opened with the first of four lectures...

Demographic Drivers of Population Change in African Migrant Birds - Catriona Morrison

For migrant species, the drivers of population changes may be on breeding grounds, passage routes and/or wintering grounds. We now have abundance data for UK breeding birds over the past 20 years, many of which are declining, but not everywhere.

Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher and Cuckoo have declined greatly, whereas the Garden Warbler has declined less and the Whitethroat has increased recently.

In the 1960s and 70s the biggest declines were in species migrating to the Sahel, such as Sedge Warbler and Whitethroat, probably linked to declines in rainfall there.

Recent declines in the humid zone species such as the Tree Pipit and Cuckoo, remain unexplained.



Plate 264. Catriona Morrison. © Jimmy Maxwell

Within Britain, species such as Chiffchaff and Redstart are increasing in Scotland by five times as fast as in England, whereas others, House Martin, Garden Warbler and Willow Warbler, are increasing in Scotland but decreasing in England.

The Willow Warbler has been used as a model for exploring drivers of these spatial differences in population trends.

After years of population decline (driven by poor survival rates), recovery is faster and stronger in Scotland than it is in England. Modelling shows that recovery in England should be achievable with only moderate increases in productivity.

Studies of sex ratios suggest that in the small fragmented populations of the south-east, populations are male biased and some individuals remain unpaired. This suggests that we should focus conservation actions on areas capable of supporting large sustainable populations.

David Palmar

Cyprus Wheatears and Geolocators: how does migration change with age - Robert Patchett

Robert explained how tracking has been biased towards larger birds due to the size of the available weight tags. Technology has improved, with 0.6 grams tags available which are 4% of body weight and therefore suitable for the Cyprus Wheatears. The tags collect information on light and so the length of days can be calculated, as well as an accurate clock. Tracking juveniles is more complex than adults because



Plate 265. Rob Patchett. © Jimmy Maxwell

of their lower survival rates and it is difficult to recapture the birds. The wheatears eat insects and are ground nesting. The female lays eggs in early May and incubation is for two weeks.

The Cyprus Wheatear is of course endemic to Cyprus and has a stable population. The field work for the study was undertaken in April. The site was the Trudos Mountains, an area designated as a National Park. The terrain has pines and junipers with rocky outcrops. The area is 200 m in altitude and in winter is used as a ski resort.

The study expects a juvenile's first migration to be slower and less direct, possibly with a period where the birds search for a suitable non-breeding site. Robert expects their subsequent autumn migration to be quicker, more direct and to a site they found on their first migration. At this moment this is educated guesswork until the project has gained another couple of seasons' data.

Gillian Herbert

Where can seabird tracking take marine conservation? - Linda Wilson

Linda Wilson used information from the RSPB's tracking programme to show how knowledge of seabird movements during the breeding season can reveal where the important foraging areas are and where birds seem to be in trouble. The UK's importance for seabirds has been described by David Attenborough as the '12th Wonder of the World', particularly for species such as Great Skua and Gannet. However, seabirds are the fastest declining group of birds

in the world, with Scotland seeing a halving in numbers of breeding individuals since 1986. The many new problems for the birds include introduced ground predators, climate change, by-catch of birds in fishing nets and potential killing or displacement by marine windfarms.

In recent decades, tracking devices have become much smaller and can now be used on most seabirds, giving locations accurate to about 20 m, and allowing the collection of the large number of data points required to really establish the main foraging areas.

Tracking devices also have the advantage over old fashioned ship-based or aerial surveys of feeding birds in that each bird can be linked with its breeding colony. Results have shown that many foraging birds now have to travel much further than previously thought, with Guillemots from Fair Isle making trips of up to 340 km. Distances vary greatly between colonies. Whereas Fair Isle Razorbills were travelling up to 300 km, those breeding on Colonsay were generally foraging within 30 km. 'Project Puffin' has shown that birds breeding at Hermaness travel large distances and are bringing in very small fish for their chicks, in contrast to those breeding on the Shiant Isles which are foraging closer and are catching plenty of fully-grown sandeels.

Tracking studies will provide an invaluable basis for designating new Marine Protected Areas or revising the Scottish National Marine Plan.

R. Hissett



Plate 266. Linda Wilson. © Jimmy Maxwell

Range-wide fitness consequences of intra-population migration strategies in Sanderling - Jeroen Reneerkens

Sanderling breed in North-east Greenland. It is vital they arrive early because the breeding season is so short (in June there is still snow on the ground!). The earlier the birds arrive, the more chance they have of mating multiple times. A Sanderling chick hatches in mid-July, weighing around 7–8 grams. At only one to two months old, young birds can be seen in Orkney, so they have to grow fast and put on weight to make the flight.

Jeroen, working collaboratively with researchers in other countries, has been colour-ringing Sanderling in many locations. Colour-ringing is a powerful technique as it involves low effort, but can produce a massive volume of data. Using colour rings, Sanderling from the single breeding location in Greenland have been found to winter in multiple locations stretching from Orkney to southern Africa.

Two wintering locations, Netherlands and Ghana, have similar day lengths. In Netherlands, the birds eat soft-bodied polychaetes and in Ghana they eat small shellfish. In Ghana, the

beaches are covered with the small shellfish and, although the energy content of the polychaetes in the Netherlands is much higher, birds have to spend much more time foraging. Birds in Ghana spend more time resting. This would suggest wintering in a tropical area is more favourable.

However, it's been established that survival is much higher in Sanderling wintering in European sites, such as Orkney, the Netherlands and Portugal. Survival is related to the timing of migration through Iceland, which is the last stop-over before Greenland. Birds wintering in tropical locations, such as Ghana and Mauritania, migrate much later through Iceland. Jeroen hypothesised that tropical areas have very high food abundance in winter which makes the site seem favourable. However, Sanderling deplete their food resource so they leave later because they have a low fuelling rate and not enough weight to migrate.

Alison Creamer

President James Main now began to sum up the conference proceedings. One of his very pleasant duties was to present the SOC Branch Awards. This year these well-earned accolades were earned by Colin Corse (Orkney), Stewart Neilson (Fife), Dr Richard Vernon (Ayrshire) and Dr Adam Watson (NE Scotland). Congratulations to you all.

The raffle was largely pre-drawn to save time and Wendy Hicks announced the lucky winners. This year the amount raised was £608. Grateful thanks was accorded to the many prize contributors with special mention made of Grant Arms Hotel for its generous DB&B voucher and Forth Wild for the trip for 10 people out to the Bass Rock.

With such a successful conference, there were of course very many people to thank and James Main took pleasure in doing just that. It then only remained for him to wish everyone a pleasant trip home in the unbelievably continuing sunshine.

Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 267. Jeroen Reneerkens. © Jimmy Maxwell

NEWS AND NOTICES

2018 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

Saturday 17 March, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), Barony Campus, Dumfries. Programme and booking information included with this issue or visit www.the-soc.org.uk

Waterston House

Art exhibitions

Darren Woodhead: showing until 10 January 2018
Kalamkari Textiles: 13 January to 14 February
Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA): 17 February to 4 April



Plate 268. Piece from Kalamkari Textiles.

Optics Demo Day

Sunday 13 May, 10am–4pm, Free event
 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

Branch updates

Fife recorder: Graham Sparshott Tel: 07770225440 Email: grahamsp@aol.com
 Council welcomes Graham, an experienced observer, to the role of Fife area recorder, and thanks outgoing recorder Malcolm Ware for his service over the past six years.

Duncan Watt Legacy

Council wishes to acknowledge the generous legacy of £20,000 left to the Club by Ayrshire SOC member, Duncan Watt, who sadly passed away in August 2016 (*Scottish Birds* 36(4): 304–305).

Legacies help SOC to build exciting new Scottish birding app

Ever wondered where to see birds on your holidays in Scotland, or even in your local area? Work will be starting soon on an exciting development for Scottish birding - a guide to the top birding sites, in the form of a free app for mobile devices - and you can help!

This unique app will bring Scotland's birds to new generations of birders and will help members of the public, complete beginners and experts alike to discover the best places to see and enjoy birds around the country. The app will reach people who would never seek out a printed site guide as well as serving the needs of experienced birders. Free for mobile phones and tablets, it is hoped the app will reach out to complete beginners who don't know where to start and, especially attract younger people.

The project fulfils many of the Club's aims, particularly educational, and crucially, the app will allow the Club to reach entirely new domestic and international audiences on an unprecedented scale. Importantly, it is being made possible with the help of money from legacies given to the SOC.

The app will show maps of birding sites, together with access information and the likely species of interest in each season. Maps of the distribution of species on the Scottish List, drawn from *The Birds of Scotland*, will be included. A selection of recent sightings at each site may also be built in.

The project will be led by a small team including its editor, Martin Cook, SOC Recorder for Moray & Nairn, author of *The Birds of Moray & Nairn*, and joint editor of *The Breeding Birds of North-East Scotland*.

The success of the project will depend on the assistance of the SOC membership and, in the New Year, Martin will be approaching SOC Local Recorders and Branches to help him to identify volunteers to compile site information within each area.

This app will be a birding first. There's nothing like it out there and it will enable the SOC to serve birders throughout Scotland, both resident and visitors, as well as connecting to those tentatively setting out on their first birding adventures.

Alan Knox



Plate 270. Rosemary Davidson was presented with a bouquet of flowers to celebrate 50 years' membership of the Edinburgh Photographic Society by Mike Caithness, 14 April 2010. © Neil Scott/EPS

Rosemary Davidson

Joan Rosemary Davidson died on 24 September 2017 - two years short of her 90th birthday. Rosemary was a long-term and loyal supporter of the SOC and the Lothian Branch; she was a member of the LSOC Committee from 1994 to 2002. She was a regular attender at meetings and conferences and had a reputation as a good bird spotter on outings. She was also a keen photographer (Plate 270). Rosemary volunteered at SOC Headquarters for many years starting at Regent Terrace through to Waterston House where she volunteered every week without fail (apart from occasional trips to Northumberland to see family).

Rosemary's dedication to the Club was recognised when she was awarded the SOC Branch Recognition Award in 2014.

Doreen Main



Plate 269. Early mock-up of one of the screens for the new birding site app the SOC is developing.

New: Mammal Atlas of North-East Scotland and the Cairngorms

Recently published, with financial assistance from the SOC NE Scotland Branch, this excellent tetrad atlas covers all the mammals of the area with photographs, maps and detailed text. There is even a section on *Homo sapiens*. The editorial team was led by SOC Local Recorder Nick Littlewood. 183 pages, A4 format; ISBN 978-1-5262-0669-5. Very good value at just £15, available from www.nesbrec.org.uk/mammal-atlas and various bookshops.

A new website for SOC

If you've visited the Club's website recently you'll have noticed it has a completely new look!

Over the last year, we had been having repeated problems when trying to update and add new content to the 'old' site that many of you will be familiar with. Eventually, it got to the point where we were unable to add any new pages without the site corrupting and crashing. Initially, we were hopeful that it could be repaired, however after extensive consultation with numerous developers, it became clear that the best way forward would be to build a new website and carry over the content from the previous one.

The Club capitalised on the opportunity to give our online profile a completely fresh look and to optimise the website for mobile and tablet users, as well as making it fully secure and compliant; all basic requirements and features of websites today.

The new site should prove easier to navigate with the addition of a 'mega menu' display and a working search facility. The home page also displays the most recent content to be added, making it easier to see what's new on the website and to keep abreast of Club news and activities. It continues to enable you to book a conference place, renew your membership or to send in an enquiry.

The site is peppered with photographic images from the renowned and multi award-winning nature photographer, Laurie Campbell as well as being graced with artwork by top wildlife artist and Swarovski/*Birdwatch* Artist of the Year



2009, Darren Woodhead. Scotland's birds are beautifully brought to life across many pages.

We hope you're enjoying using the new site and if you haven't visited yet, do take a look at www.the-soc.org.uk. If you have any comments or queries about our new look, please get in touch with Jane at jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk

Jim Dickson - a new member of SBRC

SBRC welcomes Jim Dickson as a new member of the committee, replacing John Bowler. Jim brings much knowledge, being the Local Recorder for Argyll for many years, Chairing the Argyll Birds Record Committee, and having found and seen many rare and scarce birds in Argyll and Scotland.

SBRC would like to acknowledge its gratitude to John Bowler for his work over the period of his tenure. John has contributed a great deal to SBRC, and we wish him well for the future.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC

Hen Harrier Days, 5–6 August 2017

SOC was delighted to be represented by local members at both the Loch Leven and Highland Hen Harrier Day events this year, on the 5th and 6 August respectively. With the aim of celebrating and raising awareness of the plight of the Hen Harrier in Scotland, both events drew a fantastic crowd and event-goers were able to listen to talks and presentations from keynote speakers and browse stands from organisations united in improving the fortunes of this magnificent raptor.

Up North, Highland Branch members Carol James and Carol Miller manned the SOC stand, ably assisted by Branch Secretary, Kathy Boniface (Plate 271). The small display of feathers and skulls on show proved popular with attendees and let participants test out their bird knowledge! Central Scotland Branch member, Eilidh McNab kindly flew the flag for the SOC at Loch Leven with many people stopping by to find out more about the Club. Council wishes to thank all those involved in facilitating SOC's presence at these important events.

Corrections to *Scottish Birds* 37(3)

Page 213, second paragraph: the scientific name for American Mink should be *Neovison vison*.

Pages 222–223. See pages 322 of this issue for corrections to Figures 2–4.

Page 243, upper right, the scientific name for the 'St Kilda Mouse' should be *Apodemus sylvaticus hirstensis*.

Page 274, caption to Plate 215: the mention of Iceland Gull should be deleted. The editors apologise to the author for introducing this error.

Thanks to eagle-eyed Colin McLeod and Eric McCabe.

Following on from the reference to Mink above, the editors have decided to add to their advice to contributors, see www.the-soc.org.uk/advice-to-contributors. For English and scientific names of UK mammals, please refer to the Mammal Society's website at www.mammal.org.uk/species-hub/uk-mammal-list.



Plate 271. Carol James (left) and Kathy Boniface at the SOC stand, Highland Hen Harrier Day, Boat of Garten, 6 August 2017. © Carol Miller



Plate 272. Great Spotted Woodpecker in 'frozen' mode, Duddingston, Lothian, 8 October 2016. © David McNee

Great Spotted Woodpecker behaviour

D. MCNEE

Recently one morning my wife noticed something unusual on our back garden trellis and asked me what it was. Looking closely, we saw that it was a Great Spotted Woodpecker. This in itself was unusual as we had never seen one in our garden before, and even more unexpected was that it appeared to be frozen to the spot. The only sign of movement was that its eye was blinking. It remained in this position for some 10 minutes.

It was positioned next to our feeders and also to a large Firethorn bush. During this time the area was very quiet with, unusually, no other birds around. After 10 minutes the resident House Sparrows appeared out of the Firethorn bush and at this point the woodpecker looked around for a short while and then flew away.

The sparrows in our garden, who are quite rowdy, disappear into this bush when a Sparrowhawk comes by and so it appeared that this might be what happened to make the woodpecker 'freeze'. It seemed that 'playing dead' could be the woodpecker's defence strategy when threatened by an avian predator, which would make sense when on a tree but not perhaps the best idea when sitting on top of a trellis! It seems Sparrowhawks react to movement when hunting and in this case freezing appeared to work for the woodpecker.

Searching later on the internet, we came across an interesting photograph showing a Sparrowhawk perched on a post with a Great Spotted Woodpecker clinging to the post below it - apparently the Sparrowhawk never noticed it and flew off (Fuller 2010).

Reference

Fuller, R. 2010. Now, where DID that woodpecker go? Bird plays hide and seek with sparrowhawk. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1283205/Now-DID-woodpecker-Sparrowhawk-fails-spot-prey-nervous-bird-hides-below.html

David McNee

Field Note: a new use for old nests

J. MAXWELL

The habit of re-using the nests of other species is well established in the world of birds. For example used nests in trees and cliff ledges such as Buzzard and Raven are often used by Peregrine merely as a secure base in which to lay their eggs. With small passerines, various types of old nest are often used to provide stable sites for their own particular structures. Wrens normally have to find some sort of cavity for their domed nests - a gap in a crumbling wall, the shelter of an upturned tree root or, in this case (Plate 273), well-concealed in a gap in this lime tree growth. The example in Plate 274, sent to us by David Merrie, is a little different. This shows the use by a Wren of an old Swallow nest relying solely on the shallow mud cup for its support. This might indicate a cock's nest used for roosting or a nest possibly among several which he has built for the female but that she has not chosen - there would have been an interior feather lining which she would normally have added before laying a clutch.

Spotted Flycatchers will usually take advantage of any level hollow in which to place their neat open nest, like this one (Plate 275a) which uses the espalier growth on a garden wall. However they will also re-use an old nest, in this case again that of a Swallow (Plate 275b). I photographed it in the early eighties and since then have seen one or two using a Blackbird's nest. Spotted Flycatchers normally place their nest well above head height giving them easier access to their prey of flying insects.

In the last example, from David Abraham, Plates 275c-d again feature a Wren. This time it utilises the discarded nest of a Long-tailed Tit. There must have been many for it to choose from as the Long-tailed Tit nests very early and nearly all the initial nests are predated. Depending on the predator, the domed structure often survives almost intact and in this case the Wren has moved in to construct its moss-dominated nest



Plate 273. Typical Wren nest site, Baron's Haugh, Clyde. May 2015. © Jimmy Maxwell



Plate 274. Wren's nest on an old Swallow's nest, Fungarth, Dunkeld, Perth & Kinross, March 2016. © David Merrie



Plates 275 a–d (above). a) Spotted Flycatcher on the nest, Perth & Kinross, June 2012 © Jimmy Maxwell. b) Spotted Flycatcher's nest on an old Swallow's nest, Hamilton, Clyde, June 1981 © Jimmy Maxwell. c) Wren's nest in an old Long-tailed Tit's nest, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, June 2017. © David Abraham. d) Wren bringing food for the young, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, June 2017. © David Abraham.

inside. Although not a solid structure, the tit's nest is immensely flexible, being woven throughout with spider silk which binds the materials into a strong durable texture. Who knows, perhaps the Wren also chose this type of nest due to the camouflage it would gain from the original lichen-covered surface?

If you have any photographic examples of similar re-using of old nests, please send them in to us for the interest of our readers. Ed.

Jimmy Maxwell
Email: jimmy.maxwell100@gmail.com



Plate 276. Water Pipit, Barns Ness, East Lothian, 1 April 2013. © Stuart Gillies

Photo ID spot: Water Pipit

S. GILLIES

The identification of Water Pipit is well covered in current field guides and family guides, but due to the increase in records and unprecedented photographic opportunities, I felt that a brief photo identification spot would be worthwhile to aid observers unfamiliar with this interesting species.

In a Scottish context, the first accepted sighting was at Aberlady in 1968, with further singles or a few birds recorded almost annually since the 1980s. Subsequently, the Water Pipit has become a scarce winter visitor in Scotland, mainly south of the Forth/Clyde estuaries. Lothian accounts for almost half of all Scottish records followed by Ayrshire with about a quarter.

At least some of the rise in records may be attributed to increased observer knowledge of identification criteria, field experience and, conjecturally, a rise in interest among birders following the split from Rock and Buff-bellied Pipits by the BOURC in 1983!

Of note, the birds wintering and seen on passage in Scotland tend to be found on the coast in association with Rock Pipits rather than the expected wintering habitat of inland marsh and cress beds. This behaviour has also been noted in Northumberland where the preferred wintering habitat is similar i.e. sandy beaches giving way to a rocky littoral with favoured feeding areas often flushed with fresh water.



Plate 277. Water Pipit, Barns Ness, East Lothian, 1 April 2013. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 278. 'Scandinavian Rock Pipit', Barns Ness, East Lothian, 13 March 2017. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 279. Rock Pipit, Barns Ness, East Lothian, 30 January 2017. © Stuart Gillies

The Water Pipit is also a rare example of south to north winter migration in the Northern Hemisphere as our birds are presumed to originate in the mountains of Southern Europe.

In this short article, I would like to use photographs to help those observers less familiar with the main identification features of Water Pipit to be able to pick them out with confidence from their close relative the Rock Pipit.

Water Pipits generally arrive in Scotland from October and leave by early to mid-April. Here, I will concentrate mainly on winter plumage, as the birds tend to moult extensively into the very different summer plumage (Plates 276–277) from around mid-March when there is a real possibility of confusion with some

Scandinavian (*littoralis*) Rock Pipits (Plate 278), which can look very similar.

It is interesting to note that the bird shown in Plates 276–277 was ringed in Lothian and returned to the same area the following winter.

General impression: in my experience, the first sign of a Water Pipit at distance is of a very pale bird. The underparts are generally white or slightly off-white and the streaking is mainly confined to the breast giving a much brighter and cleaner impression than Rock Pipit.

The upperparts are usually a warm brown colour unlike the grey to olive range found in Rock Pipit (Plate 279). Usually there is a prominent, pale supercilium (though not always, see Plate 282).



Plate 280. Water Pipit, Barns Ness, East Lothian, 25 January 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 281. Water Pipit, Barns Ness, East Lothian, 25 January 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 282. Water Pipit (bird 1), Skateraw, East Lothian, 30 January 2017. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 283. Water Pipit (bird 2), Skateraw, East Lothian, 2017. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 284. Water Pipit (bird 3), White Sands Bay, East Lothian, 25 February 2017. © Norman Milligan

Upon closer inspection, a good suite of features should make identification relatively straightforward. Most birds I have seen have a warm brown crown (some with greyish cast) with prominent supercilium as above. The crown is generally the same colour as the nape (although winter birds can show greyish nape) and mantle (the latter being largely unstreaked cf. Meadow Pipit). The colour of the rump and upper tail coverts are invariably a warm brown, which is, in my experience, diagnostic. The two covert wing bars are paler and more obvious than in Rock Pipit. The outer tail feathers are pure white and are usually obvious in flight (*littoralis* Rock Pipit can have white on the outer tail, but look at other details). Leg colour is variable, typically a dark reddish brown (almost identical to Rock Pipit in winter). The bill is relatively long and strong (as in Rock Pipit) with a yellowish base to lower mandible - although, again, this feature is variable (Plates 280–281).

In terms of general habits, Water Pipits tend to be more wary and cautious of human presence than Rock Pipits in my experience. They will loosely associate with feeding Rock but can be very aggressive (territorial) towards them at times.

To my ear, the call is very similar to that of Rock Pipit, but it is said to be distinguishable to the experienced ear.

With at least three individuals wintering along a short stretch of East Lothian coast in 2016/17, an excellent opportunity presented itself to illustrate some of the variation between individuals. Two of the individuals could be observed loosely associating at Skateraw and the mouth of the nearby Dry Burn. One of these birds was notable for its very weak supercilium, giving it a very plain-headed appearance but was otherwise typical in its remaining plumage features (Plate 282). The second bird was easily recognised in having a greyish cast to the crown and nape and prominent white tip to the tail and more extensive streaking on the belly (Plate 283). A third individual, which I would describe as 'typical' was observed at White Sands Bay (Plate 284).

At the time of writing (early March 2017), Water Pipits and *littoralis* Rock Pipits are starting their moult into breeding plumage. Compare Plates 278–279 to help with separating these forms at this time of year.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Norman Milligan for pictures and discussions.

Stuart Gillies, Livingston.
Email: stuart@vikingoptical.co.uk



Plate 285. Secured ground. © Carry Ackroyd

The Society of Wildlife Artists and an exhibition at Waterston House

J. THRELFALL

It is entirely fitting that the Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA) is exhibiting a selection of members' work in The Donald Watson Gallery at Waterston House, from 17 February to 4 April 2018. Donald was a founder member of the Society and next year marks the centenary of his birth.

In the late 1950s, the original work of wildlife artists was not readily available to the general public despite the growing interest in natural history. With the formation of a Society in mind, Robert Gillmor and Eric Ennion, with enthusiastic support from Peter Scott and Keith Shackleton, organised an *Exhibition of Contemporary Bird Painters* which opened at Reading Art Gallery in 1960. This exhibition then toured provincial galleries throughout the following 12 months to much widespread interest and acclaim. The idea of a Society

developed further, inviting Donald and John Busby to join, and the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Wildlife Artists was opened by James Fisher in August 1964.

Today, the Society has over 70 members, is affiliated to the Federation of British Artists and stages a large annual exhibition each autumn in the prestigious Mall Galleries in London showcasing the very best of contemporary art inspired by the natural world. In 1990, the SWLA became a registered charity seeking not only to generate an appreciation of and an enthusiasm for the natural world but also to advance the interest, education and concern of the public in the conservation of wildlife. As such the SWLA undertakes various activities to support and promote arts based objectives of other conservation and wildlife charities.

In 2005, the Aig an Oir (At the Edge) project, a collaboration between the SWLA and Forest Enterprise Scotland, culminated in a beautiful book that celebrated the Atlantic oakwoods of the west coast. These rare temperate rainforests are an internationally important habitat for plants and wildlife yet also contain a rich cultural and historical heritage.

More recently, the RSPB has invited the SWLA to create an artistic record of the development of a landmark new reserve in Essex. Wallasea Island is the site of one of the most exciting habitat creation projects in western Europe, using spoil from London's Crossrail Project to transform sterile agricultural land into a landscaped wildlife haven.

In 2014 and throughout the summer of 2015, the SWLA worked alongside the BTO on the Flight Lines Project, raising the profile of the research that is being done to understand the challenges that migrant birds face as they journey between Britain and Africa. Artists were paired with bird ringers, nest recorders and others. As Mike Toms of the BTO writes in the introduction of the book *Flight Lines*, "While science can provide the evidence, making the case for conservation action and monitoring

progress towards its goals, the creative arts deliver passion and engagement. Together science and art make a stronger case for the conservation of migrant birds, engaging new voices in support of conservation action." The exhibition at Waterston House will be based on the theme of migration to tie in with the release of this book.

Other collaborations with the Wildlife Trusts for example have been equally rewarding and the hugely significant bursary scheme that the SWLA supports allows emerging artists to develop their talents and aims. Each year, for example, the Society supports two or three places on the John Busby Seabird Drawing Course based in East Lothian.

John Threlfall

List of artists

Carry Ackroyd, Richard Allen, Kim Atkinson, Fiona Clucas, Dan Cole, Nick Derry, Brin Edwards, John Foker, Bob Greenhalf, Kittie Jones, Szabolcs Kokay, Nic Pollard, Greg Poole, Darren Rees, Chris Sinden, John Threlfall, Barry van Dusen, Michael Warren, Ben Woodhams and Darren Woodhead.

Resighting colour-ringed Shags in winter

M. NEWELL

As part of a collaborative project between the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and the University of Aberdeen, we are using resightings of field-readable colour-rings to locate Shags in winter in order to understand migration behaviour and how it affects survival and subsequent breeding success.

Since 2009, Shags at multiple colonies along the east coast of Scotland and England have been ringed with a coloured plastic ring engraved with three letters. The Shag is an inshore species and individuals of all ages are present throughout the year at coastal roost sites, allowing individuals to

be identified in the field using binoculars, a telescope or camera zoom.

Intensive winter resighting of colour-ringed Shags began in 2009 and since then individuals have been reported wintering in the UK as far north as Shetland and as far south as East Sussex. Every year we also receive reports of individuals going further afield to France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

In total, more than 45,000 resightings of individual Shags have been amassed from more than 150 observers along the UK coastline.



So far, this long-term resighting data has shown that the population is partially migratory, meaning some birds remain resident at the breeding colony throughout the year while others migrate to different areas along the coast outside the breeding season. Individuals generally spend the winter in the same location in different seasons. The challenge now is to understand when juvenile birds fix on their migration strategy and whether winter location is important in determining how well birds survive or breed.

During summer 2017, Shags were ringed at 15 colonies and thanks to the amazing efforts of ringers 1,467 Shags were colour-ringed. We would now like to get as many resightings as possible over the coming months. The winter season for resighting colour-ringed Shags runs from September until the end of March and we are always grateful to receive resightings from new observers. Please get in touch if you are interested in getting more involved and email shags@ceh.ac.uk with any resightings (including date seen, location, three-letter code and ring colour). You can follow updates on our dedicated twitter account: @shagmigration.

Mark Newell, CEH

The use of nesting trays for roof-nesting Oystercatchers

A. DUNCAN & B. PIRIE

Oystercatchers are ground nesters, usually amongst small stones on sea shores but are well-known for adopting unusual nest sites (Duncan *et al.* 2001). In the late 1800s they moved up river systems nesting in fields on farmland. In the early 1960s a lot of buildings in Aberdeen were built with flat roofs, which are cheaper than pitched roofs, and they were finished off with a coating of gravel to ward off the damaging effects of sunlight. These gravel covered roofs mimicked the ancestral shingle used by the birds. In the mid-1960s, R. Rae ringed two chicks of a pair nesting on the flat roof of a school in the city. From about this time pairs of birds adopted the flat gravel covered roofs,

one could say almost enthusiastically, rising from a few pairs in the 1970s to 205 pairs in 1993.

In time, there were leakage problems with the flat roofs and from the 1990s many were reroofed but without the gravel so there was no substrate for the birds to nest. Some pairs were encouraged to remain by providing some gravel or shingle. For example in 1985 a janitor emptied a bucketful of gravel on a new roof and this was adopted immediately by the birds. Similarly, a box of earth was put on a roof and it was adopted. We started providing nesting trays in 2003 (Table 1). These are simply plastic seed trays or similar, 43 cm x 31 cm x 8 cm, half-filled (to minimise spillage over



Plate 286. Oystercatcher nesting tray. © Alistair Duncan

Table 1. Location and use of nesting trays by Oystercatchers in Aberdeen, North-east Scotland 2003–12.

Location	Year	Details of use
University Meston Building North	2003	Intermittent
University Meston Building South	2003	Intermittent
University Admin. Building	2003	Used annually until removed in 2006
University Admin. Building	2012	Not used - no pair previously
University Regent Building	2005	Annually still in use
University MacRobert Building	2009	Not used - no pair previously
Peterculter Health Centre	2004	Annually still in use

the side) with shingle, drainage holes drilled in the bottom and placed on the roof (Plate 286). The birds adopt these readily. Some pairs will utilise debris such as moss and leaves caught in drainage channels on the roof to nest on with the possibility of causing a blockage. Providing a nesting tray means that we can control where the birds nest on the roof. Further, if a pair is excluded from their site on a roof, they often attempt to nest nearby in for example a car park or flowerbed sometimes causing conflict with humans. Using a tray can prevent this.

Oystercatchers are very site faithful and return to a site each year. We have only provided a tray, a nest site, for an existing pair which has been denied its site by re-roofing. We have not used the trays to increase the number of pairs. In fact, on the two instances when we tried to attract birds to a previously unused roof they were unsuccessful.

In summary, we have found that these nesting trays are readily adopted by the birds and are successful in replacing nesting conditions for

pairs that have been excluded from an established site. They can be used to manipulate where the birds nest on a roof. It has been suggested that we could increase the number of pairs of roof nesters by providing trays. However, we have found that although people are happy to provide for 'their' pair they are not so willing to encourage new pairs.

We would like to thank Aberdeen University Estates Department and Peterculter Health Centre for their continued cooperation in this project and for allowing access to the roofs.

Reference

Duncan, A., Duncan, R., Rae, R., Rebecca, G.W. & Stewart, B.J. 2001. Roof and ground nesting Eurasian Oystercatchers in Aberdeen. *Scottish Birds* 22: 1–8.

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Plate 287. Shows three of the 14 sections dividing the Bass Rock for survey purposes. Breeding Gannets in Section 10 had yet to extend to the footpath leading to the chapel. Tree Mallow covered nearly half the area of Section 11 and the landing rocks in Section 14 were unused as a 'club' site. 29 May 2009. © S. Murray

Gannets and Tree Mallow - change on the Bass Rock, 2009–17

S. MURRAY

The Bass Rock in East Lothian is the world's largest Gannet colony and has been since at least 2014. Situated as it is in the Firth of Forth makes tracking the fortunes of this colony by aerial survey comparatively straightforward and relatively inexpensive. Being so close to the mainland means we can use single-engine aircraft and flying from Glenrothes in Fife a survey can be completed in under an hour.

Thus, we have been fortunate to make three aerial surveys in recent years: on 29 May 2009, 23 June 2014 and, most recently, on 14 June 2017. David Cowley of Historic Environment Scotland (HES) took these latest Bass pictures, made in a single circuit of the rock lasting only two minutes, but providing complete colony coverage at high resolution. From these images it will be possible to count the entire population, but this isn't something to approach lightly as it takes weeks of effort. However, even a quick glance at the images indicates that Gannets

have continued their relentless increase and comparison of photographs taken in the three years shows that these changes have mostly occurred around the chapel and below the lighthouse (Plates 287–289).

The most striking change that has occurred between 2009 and 2017 is the near extinction of Tree Mallow in Section 11, the area enclosed by the old fortress walls. The dense, luxuriant green plant cover visible in 2009 (Plate 287) has been all but eliminated by the expanding gannetry, with only a few hardy survivors remaining in 2017. Also, in Section 10, at the west end of the battlements, the Tree Mallow has gone, killed off as colonizing Gannets become established. The solid rock surface of Section 14 held few plants, but even here, in a pocket of soil directly below the lighthouse the mallow has been displaced by site occupying Gannet pairs (Plate 289).



Plate 288. Breeding Gannets in Section 10 had expanded onto the footpath, killing off Tree Mallow and blocking access to the chapel. In Section 11, expanding birds had pushed the Tree Mallow back against the fort walls and Section 14 was an established 'club' site with displaying pairs. 23 June 2014. © S. Murray



Plate 289. In Section 10, non-breeders had colonized the west end of the fort battlements. In Section 11, the Tree Mallow had gone and the entire area of Section 14 was a 'club' site. 14 June 2017. © David Cowley/Historic Environment Scotland

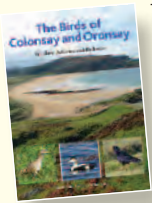
It is perhaps no surprise that Gannets have moved in and now utilise the landing rocks, as this is the only remaining open space on the rock where birds can congregate. Non-breeders, prospecting young birds and loafing adults have run out of 'club' space elsewhere and they are now present around the helipad and jetty rocks in their hundreds throughout the breeding season (Plate 289), a phenomenon that was never recorded prior to 2009 (Plate 287). By

2014, there were displaying pairs with trace nests present, but there have been no indications since then that actual breeding has been attempted, but it seems likely that it will occur before much longer.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Birds of Colonsay and Oronsay, an island avifauna and bird atlas. David Jardine, Mike Peacock & Ian Fisher, 2017. The Argyll Bird Club, ISBN 978-0-9561126-9-9, hardback, 360 pages, 165 maps and 174 photographs, available from the Colonsay Bookshop (01951 200320, byrne@colonsay.org.uk) for £25 + £4 P&P, or NHBS (www.nhbs.com) for £29.99 + P&P.



This beautifully presented book, written by past SOC President David Jardine, former RSPB Manager for Oronsay and Colonsay Mike Peacock, and birder and photographer Ian Fisher, contains a wealth of information on the birds of the Hebridean islands of Colonsay and Oronsay.

After a glowing and poetic preface by Professor Des Thompson (a regular Colonsay visitor), there are short sections summarising the landscape and habitats, and the history of ornithology and conservation on the islands. However, most of the book is given over to detailed species accounts (including Gaelic names), with regular readers of classic bird reports given much to digest with dates of all known records of scarcer species given (including such rarities as White-faced Storm-petrel, Killdeer and Yellow-browed Warbler). All species accounts give general overviews of the likely habitats and times of year birds have been seen, which will likely be more engaging to the casual birdwatcher or naturalist than simply record lists.

Every account has a species summary in Scotland, taken from information in the *Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007), followed by an island-specific account. Most species accounts also contain beautifully clear island maps showing winter and summer distribution, with many accounts also showing a graph of monthly occurrence of the species. Of the photographs in the book, only four were taken outwith the islands, a remarkable feat in itself! Even for species such as the extinct Great Auk, photographs are of specimens from the island (in this case Great Auk bones found on Oronsay, now stored at the National Museums Scotland).

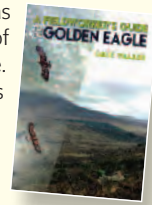
The book is both scientific yet highly accessible, providing an excellent companion to anyone hoping to visit the islands, or who has an interest in the natural history of the Hebrides. The authors' knowledge and understanding of the island bird life really comes through in the text. The distribution maps and descriptions will be invaluable for anyone hoping to go birding on the islands, and the wonderful photographs will be enjoyed by the serious birder or armchair naturalist alike!

Eilidh McNab

A Fieldworker's Guide to the Golden Eagle. Dave Walker, 2017. Whittles Publishing, Dunbeath, ISBN 978-184995-224-8, softback, 248 pages, £19.99.

The dedication of the author to the painstaking and meticulous study of Golden Eagles based on

years of observations at different times of year is undeniable. This book gives his personal views on many aspects of the Golden Eagle, based on these years of observation in both the Lake District and Scotland. Each aspect of the field ecology is covered in depth, both in specific chapters (e.g. status, breeding, etc.) and in a final chapter summarising the behaviour and ecology across the year.



Although the scope of the book is very wide and is based on a wealth of experience, it suffers in narrative from negative comments and criticism towards others working in the field. The author uses any opportunity to pass what comes across as undue and severe criticism of many people who have also studied the species, showing a disdain for peer-reviewed science and professional ecologists. Although it may be that some of the claimed shortcomings highlighted in this book are valid, these are mostly argued with reference to anecdotes, offering little in the way of new data to challenge the assertions of others. As a result, this book is difficult to read at times and a valuable contribution is tainted by the excessively critical narrative.

Ewan Weston

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

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

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

Spring migration was relatively slow, although a Collared Pratincole was popular and a good selection of other rarities included Thrush Nightingale, two each of Red-throated Pipits and Rustic Buntings, 'Western Subalpine Warbler', Red-rumped Swallow, Woodchat Shrike, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Fair Isle's first spring Dusky Warbler and third record of Mandarin. July is often considered a quiet month for rarer birds, but Green Warbler (a first for Fair Isle), Swinhoe's Petrel, Two-barred Crossbill, White-winged Black Tern and Rose-coloured Starling provided a good mid-summer selection. Autumn has seen some fairly long spells of westerly winds (at the time of writing, they have delivered three Buff-breasted Sandpipers, but nothing rarer) but a few blasts of easterlies have seen some decent falls of common migrants, a good selection of scarcities and rarities including Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Citrine Wagtail, Great Snipe, Arctic

Warbler, Red-throated Pipit, Melodious Warbler, Rustic Bunting and Western Bonelli's Warbler. The last two were found on the same day by Tom Gale, a volunteer visiting Fair Isle with the aid of one of FIBO's grants aimed at encouraging youngsters to be able to experience the work of the Obs. He was one of several volunteers to work at the Obs this year and we'd like to thank them all for their help - I'm sure we'll see some of them again in the future.

It was a generally poor year for seabirds unfortunately and, although there were notable increases in breeding numbers of Gannets, Arctic Terns and Tysties, productivity fell for all species except Fulmar. This was especially disappointing following three years of reasonable productivity for several species. Research projects looking at wintering areas of Guillemots and Razorbills (undertaken by the University of Glasgow) and the foraging and wintering ranges of Arctic Skuas



Plate 290. Senior Assistant Warden Ciaran Hatsell (left) and Tom Gale, Fair Isle, September 2017. © David Parnaby



Plate 291. Red-necked Phalarope, Fair Isle, August 2017. One of the juveniles assumed to be from the Fair Isle breeding attempt. © David Parnaby

(a BTO project) will hopefully yield some interesting results, whilst a darvic-ringing project of Bonxies on the island should see us learn more about site fidelity and survival of the seabird species for which Fair Isle is perhaps most important on a global scale.



Plate 292. Darvic-ringed juvenile Bonxie, Fair Isle, August 2017. © Max Hellicar

It was a very good year for Storm Petrel ringing, with over 4,000 birds ringed (plus several hundred retraps and controls). It is always one of the most popular activities for visitors in the summer months and this year a new, more spacious ringing area was developed in one of the sheds in the Haven. Amongst the more interesting Stormies caught was one ringed on the isle in 1986 and another ringed on Foula in 1987, as well as one that made the 46 km journey to our neighbours North Ronaldsay from Fair Isle in just three hours. Amongst the other interesting ringing recoveries was a Sedge Warbler ringed on Fair Isle in May 2016 which has spent the summer in Perth and Kinross.

Although seabirds fared poorly, there were some interesting breeding records amongst the landbirds. Most significant were breeding Red-necked Phalaropes, with three juveniles on the Isle in August thought to be from the breeding pair that arrived in June. A pair of Golden Plovers also raised chicks (breeding had only previously

been attempted in 1924–26, 1970 and 1989), whilst Dunlins also nested and two pairs of Redshanks held territory. Breeding was confirmed for the first time for Linnets, whilst a pair of Carrion Crows carrying nesting material in the spring was the first breeding attempt of a 'pure' pair for Fair Isle and Shetland.

Aside from birds, it was Killer Whales that stole the show in the summer, with sightings on ten dates, including some incredible prolonged close encounters off Bunness. Several animals were identified from their scars and are known to be regular visitors to Fair Isle.

As ever, thanks are due to all of the visitors to FIBO and everyone who supports the Obs in other ways, including the FIBOT directors, with thanks due especially to Douglas Barr, David Okill, Mike Wood, Fiona Mitchell and Ian Cowgill for all their help during the year.

*David and Susannah Parnaby, FIBO
Warden and Administrator*

Plate 293. Killer Whale, Fair Isle, June 2017.
© David Parnaby



Isle of May Bird Observatory

April was dominated by westerlies with spring migrants only turning up in small numbers, however, there were a number of notable sightings for the isle. A Lapland Bunting was a rare spring record on 2nd while a Firecrest on 3rd was only the fifth spring record. A Stock Dove also on 3rd was the first island record since 2013. Jack Snipes on 23rd & 30th were good spring records while single Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were seen occasionally throughout the month. The final day of April saw a reasonable fall with a variety of common migrants, Wheatear (45) the most numerous along with two Grasshopper Warblers and single Black Redstart.

The south-easterly winds at the end of April continued into the first week of May bringing a run of good birds. Quail and Wood Warbler were the highlights of the 1st while the 2nd yielded the fifth record of Golden Oriole (a male) and the first for 20 years. Also on 2nd the eighth island Hawfinch (until 3rd) followed by Pied Flycatcher and Yellow Wagtail. A trickle of migrants until 10th when 55 Willow Warblers were counted and Twite was a spring notable. The best day of the spring was on 12th when a ringed male Red-breasted Flycatcher appeared on Pilgrims Beach, it was trapped and proved to have been caught in Sweden a week earlier! Later in the day, an apparent 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' was found at Altarstones. The 13th brought an increase in common migrants with 12 Sedge Warblers including one ringed in Belgium. The second Hawfinch of the spring appeared on 20th. A trickle of migrants until 21st when four Mute Swans flew north, only the ninth record while a Little Gull was present on the loch. The second Quail of the year arrived on 25th along with a Hummingbird Hawkmoth. Twenty-one Barnacle Geese flying north on 26th were late, while two Little Terns over were the first since 2004. A Common Rosefinch brought the month to an end on 30th.

A Quail was seen on a couple of dates in June while a Nightjar on 6th was the 14th record for the isle and was heard churring on 7th. A male Red-backed Shrike was present on 6th–7th. A Grasshopper Warbler on 15th was a late record, while 360 Starling on 18th was the highest



Plate 294. Great Spotted Woodpecker on the Main Lighthouse, Isle of May, September 2017. © *Iain English*

count this century. The month ended with two Wood Sandpipers on 29th–30th and a Black Redstart on 30th.

Waders held court in early July with Greenshank, Knot and a single Wood Sandpiper all on 1st and a Green Sandpiper on 2nd. The first Storm Petrel of the year was caught on 6th while three Black-tailed Godwit dropped in on 9th and a Black Guillemot was offshore on 10th. A Pomarine Skua flew past on 13th while a Wood Warbler on 14th was the second earliest autumn record. The 24th brought the first Cuckoo of the year but this was overshadowed by the isle's third record of Two-barred Crossbill. This adult female was then present until 29th as it worked the hogweed seed heads. A Red Kite on 28th was only the fifth record for the isle while an Osprey flew over on 29th.

Black Redstart was recorded on several dates in early August, while seven Black-tailed Godwits flew south on 17th. The second Red Kite of the year flew south on 20th while a Water Rail on 21st was an early record. The isle's second Great White Egret circled over with three Grey Herons on 23rd before heading south. The 24th brought an Osprey

over while an adult Sabine's Gull on 29th was the 12th record for the May.

The 4th September brought the first Barred and Reed Warblers of the year while the 5th brought a Black Tern offshore while a Ruff was also noted. Green Sandpiper was the highlight of 6th while 15 Brent Geese flew past on 7th. A female Goshawk flew south over the isle on 9th, only the 2nd island record with the previous one in September 2000. Another Black Tern was noted on 14th while the 15th brought a Stonechat and 11 Sooty Shearwaters. After prolonged westerlies, the wind went east on 17th and with it notable migrants; the first Yellow-browed Warbler of the autumn was caught, a Little Bunting was seen while the first Great Spotted Woodpecker since 2013 was found on the side of the Main Lighthouse. A Common Rosefinch appeared on 18th while Great Spotted Woodpeckers totalled three on 24th. The sixth record of Arctic Warbler was a bird ringed on 25th remaining until 27th. A late Cuckoo on 27th was eclipsed by the 8th record of Olive-backed Pipit while Yellow-browed Warblers totalled six that day.

Mark Newell and David Steel



Plate 295. First-winter (2CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 9 March 2014. © Peter Stronach

A long-staying 'Viking Gull' in Mallaig, Highland

P. STRONACH, R. MCMILLAN & S. MACDONALD

Hybridisation is not infrequent in many gull species especially where breeding and wintering ranges overlap. Hybrids are inclined to show characteristics of both species and can be variable in appearance, and challenging to identify.

In the Western Palearctic, the name 'Viking Gull' is used to denote a hybrid between Herring Gull and Glaucous Gull. This differentiates it from a 'Nelson's Gull' which is a hybrid between American Herring Gull and Glaucous Gull. 'Viking Gulls' are regularly seen in Iceland, and irregularly in Britain and Scandinavia (Malling Olsen & Larsson 2003).

Perhaps an eye-opener for Scottish birders is the current 'Viking Gull' situation in Iceland. Large numbers of 'Viking Gulls' are now a regular occurrence in Iceland. For example, in March 2017 in Husavik, gull totals were approximately 400 Herring Gulls, 30 Iceland Gulls, two Glaucous Gulls and 50 'Viking Gulls' ranging

from almost true Glaucous to Herrings with charcoal primaries in adults (Tom Lowe pers. comm.). 'Viking Gulls' are actually outnumbering true 'white-wingers' in Iceland in winter.

Glaucous Gulls have been recorded breeding previously in Scotland with a female paired with a Herring Gull in a Herring Gull colony on Hunev, off Unst, Shetland. This pair raised hybrid young and bred for five years between 1975 and 1979. Although the young were colour-ringed none were seen again after fledging (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

In terms of annual numbers of 'Viking Gulls' in Scotland, *The Birds of Scotland* records a total of 68 between 1976 and 2001, an average of 2.6 a year. Knowing for certain that a putative 'Viking Gull' is actually a hybrid is problematic, as very few are ringed or marked, and none are DNA tested to know their parentage for sure.

A presumed 'Viking Gull' was found in the west coast port of Mallaig, in Lochaber, Highland on 29 October 2013. Usually 'Viking Gulls' are only seen fleetingly, at most for a winter before disappearing. Unusually, in this case, the bird stayed for four winters, allowing its plumage development to be studied in detail, a unique opportunity amongst 'Viking Gulls' in Scotland.

The individual had damaged its left leg in its first year, and this meant that it was easily recognisable as the same individual from year to year.

First-winter, 2013/14

When found the bird was in first-winter plumage (Plates 295–297), it was initially mistaken for a 'Kumlien's Gull' (a Thayer's x Iceland Gull intergrade). It had a charcoal grey wash across the belly, breast and scapulars, the rest of the flight feathers were off white with dark brown mottling. The scapular feathers were very similar to a Herring Gull of the same age, with the same internal marking.

It could have easily been mistaken for a pale end of the spectrum 2CY Herring Gull, however the tertials were not dark centred and were boldly marked and very similar to that of a 2CY Glaucous Gull of the same age.



Plate 297. First-winter (2CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 9 March 2014. Tail pattern. © Peter Stronach

The wingtip was the most interesting feature, with an almost kumlieni-esque outer primary pattern (Plate 296), with dark arrows at the tip.

The tail was a very similar pattern to Glaucous Gull of the same age but the dark sections were as dark as in a standard Herring Gull's tail. The bird was last seen in May 2014 before leaving to presumably summer elsewhere.

Plate 296. First-winter (2CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 9 March 2014. Wing pattern. © Peter Stronach





Plate 298. Second-winter (3CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 31 March 2015. © Stephen MacDonald



Plate 299. Fourth-winter (5CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 23 January 2017. Still with its injured leg. © Bob McMillan

Second-winter, 2014/15

In its second winter the 'Viking Gull's' most obvious feature was the two-tone Glaucous-like bill, nothing like any Herring Gull of the same age would exhibit. The vast majority of the scapulars had been replaced by March 2015, and a couple of the tertials which would be unusual for a Herring Gull of the same age.

Third-winter 2015/16

Unfortunately, we don't have any photographs from its time as a third-winter.

Fourth-winter, 2016/17

In its fourth-winter plumage (Plate 299), the bird became more Glaucous Gull-like. The bill tip had black on both mandibles and a hint of red on the lower. Instead of the typical 'netted' look to the dark colour on the head and neck there was extensive streaking as in Herring Gull.



Plate 300. Fifth-summer (5CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 3 March 2017. Long-calling (left) with a Herring Gull. Note the fainter head streaking than in Plate 299. © Peter Stronach



Plate 301. Fifth-summer (5CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 27 March 2017. Only 24 days after Plate 300 was taken, the head streaking had completely disappeared. © Bob McMillan



Plate 302. Fifth-summer (5CY) 'Viking Gull', Mallaig, Highland, 27 March 2017. Wing pattern. © Bob McMillan

The wing was the most interesting part of this age, with the tertial and greater covert patterns identical to Glaucous Gull. The primary pattern however lacked the gentle gradient from dark grey inner to white outer, with a more defined border; obviously, the Herring Gull influence showing through.

Moving through to its fifth summer, the head streaking became thinner (Plate 300), then eventually disappeared (Plate 302). The wing pattern coming into the fifth summer showed completely white tips to the primaries, with just a hint of darkness in the grey colouration on both webs the outermost primaries.

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Peter Stronach, Bob McMillan & Stephen MacDonald, Clachan, Boat of Garten, Inverness-shire PH24 3BX.



Plate 303. Red-winged Blackbird, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, April 2017. © Simon Davies

Red-winged Blackbird, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, April–May 2017 – the first British record

S.J. DAVIES

After seemingly weeks of endless blazing strong W/NW/N winds bringing snow and hail most days, we were overjoyed when the wind finally swung round to the east but after a day of slack weather it had picked up again to a cold force 6–7...but it was from the east! On 29 April, I had enjoyed a pretty decent morning carrying out the northern census route with some wildfowl moving offshore, some pristine full summer Snow Buntings, a Black Redstart and a Merlin which caught a Starling right in front of me! At this point I was walking back past the house at Garso, with my mind half on what we had to do in the afternoon to get the Obs ready for tomorrow's Heatherlea tour group, when a strange little 'chup' call spun me round in time

to see a Starling-sized bird land on top of some gas bottles outside the house.

I could just see its head poking out with a broad supercillium, yellowish throat, streaked chest and pointed bill; my brain stuttered for a second as I went to myself 'ohh, Redwing, no, yes, NO!' I took a few steps to my right and could see the whole bird about 15 m away it was indeed a chunky passerine with dark crown, broad, flaring supercillium, yellowish at the front, dark eye-stripe, yellowish chin patch with dark, bold streaks down the front. The two, white wing-bars were also obvious as were the chestnut scapulars and mantle, it was a stunning bird despite being just brown and streaky!

I then swore to myself 'what the hell is that?' and looked closer at it, in and out of my camera, while trying to work it out in my head; my jumbled thoughts ran something like 'look at that bill... looks like an American Oriole... but it's not one of those... but it must be American... what else is like that... some kind of Blackbird / Grackle thing... no Grackles are bigger... must be a Blackbird... which ones have I seen... Red-winged in Texas... no others... but there are others... females are dark and streaky like that... GOD... it might actually be a Red-winged Blackbird...'

It then flew up after a few minutes with a really distinctive floppy flight with a crazy fan shaped tail which also flopped around as it flew up onto the wires, where it perched for a minute or so before dropping down into a nearby Iris bed. I then found some shelter from the wind and began to phone the Obs volunteers that were working other parts of the island with a message of something like 'odd bird at Garso, its

American and mega, not 100% what it is but best guess is Red-winged Blackbird' (to which Larissa helpfully asked 'is it black with red wings?' 'no' I said!).

I had now lost the bird allowing me a bit of time to reflect on what I had just seen and cast my mind back to Texas a couple of years ago, when big, noisy flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds dominated the bird tables and marshes I visited - it all seemed to fit! I tramped around for ten minutes and failed to re-find it before Sam, Larissa and Harris arrived; after what seemed like ages but was probably only another fifteen minutes it flew up from the Irises to make a beeline straight back to the gas bottles where we all had excellent views; Larissa, being Canadian was probably best placed to help with the ID and tentatively agreed with my first thoughts as did Pete Donnelly who arrived shortly afterwards. I then tweeted (apparently, that's how its done nowadays) back-of-the-camera pictures out into the world and that was that!

Plate 304. Red-winged Blackbird, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, April 2017. © Simon Davies





Plate 305. Red-winged Blackbird, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, April 2017. © *Simon Davies*

Kevin Woodbridge and Alison Duncan were off island for the day (as they always are when rare birds are found!) but they arrived back on the last scheduled flight of the day and soon had great views as it followed the same pattern of heading to the gas bottles. The phones were red hot for the rest of the evening with people booking in, making plans and congratulating us while we just sat back and relaxed with a beer or two!

The first planes arrived at 09.30 hrs the next morning and with the bird sticking to its routine everyone connected and had great views; many people were initially sceptical as we casually stated 'just stand here, it'll come back and land on those gas bottles' but return it did, time after time. A slightly odd character quirk, maybe the colour, or maybe the cold metal of the canisters, reminded her of the ship she came across on?

The following two weeks passed by in a whirlwind with endless trips up to the site, the Land Rover packed full of long distance twitchers and endless phone calls with a whole host of newspapers, radio stations and TV programmes as seemingly everyone picked up on the story - with so much bad news in the media at the time, I'm sure we were due some much needed light relief!

The bird was last seen on 14 May.

Simon Davies,
North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory.
Email: wfbee eater@hotmail.com

This record is subject to acceptance by the British Birds Rarities Committee and the BOU Rarities Committee.



Plate 306. Collared Pratincole, Fair Isle, Shetland, May 2017. © Roger Riddington

Collared Pratincole, Fair Isle, Shetland, 14–18 May 2017 – the second island record

D. PARNABY

After a very quiet April, in which northerly and westerly winds dominated and migration was generally very slow, May was somewhat better. Common migrants were coming through in reasonable numbers and a few scarcities were also appearing, making for some enjoyable days birding. The 14 May started with a light south-easterly wind and there were obviously a few more birds around, with warblers, chats, Tree Pipits and hirundines all increasing in numbers.

Every day throughout the spring and autumn migration period, the whole island is covered on the daily census, with a member of the wardening team searching a third of the island each and counting the migrant birds, which are logged at the end of the day. This has provided a wealth of data, with some fascinating results now starting to emerge on changes in migration over the decades FIBO has been operating.

Census is, of course, also a wonderful chance to look for rarities and, whilst the science of the daily counts keeps us going, the chance of the glory of a rarity is never far from our minds! That said, I was mostly enjoying seeing a nice spread of common migrants as I headed up the Wirvie Burn, when a Collared Pratincole lifted up from not too far ahead. A beautifully graceful, mid-sized wader, with long wings and a forked tail with white outer edges, there's not much can be confused with a pratincole. The view was good enough to see the chestnut underwing coverts, the white trailing edge to the inner wing and the contrast between the quite pale brown mantle and darker wing feathers, which ruled out the other pratincole species.

Plate 307 (opposite). Collared Pratincole, Fair Isle, Shetland, May 2017. © Roger Riddington





Plate 308. Collared Pratincole, Fair Isle, Shetland, May 2017. © Roger Riddington

Thankfully it only flew a short way before alighting, giving me the chance to take in the short bill, with a fairly extensive red base, and the mid-length legs, whilst calling the rest of the Obs staff and islanders who would be interested. In a very short space of time, a small crowd (including Stewart Thomson of Quoy, who had seen the only other previous Collared Pratincole on Fair Isle in 1971) had assembled and enjoyed great views as it flew short distances and ran around on the ground. This seemed to be its preferred feeding technique as it chased (presumably) invertebrates in the manner of a plover.

The pratincole remained in the same area for the rest of the day and proved fairly approachable. As the sun came out, it began to undertake some longer feeding flights, hawking along the cliffs, and it would often pass close over observers' heads. It was present until dusk and was watched going to roost at the edge of Easter Lother Water.

The bird remained in the same area for the next three days and attracted twitchers from Shetland, as well as several of the islanders, who were not birders but were nonetheless impressed by the bird's grace and beauty. At times of poor, cool weather, it was often hunched up trying to find shelter and could look rather sorry for itself, so we were pleased that sunny conditions on the 18th saw it move to the south of the island, where it was hawking over Utra scrape with hirundines. It was then seen at around 13:40 hrs as it went south over Leogh and then it was gone, hopefully re-orientating itself back towards its southern breeding grounds.

*David Parnaby, Fair Isle Bird Observatory.
Email: fibo@btconnect.com*



a)



b)

Plate 309 a–b. Dark-eyed Junco, Dingleton, Melrose, Borders, 31 March 2017. © Ian Forsyth

Dark-eyed Junco in Melrose, March–April 2017 – first record for Borders

D. PARKINSON

The Dark-eyed Junco, a native of eastern North America, is a very rare visitor to the British Isles with only 40 previous British records, the last being to the Point of Ayre, Isle of Man on 3 April 2016, a first for the island.

I am the joint SOC local recorder for the Borders and stay in Melrose and you can imagine my surprise when I received an email from a local birder alerting me to a report of a strange bird in a garden no more than 400 m from my house.

I immediately made my way to the house and was greeted by Ian and Zena Forsyth the owners. They showed me their rear garden which faces open countryside with the Eildon Hills beyond and has Dingleton burn running through the bottom of it. They had first noticed the unusual bird feeding on the ground along with other species on 31 March and, despite searching the field guide they owned, were unable to identify it. They described its behaviour as “hopping around on the lawn and jerking its tail”.

On 1 April, the unidentified bird was still frequenting their garden so they telephoned a local birder who suggested that they take photos and email them to him. The bird did not return to their garden on the following day and a thorough search of the neighbourhood by me and other birders could not locate it. So, only Ian and Zena were lucky enough to see the bird, but at least we have their photographs.

The lack of brown on the head and back suggests that the Melrose bird was a male of the race *Junco h. hyemalis* (known as ‘Slate-coloured Junco’) and is most likely to have overshot its breeding range due to adverse weather conditions while flying north along the eastern seaboard of North America.

David Parkinson, Melrose.
Email: bordersrecorder@gmail.com



Plate 310. Lesser Kestrel, Noss, Shetland, 1 May 2017. © Craig Nisbet

Lesser Kestrel on Noss, Shetland, May 2017 - third record for Scotland

A. DENTON & C. NISBET

Following a substantial fall of migrants the previous day, hopes were high of another good days birding as the day dawned on 1 May. The wind had been firmly in the south-east all night but the sun was out making for pleasant birding conditions. Birding the garden around the cottage proved fruitful with many Willow Warblers and a couple of Blackcaps hopping around the walls and is often a good indicator for what might lurk around the rest of the island. Craig and I headed off on the six mile circuit around the island with a spring in our step dreaming about finding another mega following the Hermit Thrush a couple of weeks before. About a third of the way round as we approached an area called Faedda Ness we

flushed a small raptor from the cliff face nearest us. We immediately both said "Kestrel" with the plumage and structure looking right for this species. It flew around 30 m before alighting on the cliff face opposite where it sat appearing quite disgruntled. We were pretty pleased to get Kestrel on the year list as it had been missed last season. We were able to approach to within about 10 m, and once we were happy with a few sharp images, we left the tired looking raptor in peace and continued our circuit. A selection of pictures of various birds was posted to the 'Birds of Noss' Facebook group, and a picture of the Kestrel was also shared to the 'Nature in Shetland Photos' Facebook group.

Three and a half weeks later on 24 May, news reached us that the bird was being touted as a potential Lesser Kestrel! The photographs had been lifted from the Facebook page by eagle-eyed Philip Wilson who noticed enough features to query the identification and start a discussion on the BirdForum website. The first identification feature indicated was the lack of black claws, but through discussion with other BirdForum members, including individuals from Luxembourg and Denmark, other features were highlighted, including the pale, plain, flat face with short bill and pale black eye stripe, chevron markings on the scapulars and coverts, long wings, un-barred tail, pale belly with sparse streaks rather than bold dots and the general size and 'cuteness' of the bird. After this discussion news was quickly reported through BirdGuides and Rare Bird Alert as a retrospectively identified Lesser Kestrel seen and photographed on Noss from 1 May. A description was written and submitted to BBRC

where it was accepted on 27 August. This represents just the third modern day Scottish record, and the second for Shetland, with the first being a male on Fair Isle in 1987. It is also only the second female ever to be recorded, following a record in 1905.

Reading back through various field guides, female and immature Kestrels and Lesser Kestrels can be tricky to separate, and we were gutted that we didn't realise at the time that what we were looking at was much rarer than first thought. Nevertheless, it was a fine 'arm-chair tick' for Craig and I and is also testament to the positive impact of photography and the internet as identification tools. Thanks must go to identifier, Philip Wilson, without whom the identification may never have surfaced.

**Andrew Denton, 171 Damson Lane, Solihull,
West Midlands B91 9LD.
Email: dent123andy@yahoo.com**

Plate 311. Lesser Kestrel, Noss, Shetland, 1 May 2017. © Craig Nisbet





Plate 312. White-throated Needletail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, June 2017. © Bruce Taylor

White-throated Needletail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 22 June 2017 – the sixth Scottish record

B. TAYLOR

Kathy and I had enjoyed a busy spring on Barra finding a few good birds including two Night-herons, a White-billed Diver, a singing Marsh Warbler and some Hebridean scarcities. We hadn't found anything really rare though, and as migration came to an end it felt like we'd have to wait until the autumn for the opportunity of finding a mega.

As 22 June dawned, it was murky with low cloud shrouding the hilltops on Barra and a fresh south-south-westerly breeze was picking up. As usual Kathy and I were out birding our way around the island. We arrived at Glen just after 09:00 hrs and slowly worked our way up the hill, stopping to check each garden along the way, more from habit than any expectation of finding something new. The same birds were where they had been on our previous visits and there was no sign of any new arrivals.

After checking the 'dump clump' at the top of the hill, we began to trudge back down again. We reached the first house just after 10:00 hrs,

as Iain was coming out of his front door. He called over to ask if we'd seen anything interesting. I replied that no we hadn't, in fact it was very quiet and that was the way it was likely to stay for the next few weeks, now that migration was over. The Bird Gods must have an impeccable sense of timing, as before Iain had a chance to reply, a large swift appeared over his roof, flying over us before looping around and heading up the hillside and out of view. It was far bigger than a Common Swift, with a barrel-like body, squarish tail, white throat and a broad white wedge across the undertail. There was only one thing it could be: White-throated Needletail. This encounter lasted around 40 seconds and prompted a mixture of disbelief, awe, blind panic and choice language from me. Although I'd seen it well, I'd not managed to get a record shot and now it had disappeared into the murk. Would anyone believe this? Probably not, especially without a photo. I started to run up the hill after it, before realising that running after the fastest bird on the planet wasn't going to work! No, this was a time to stay calm and

Plate 313 a–d. White-throated Needletail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, June 2017. © Bruce Taylor

level-headed: the bird had flown over this spot once already and probably would again. Kathy and I kept watching and about two minutes later, to our eternal relief, the Needletail reappeared over the road a bit further down. After a quick sprint, we were treated to fabulous views as it cruised up and down the hillside, over the rooftops and along the road. I concentrated on getting record shots; this should have been easy, but my hands were shaking from a massive adrenaline rush, the light was poor and the bird was moving at break-neck speed. Eventually, I got some passable shots, so was able to take it in in more detail through my bins and with the naked eye as it hurtled past us. After perhaps 15 minutes, with the weather closing in and the cloud base lowering, the Needletail switched to a new feeding circuit over and around the small copse below our vantage point. We were now able to clearly see the pale patch on its mantle and the blue sheen on its wings. What a smart looking bird!

Mobile phone reception is notoriously poor on Barra and that day it was non-existent at Glen, so knowing that we needed to get the word out, we ran back down to the car then drove home to use our landline. After phoning the news out and putting the photos on Twitter, we returned to Glen by 11:30. The Needletail was still feeding around the copse and with the pressure now off, we could finally relax and enjoy the spectacle of watching one of the best birds on the planet cruising effortlessly around us. At times it passed so close that we could hear the whir of its wings as it swept past us at point blank range, nearly taking the top off Kathy's head on one pass!

It was still present at midday when we decided to walk back up to Iain's house to explain what all the fuss had been about earlier, but when we returned a few minutes later, there was no sign of the Needletail. When it hadn't reappeared after 15 minutes, we widened our search in an effort to relocate it. Sadly we failed to find it again despite our best efforts. It's likely that it left Barra soon after noon ahead of the approaching weather

a)



b)



c)



d)



front that brought rain and high winds a few hours later. Later that afternoon, while checking Eoligarra, Kathy found her first adult Rose-coloured Starling. It's tempting to believe that this may have arrived on the same weather system that brought us the Needletail. The previous afternoon there had been a strong, very warm and unusually humid south-easterly wind here and it's therefore possible that both birds may have arrived then.

So we got our mega, but as is so often the case here it appeared when we least expected it. Not only that, it was a spectacular bird that I never expected to have the chance to see, let alone find. It just goes to show that anything is possible on Barra!

Bruce Taylor, 1 An Goirtean, Brevig, Isle of Barra.
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Status of White-throated Needletail in Scotland

This Eastern Palearctic species has separate breeding populations in the Himalayas (which is resident) and from south-central Siberia and Mongolia east to Sakhalin and south to NE

China, Korea and northern Japan. The eastern population is migratory and mostly winters in Australia, with smaller numbers in New Zealand and New Guinea.

There have been 11 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2016 (all singles), with five of these in Scotland:

1983 Orkney: South Ronaldsay, 11–12 June

1984 Shetland: Quendale, 25 May to 6 June

1988 Orkney: Isle of Hoy, 28 May to 8 June

1991 Shetland: Isle of Noss, 11–14 June

2013 Outer Hebrides: Loch Direcleit, Tarbert and Loch Drinisidair, Isle of Harris, 24–26 June

The 1991 Shetland bird is now considered to be the same as one seen in Kent, Staffordshire and then Derbyshire on 26 May to 3 June that year. The other British records are one in Essex on 6–8 July 1846, one in Hampshire on 26 or 27 July 1879, and one in Yorkshire on 27 May 1985. It is considered possible that the 1983, 1984 and 1985 sightings could refer to a returning individual (or two). There has also been one in Ireland at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork on 20 June 1964. All accepted records fall within a 63-day period in late spring to mid-summer, and the Barra bird also occurred within this period.

Pacific Swift, Longhaven, North-east Scotland, 2 July 2017 – the first Scottish record

P.D. BLOOR

It's been four years since I adopted the Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve at Longhaven as 'my patch', a coastal site lying half-way between Cruden Bay and Peterhead in North-east Scotland. It gets the regular migrants when the conditions are suitable and has even had the occasional rarity, but nothing major. What makes it special, is that it's 'my patch' and each year I take part in a totally frivolous 'Patch List Challenge' with about ten other birders scattered around various parts of the UK and

Ireland. Nobody takes it (too) seriously, but having said that, I've never won and at the start of this year I planned to change that.

So, with the beginning of July being the best time of year for Swifts on the patch - and I still needed Swift for the year - I had decided to visit my birding patch at Longhaven on 2 July to see what might be around. It was a fine sunny Sunday morning with a fresh south-westerly breeze - a perfect day for finding absolutely nothing?

Not long after I started my usual circuit at the entrance to the patch, and was making my way up the track towards the disused quarry, I saw a distant swift hawking over the fields. Being the first one for my patch this year, I was pleased that I had made the effort to get out. My route continued towards the fields, over which the swift had been flying, and as I got closer the bird reappeared. Looking again at the swift, this time a lot closer, I got a glimpse of what I thought was some white on the rump - unsurprisingly, this woke me up! I soon realised that not only did this bird have a white rump but it was also obviously the wrong shape for a Common Swift and had scaly underparts too! It suddenly dawned on me that I was looking at a Pacific Swift!

Now, although I've found a few good birds over the years, I've never found a real 'mega'. I've often wondered how I'd react if/when I ever did. I've always thought I'd remain calm and collected while casually putting the news out, then I'd just wait patiently for others to arrive while maintaining a veneer of Bond-like coolness throughout. How wrong could I have been! Instantly and unexpectedly I went into a sort of uncontrollable mental melt down; fumbling with my phone, randomly pressing the screen I managed to open iTunes, Safari and Candy Crush before, by pure blind luck, I finally got a hold of local birder Phil Crockett who, thankfully, was in a more stable state than I to put the news out.

Finding an instantly identifiable mega rarity when you least expect it is, to say the least, a shock, but finding a mega rare swift at a site that doesn't usually hold swifts is extremely worrying. There was no reason why it would want to hang around at Longhaven and I remember thinking that this bird could easily disappear any second, which it did regularly. Every time it disappeared I broke into a cold sweat that it would be gone for good, before anyone else could see it. I feared I would end up with a dreaded 'single observer record'.

So, the feeling of relief I felt every time it flew back into view was palpable; hawking low over the fields, or above my head, sometimes only tens of metres away. It took an excruciatingly long 15 minutes before Phil eventually appeared along the track with his camera and he certainly wasn't sauntering! I've never been so pleased to see him.

The bird was ranging over a wide area, often disappearing while heading toward some aerial masts a couple of kilometres to the north, before returning to the same field where it would circle around often at eye level and within 50 m of the track. Eventually however, after about 40 minutes, the bird was finally watched (by just three local birders; myself, Phil Crockett and Dave Gill) drifting south behind the quarry and out of sight.

Plate 314 a–b. Pacific Swift, Longhaven, North-east Scotland, 2 July 2017. © *Phil Crockett*



a)



b)



Plate 315 a–b. Pacific Swift, Longhaven, North-east Scotland, 2 July 2017. © Phil Crockett

The sheer randomness of birding is what makes this crazy hobby so special. We've all trudged for miles across fields and bashed acres of bushes, during the most perfect of autumnal conditions and seen nothing. Yet when you least expect it, wham!!!... it's there... right in front of you!

Description

Size and structure: typically swift-like, long rakish sickle-shaped wings, cigar-shaped body and forked tail. Compared with Common Swift, this bird appeared skinnier, the wings proportionally longer and the significantly more deeply forked than Common Swift. **Upperpart colouration:** general black with an obvious and extensive white rump extending from the upper tail coverts to the lower back and wrapping around partially onto the flanks. **Underpart colouration:** under poorer light conditions the bird could look relatively dark all over. However, with closer views (or in good light) the overall underpart colouration was clearly paler than the upperparts, with a more distinct brownish hue and clearly mottled or scaly in appearance. A relatively paler brown throat, leading to darker breast and belly, before becoming paler and more mottled towards the undertail coverts. Underwings were uniformly dark brown with slightly darker axillaries. **Call:** The bird was not heard to call.

*Phil Bloor, Collieston, Aberdeenshire.
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Status of Pacific Swift in the UK

If accepted, this will be the first record of Pacific Swift in Scotland and the eighth for the UK. The last one was a bird seen in several locations in Suffolk, East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire during May–June 2013. Previous UK sightings have occurred between 29 May and 16 July, with two in May, two in June and four in July.

Britain's first Pacific Swift was famously caught, exhausted, on a gas platform well off Norfolk's east coast on June 19th 1981, being released in Suffolk, near Beccles, the following day. Even more famous was Cley's Bank Holiday bird of May 30th 1993 which caused much chaos (and controversy) as people hurried to the reserve before the bird took its leave as the clock hit 4 o'clock.

A brief fly-through in Northamptonshire, at Daventry Reservoir on July 16th 1995 was our third and a decade elapsed until the Spurn bird of July 1st 2005. The same recording area scored again on June 22nd 2008 and July 9th 2011 and then came the second twitchable record; one appearing in Suffolk (at Bawdsey) on May 29th was relocated at Spurn on June 12th and was seen later the same day zipping south at Saltfleetby in Lincolnshire. By 15th it was back in Suffolk, spending two days at Trimley Marshes, to the relief of all those not in the listing game in 1993.



Plate 316. American Redstart, Barra, Outer Hebrides, September 2017. © Lee Fuller

American Redstart, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 7–17 September 2017 – the second Scottish record

B. TAYLOR

Over the years the Isle of Barra has earned a reputation as something of a rarity magnet. A Red-eyed Vireo got the ball rolling back in 2003, and the Yellow Warbler created major headlines in 2004 and was followed by a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, another Red-eyed Vireo, Hermit, Swainson's and two Grey-cheeked Thrushes, Ovenbird, White's Thrush, Scotland's first live Cetti's Warbler and in September last year, Britain's first Eastern Kingbird. In June this year I was fortunate enough to find a White-throated Needletail here, but the reality of Barra birding is that most of the time there are no rarities and birding the island, day-in day-out throughout the year, can be a hard slog.

I optimistically like to think that the autumn begins in July, so I'd been flogging the island's beaches, machair and plantations since then, hoping to find migrants. But apart from a Pectoral Sandpiper that dropped out of the sky and spent five minutes feeding in front of us on Vatersay in mid-August, we'd seen very little to get excited about.

September 7th was another day of frequent heavy showers and strong westerly winds. As ever, Kathy and I were out early, searching Vatersay and the western side of Barra for American waders and failing to find any. After doing some chores in the middle of the day, I set out again in the late afternoon to check the

north end of the island, while Kathy stayed home. After scanning through the waders at the airport, I headed up to Eoligarry. Parking by the cemetery, I checked the garden that last year held the Kingbird but today held a small flock of Starlings and a single Blackbird. I'd walked miles in the rain during the morning. My waterproofs weren't waterproof any more, I was feeling exhausted and I could see another wall of rain approaching from the west. I was tempted to call it a day and go home, but convinced myself that I couldn't get any wetter than I already was, and today might be the day there was an American Redstart or Bay-breasted Warbler in the trees just along the road, so I ought to go and check.

Behind the church at Eoligarry there are five sycamore trees and a small patch of brambles, all sheltered from the elements by a wall. This site has always felt promising and although the best birds I'd seen during hundreds of visits were a couple of Barred Warblers and a Red-backed Shrike, I knew that one day it would hold something much rarer.

As I approached the first tree, a small bird took off from behind a clump of ragwort just a few feet in front of me. I'm not sure that I even raised my bins, but I certainly clocked the bright yellow panels on the base of its tail as it flew away from me. For a split second the tail pattern made me think it was a Greenfinch, but the bird was too small and the wrong shape. Siskin didn't fit either. I could only think of one species with such a striking tail pattern and it wasn't European. It landed on a bare section of branch about 15 metres ahead and a quick look at it through my bins revealed a small warbler-type bird sitting in a Red-breasted Flycatcher-like pose with tail cocked, a pale grey head, clean white belly with yellowy-orange patches on either side of the breast, a faint wingbar and hi-vis yellow panels at the base of the tail. I grabbed a quick record shot while it sat motionless on the branch for a few moments and then it flicked out of sight. I'd seen enough to realise I'd found Britain's sixth and Scotland's second American Redstart: a species I've had a thing about since missing the chance to see one in my teens in Cornwall in the early 1980s; a

Plate 317 (below). American Redstart, Barra, Outer Hebrides, September 2017. © Lee Fuller.
Plates 318–319 (opposite). American Redstart, Barra, Outer Hebrides, September 2017. © Ian Wells







Plate 320 a–b. American Redstart, Barra, Outer Hebrides, September 2017. © Yvonne Benting

species I've spent many a winter's evening gazing at in field guides and on Youtube, dreaming of finding one. Now I'd just seen one on Barra and my first thought was: I didn't think it'd be that easy!

I tried calling Kathy but the phone network was down again. Certain that the bird wouldn't leave the cover of its isolated trees, I ran back up the road to the car, giving a khaki-clad, binocular-wearing tourist a funny turn as I ran up to him thinking he was a birder, yelling breathlessly, 'American Redstart...trees!' before driving off at high speed. Kathy and I were soon back at the churchyard getting great views of the American Redstart as it flicked in and out of the trees, feeding actively. During the brighter moments it even sat out on top of the brambles sunning itself. We returned home and released the news. A wet night followed, ensuring that the bird was still present the next day as the first twitchers arrived.

The first-winter female American Redstart remained at Eoligarry for 11 days, finally departing overnight on 17/18 September on the second calm, clear night of its stay. During this time, over 200 birders came to Barra to see it, making this the island's biggest twitch to date. Since there had been no opportunity in over 30 years to see this bird in Britain, for many it was too good a chance to pass up.

So, Barra chalks up another mega rarity. I for one can't help wondering what will be next!

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Status of American Redstart in Scotland

This Nearctic species breeds from Yukon and Northern Territories and south through Alberta to eastern Wyoming, east Nevada and eastern Texas and eastwards to Newfoundland, Virginia and central Georgia. The whole population is migratory and winters from southern Florida, Baja California, coastal Mexico and the West Indies south into NW South America.

There have been five previous records in Britain, with one of these in Scotland:

1967 Cornwall: 21 October, Porthgarra, first-winter male

1982 Argyll: 1 November, Portnahaven, Islay, female/immature

1982 Lincolnshire: 7 November to 5 December, Gibraltar Point, probable first-winter male

1983 Cornwall: 13–24 October, St. Just, first-winter male

1985 Hampshire: 4–6 October, Winchester, first-winter male

In addition, there are two records from Ireland: a male at Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork, on 13–14 October 1968, and one at Galley Head, Co. Cork, on 13–15 October 1985. These records have find dates between 4 October and 7 November (34-day window) with the longest stay being the Gibraltar Point bird at 29 days, and there is a south-west bias to records. The Barra individual was found 29 days earlier than the previous window of records.

Scottish Bird Sightings

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

July produced two major prizes: Scotland's first sighting of Pacific Swift, and a DNA-confirmed Green Warbler - the second Scottish record. The returning American White-winged Scoter lingered into August, with Scotland's second American Redstart the rarest find in September, but generally scarce passerine totals were below last year, even for Yellow-browed Warblers.

'Taiga Bean Goose': one was at Wester Sand, Mainland (Ork) on 25 September. **Snow Goose:** one was at Rattray Head/Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 14–17 September, and Loch of Skene (NES) on 20 September. **Red-breasted Goose:** an adult was at Quanterness, Mainland (Ork) on 29–30 September. **American Wigeon:** single drakes were at Loch of Swartmill, Westray (Ork) on 24 September; at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) on 25–26th; two at Aileodair, North Uist (OH) on 26–30 September; one at Oban Trumisgarry, North Uist on

27th, and a juvenile drake at Loch Gilp (Arg) on 24–29 September. **Black Duck:** the regular drake was still at Strontian (High) to 22 September. **Ring-necked Duck:** an eclipse drake was at Loch of Busquoy, Mainland (Ork) on 16 September, and a first-winter at Loch a'Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 28–30 September. **King Eider:** the regular drake was still off Murcar/Blackdog (NES) to 14 July. **Surf Scoter:** the adult drake was in Lunan Bay (A&D) to 1 July; another off Blackdog/Murcar (NES) on 2–12 July, with two there on 7th and 13–17th, three on 22nd, one again from 23–30 July, two on 1–19 August, with three on 5th and 12th, and one still on 25 August; three off Aberdeen (NES) on 18 August; one in Lunan Bay again on 20 August and 10 September, and a drake off Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 30 September. **'American White-winged Scoter':** the returning drake was off Murcar Links/Blackdog (NES) from 2 July to 19 August.

White-billed Diver: one was in Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 22 July and 28 September, and an adult was off Isle of Mousa (Shet) on 31 August to 14 September. **Fea's-type Petrel:** one flew past North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 September. **Cory's Shearwater:** one was seen from the Ullapool–Stornoway ferry (High/OH) on 21 July and another on 30 August; singles were off Fife Ness (Fife) on 4th and 23 August, and off Girdle Ness (NES) on 23 August. **Great Shearwater:** one flew past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 27 July, and singles passed North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 August, 1 September and 10

September. **Balearic Shearwater:** three flew north past Portencross (Ayrs) on 11 July; one past Scoughall (Loth) on 23 July, one off Isle of Skye (High) on 10 August; two flew past Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 10 August; one was off Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 16 August; one went south past Maidens (Ayrs) on 19 August; one passed Tarbat Ness (High) on 7 September; one went north past Barns Ness and Dunbar (Loth) on 16 September; singles passed North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 16th and 17th; two passed St Abb's Head (Bord) and one passed Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 17th; one flew past Barns Ness (Loth) on 18th and one passed Hynish, Tiree on 22 September. **Swinhoe's Petrel:** one re-trapped on Fair Isle on 14 August was the first of the two birds ringed there in July 2013.

Bittern: an unusual record involved one over South Queensferry (Loth) on 30 July. **Cattle Egret:** one was at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) briefly on 26 September; one was near Dunkeld (P&K) on 28th - first for the county, and one at Prora, near Drem (Loth) on 29–30 September. **Little Egret:** generally under-reported, but higher counts included at least 18 in Dumfries & Galloway and nine at Tynninghame (Loth) in August. **Great White Egret:** one remained at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) to 18 August, with it or another there again on 13–21 September; one flew over the Isle of May on 23 August - 2nd island record; one was at Kinneil (UF) on 24 August, and one at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 27 September. **Spoonbill:** one was

at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 8 July. **Pied-billed Grebe:** the returning adult was at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) through July to 17 September. **Honey-buzzard:** one was at Cowal (Arg) on 1 July; one roosted at Halligarth, Unst (Shet) on 2 July; one flew over Handa Island (High) on 4 July; one over Fortrose (High) on 27 July; one over Loch Leven (P&K) on 5 August; one over Strathmiglo (Fife) on 13 August; one over Fair Isle on 5 September, and one over Finstown, Mainland (Ork) on 28 September. **Hobby:** singles were noted at Letham Pools (Fife) on 23 July; at Old Craighall (Loth) on 2 August; at Loch of Skene (NES) on 5 August; at St Andrews (Fife) on 15 August; at Loch Fleet (High) and at Loch Leven (P&K) on 19 August, and one past Tarbat Ness (High) on 22 August. **Spotted Crane:** one was at Doonfoot (Ayr) on 13–29 September. **Crane:** one was at Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 7–11 July; three at Tomatin (High) on 15 July; one at Loch of Hillwell,

Mainland (Shet) on 29 July to 30 September; two were at Rora (NES) on 1–3 August, and one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 18 August to 15 September.

Avocet: one was at the Eden Estuary (Fife) on 22 August to 8 September, with presumed same at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 10 September. **American Golden Plover:** an adult was at North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25 August; one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 12–13 September; an adult at Tolsta Chaolais, Lewis (OH) on 14 September, and one at Shawbost, Lewis (OH) on 14–15th and 26 September; a juvenile at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 22–29th; one on Foula (Shet) on 26th; a juvenile at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 27–30th, and a juvenile at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 28 September. **Pacific Golden Plover:** an adult was at Treadwell Loch, Papa Westray (Ork) on 26 August. **Semipalmated Sandpiper:** one was at Aird an Runair, North Uist

(OH) on 5–6 July, and a juvenile at Balgarva, South Uist (OH) on 11–16 September. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** one was Banna Min, West Burra (Shet) on 23 July; an adult at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 29–30 July, and one was at Aird an Runair, North Uist on 2–3 August. **Baird's Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Spey Bay (M&N) on 13–14th and 16 September. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7 August; on Vatersay (OH) on 19 August; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 20 August; near Loch Bornish, North Uist (OH) on 26 August; at Alloa Inch (UF) on 26th; four at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 26th August; on Fair Isle on 28th; at Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) on 31 August to 8 September; at least two at Baleshare, North Uist on 1 September, with one still on 6th; one on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 1st; one at Kilaulay, South Uist (OH) on 3rd; one at Loch Bee, South Uist on 4th; one at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 5th; two at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB



Plate 321. Semipalmated Sandpiper, Balgarva, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, September 2017. © Andy Williams

Reserve (NES) on 6–8th, with one to 15th; one at Graemeshall Loch, Mainland (Ork) on 6th; one on Noss (Shet) on 10–11th; one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 12th; one near Loch Hallan, South Uist on 14th; one at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 16th, and one at West Gerinish, South Uist on 27 September. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 9 July, with another there on 4 August; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13–18 August; three at Loch Bornish, North Uist (OH) on 28th, with two on 29th and one on 30 August; one on Fair Isle on 4 September, with two on 5th, and one still on 7th; two at Ormiclate, South Uist (OH) on 4–6th, with one still on 13th; one at Greenhill, Tiree (Arg) on 6th; one at Deerness (Ork) on 8th; one at Frobost, South Uist on 9th; one at Baleshare, North Uist on 9th, with two on 13th, one still on 15th, five on 18–26th, and two still on 29–30th; two at Loch a'Phuill, Tiree on 11th; three at Loch Hallan, South Uist on 14th; one at Bornish, South Uist on 15th; one at Balgarva, South Uist on 16th; one near Loch Bhasapol, Tiree on 16th; one on Fair Isle on 21st, and one near Cleat, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 22–23 September. **Great Snipe:** one was on Fair Isle on 11 September. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** an elusive bird was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6th and 18 September. **Hudsonian Whimbrel:** one was seen at Ormiclate, South Uist (OH) on 4 September. **Upland Sandpiper:** one was near Leegartha, Fetlar (Shet) on 30 September. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 8–30 September. **Red-necked Phalarope:** up to five on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1–29 July; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 7 July; ; one at Skaw, Unst (Shet) and three on Fair Isle on 11 August, with one to 14th, then three on 15th, two on 17–21st and one still on 22

August; one on North Ronaldsay on 29 August, and one at Fail, near Tarbolton (Ayr) on 25–29 September. **Grey Phalarope:** one was at Singing Sands, Ardnamurchan (High) on 3 August; two flew south past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 29 August; one was off Arisaig (High) on 2 September; one off the Uig–Lochmaddy ferry (High/OH) on 8 September; one was off Aird, Tiree (Arg), three flew past Uisaed Point (Arg) and one past Maidens (Ayr) on 11th; one was seen from the Oban–Barra ferry (Arg/OH) on 16th, and one flew past Hynish, Tiree on 23 September.

Pomarine Skua: eight reported in July all south of Aberdeen with a high count of three off Brevig, Barra (OH) on 28th; 17 noted in August, all on east coast from the Moray Firth to Firth of Forth, with high counts of three past Hound Point (Loth) on 21st and four off Fife Ness (Fife) on 23rd; 62 seen in September from Caithness south, with most on east coast and 11 down west side, and peaks of 13 in Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 11th, and 17 past Hound Point on 17 September. **Long-tailed Skua:** one was reported off Fisherrow (Loth) on 12 July; singles were off Slains (NES) on 23 August and off Mull (Arg) on 29 August; 16 noted in September from Highland to Borders plus two in Argyll, with a high count of five off Chanony Point (High) on 14th. **Sabine's Gull:** twelve noted in August, with five in The Minch plus one from Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 28th and two off Balranald, North Uist (OH) and Rubha Ardvule on 29th, and one off the Isle of May on 29 August; 14 in September from Caithness to Argyll with peaks of two off Gairloch (High) on 1st and in Broadford Bay, Skye (High) on 9th, and three on east coast - singles off Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) and Blackness (UF) on 18th, and in Lunan Bay (A&D) on 26th.

Bonaparte's Gull: a juvenile was at North Tolsta, Lewis (OH) on 21–23 September. **Mediterranean Gull:** very few reported away from the Firth of Forth, where a new site record of 10 at East Wemyss (Fife) on 14–17 September, or Ayrshire, where peak of 23 noted at Troon on 9 September. **Iceland Gull:** very low numbers - about 10 in July, all singles and just two on the east coast - a juvenile at Tarbat Ness (High) on 2nd and a first-summer at Bilsdean (Loth) on 6th, with others from North Uist (OH) to Ayrshire; just three birds in August - a juvenile at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 6–8th; a second-summer at Stinky Bay, Benbecula (OH) on 11–23rd, and one at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) on 20th; just two reported in September - single second-winter birds at Uisaed Point/Machrahanish (Arg) on 12th and 24th, with both together on 25th. **Glaucous Gull:** low numbers - about 10 in July, with singles in Orkney, Caithness, Highland and Morayshire, at Ullapool (High) and the rest on the Outer Hebrides. About nine in August, all on the Outer Hebrides except for singles in Caithness and Ullapool, with a peak count of two at Loch Sandary, North Uist on 15th. Only about five reported in September, with birds on Out Skerries (Shet), Unst (Shet), Caithness, and Dingwall and Ullapool (both High). **Gull-billed Tern:** one flew south past Troon (Ayr) on 14 July. **Black Tern:** one flew past Eyemouth (Bord) on 15 July; two passed Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 8 August; one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 18 August; one off Dornoch Point (High) on 21 August; one at Arbroath on 30 August to 2 September; with at least 25 more in September, all on the east coast from Highland to the Firth of Forth except for singles at Hogganfield Loch (Clyde) on 2nd; Bishop Loch (Clyde) on 6–9th; Loch Ryan (D&G) on 28th, and Rubha



Plate 322. Wryneck, Toab, Shetland, September 2017. © Peter Garrity

Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 30th. Peak counts were two off Chanonry Point (High) on 4th, two at Arbroath (A&D) on 6th; two off Musselburgh (Loth) on 7th, and two off Kinghorn (Fife) on 10th. **White-winged Black Tern:** single adults were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9 July, 16–18 July and 1–19 August (venturing to Fair Isle on 21 July); at Seilebost, Harris (OH) on 14–19 July.

Turtle Dove: singles were on Fair Isle on 27–28 August; on Noss (Shet) on 1 September; at Treshnish, Mull (Arg) on 15 September; at Pow Burn (Ayr) on 25th, and at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 28 September. **Black-billed Cuckoo:** a first-winter was at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 18 September. **Snowy Owl:** an immature male was at Loch Fada, Benbecula (OH) on 7 September. **Nightjar:** one was at Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 20 July. **Pacific Swift:** one was at Longhaven Quarry (NES) on 2 July - the first record for Scotland. **Bee-eater:** one was at Sandside Bay/Reay (Caith) on 4 August. **Roller:** one was at Balnakeil (High) on 29–30 September. **Hoopoe:** singles were at Kirkton Farm, near Crianlarich

(UF) on 21–23 July; at Lopness Bay, Sanday (Ork) on 25 August; at Pencaitland (Loth) on 2–8 September; at Cott Farm, Papa Westray (Ork) on 19–20 September; at Harrapool, Skye (High) on 26th, and on Shapinsay (Ork) on 27 September. **Wryneck:** two were on Fair Isle on 25 August, with one still on 26th; two at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 26 August, with one there on 4–5 September; then singles on Papa Westray (Ork) on 5 September; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 7th; on Fair Isle on 9th; near Scousburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 11th; at Loch na Keal, Mull (Arg) on 21st; on Fair Isle on 25th and 29–30th; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 29–30th, and at Toab, Mainland and Wester Quarff, Mainland (both Shet) on 30 September.

Golden Oriole: one was at Vaul, Tiree (Arg) on 3 September, and one at Symbister/Saltness, Whalsay (Shet) on 17–21 September. **Isabelline Shrike:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 29 September, with two there on 30th. **Red-backed Shrike:** singles were at Tresta, Fetlar (Shet) on 3 July; at Grutnesss, Mainland (Shet) on 24–26 August; on Noss (Shet)

on 24–27 August; at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 24th; at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 25–28th, at Achmore, Lewis (OH) on 25th, and on Fair Isle on 25th, with two there on 26 August; a single again on Fair Isle on 5–9 September, with another on 16th; at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 10–30 September; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 19th, at Barassie (Ayr) on 25th, and at Burravoe, Yell and Fladdabister, Mainland (both Shet) on 30 September. **Great Grey Shrike:** one was on Fair Isle on 25–29 September; one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 27–29th; at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 28–30th, and at Dale of Walls, Mainland and Sumburgh, Mainland (both Shet) on 30 September. **Woodchat Shrike:** single juveniles were on Fair Isle on 19 August, and at Hundland, Papa Westray (Ork) on 25 September. **Firecrest:** singles were at Torness (Loth) on 26 September, and at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 27 September. **Short-toed Lark:** singles were at Tynninghame (Loth) on 22–24 July and 11–16 September; at Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 26 August; and at Housay, Out Skerries (Shet) on 27 September.

Greenish Warbler: singles were on Fair Isle on 4–7 July; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24–27 August, and at Hundland, Papa Westray (Ork) on 12 September. **Green Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 4–7 July (confirmed by DNA analysis) - the second for Scotland. **Arctic Warbler:** singles were on Fair Isle on 26–27 August; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 7–11 September; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) and Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 9 September; at Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 12–13th; at Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 16th; at Fife Ness (Fife) on 21st, and on the Isle of May on 25–27 September. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** the first of the autumn were one at Norwick, Unst, two at Skaw, Whalsay and two at Mossbank, Whalsay (all Shet) on 9 September, with birds numerous and widespread in the north from 17th. Though difficult to estimate, over 350 birds were noted by the end of the month, with birds as far south as Borders and Clyde. High counts included 12 on Out Skerries, 22 on Unst and 16 on Whalsay (all Shet) on 20th; 24 on Unst, 13 on Yell and 24 on Fetlar (all Shet) and 15 on Fair Isle



Plate 324. Western Bonelli's Warbler, St Abb's Head, Borders, September 2017. © Andrew Russell

on 22nd; 39 on Bressay (Shet), 10 on North Ronaldsay (Ork) and 10 at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 26th. **Radde's Warbler:** one was at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 29 September, but flew into a window and died. **Western Bonelli's Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 17 September and one at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 19–24

September. **Barred Warbler:** first of the autumn were singles at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) and on Fair Isle on 19 August with 10 others by 31st. There were over 45 noted in September, mostly on the Northern Isles, except for singles on the Isle of May on 4–5th; at Portknockie (M&N) on 13th; at Kilminning (Fife) on 21–30th; at Nigg Bay, Aberdeen (NES) on 22nd and nearby at Girdle Ness (NES) on 25th; at Castlebay, Barra (OH) on 24th, and at Barns Ness (Loth) on 26th and nearby at Skateraw (Loth) on 28th. **Subalpine Warbler:** a female was on Westray (Ork) on 14 July. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 11 September. **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler:** one was on Fair Isle on 22 September. **Booted Warbler:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 27–30 September. **Sykes's Warbler:** one was at Skirza, near John O'Groats (Caith) on 28 September. **Icterine Warbler:** a singing bird was still at Nigg (High) to 6 July; with singles on Fair Isle on 25 August; at Longhaven (NES) on 5 September; at Isbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 9th and at Sumburgh



Plate 323. Yellow-browed Warbler, Scourie, Sutherland, Highland, September 2017. © Andy Williams

Head, Mainland (Shet) on 11th and 26 September. **Melodious Warbler:** singles were on Papa Westray (Ork) on 25 August and on Fair Isle on 17–18 September. **Paddyfield Warbler:** one was at Hobbister, Mainland (Ork), on 6 July (retrospectively identified from photos); one at Cunningsburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 25 September, and one at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 28 September. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** singles were at Inverdrue Fish Farm (High) on 3 July; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 25 August and 26–29 September, and on Fair Isle on 25 September. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were at Graemeshall Loch, Mainland (Ork) on 17 August; near Eastside Manse, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18 August, on Fetlar (Shet) and at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 26 August; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17–18th and 28–30 September, and on Fair Isle on 19–27 and 30 September.

Rose-coloured Starling: singles were at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 2 July with presumed same at Vatersay (OH) on 14 July; at Harrapool, Skye (High) on 3 July to 12 August; at Sliderry, Arran (Ayr) on 10 July; at Embo (High) on 16 July to 1 August and 28 August to 3 September; on Fair Isle on 24 July to 5 August; at Balnakeil (High) on 30 July to 1 August, and at Seaton of Usan on 16 August. **Siberian Thrush:** a female was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 20 September. **Bluethroat:** singles were at Sumburgh Farm, Mainland (Shet) on 7 September; on Fair Isle on 17–22nd and 25–30 September; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19th and 25–26th; at Baliasta, Unst (Shet) on 21st; at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 24; at Hagdale, Unst and at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 27th, and at Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 30 September. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** at least 18 were on the Northern Isles from 17 September, with singles elsewhere at

Balephuill, Tiree (Arg) on 10–11 September and at Murcar (NES) on 26 September. **Siberian Stonechat:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26 September.

Yellow Wagtail races - Blue-headed: a male was on Fair Isle on 5–8 September; **Grey-headed:** one was at Troon (Ayr) on 26 August. **Citrine Wagtail:** one was on Fair Isle on 17 September. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were on Out Skerries (Shet) and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26 September. **Olive-backed Pipit:** singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26 September, with two there on 28–29th; on Fair Isle on 26–27 September, with two there on 30th; on the Isle of May on 27–28th, and at Bousta, Mainland, at Dale of Walls, Mainland and at Quendale, Mainland (all Shet) on 30 September. **Pechora Pipit:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 27 September. **Red-throated Pipit:** one was on Fair Isle on 27–30 September, and one at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 30th.

Common Rosefinch: at least six in August, all on the Northern Isles except one near Arisaig (High) on 12th; up to 50 were noted in September, virtually all on the Northern Isles again, with high counts of three at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 16th and Fair Isle on 19–21st. Elsewhere there were singles on the Isle of May on 18th, at Kilminning (Fife) on 22nd, and at Murcar (NES) on 26–27 September. **'Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll':** one was near Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 20 September. **Two-barred Crossbill:** a female was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 21–23 July, with two there on 25–26th and three on 27–31 July; a female on Fair Isle on 22 July; a female on the Isle of May on 24–29 July; two males at Marrister, Whalsay (Shet) on 29 July, and a juvenile found dead at Bealance, Fetlar (Shet) on 1 August.

Snow Bunting: first of the autumn were singles on Fair Isle and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15 September, with about 30 reported by 30 September. **Lapland Bunting:** first of the autumn were singles on Fair Isle and at Claddach Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 30 August. At least 160 in September, mostly on the Northern and Western Isles, except for two at Cotehill Loch (NES) on 9th, and singles at Gott, Tiree (Arg) on 3–6th; at The Reef, Tiree on 19th, at Dunbar (Loth) on 20th; on Rhum (High) and near Carnan, Tiree on 24th; at Boarhills (Fife) on 25th; at Scoughall (Loth) on 27th, and on the Isle of May on 28th. **Ortolan Bunting:** singles were at Norwick, Unst (Ork) on 11–16 September, and on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13–14th and 26–28 September. **Rustic Bunting:** singles were on Fair Isle on 17 September; on Foula (Shet) and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29th, and at Melby, Mainland, at Dale of Walls, Mainland and at Cunningsburgh, Mainland (all Shet) on 30th. **Little Bunting:** from 11–30 September there were up to 20 on Shetland, at least four on Fair Isle, at least three on North Ronaldsay (Ork). Elsewhere there were singles on the Isle of May on 17–19th, and near Keoldale, Durness (High) on 29 September. **Yellow-breasted Bunting:** one was on Housay, Out Skerries (Shet) on 20–23 September. **American Redstart:** a female was at Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 7–17 September - the second for Scotland.

Scottish Birds

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PhotoSPOT

Plate 325. Having moved back home to south-west Scotland earlier this year, it was nice to have a scarce bird in the form of this Spotted Crake turn up on my doorstep. I made two early morning visits to see the bird which frequented a small lagoon on the foreshore at Doonfoot, just outside Ayr - my old local patch from years ago. The bird was easily spooked but providing there wasn't too much noise or movement, it would feed out in the open along the edge of the reedbed giving very nice views. This is the second Spotted Crake I have seen at Doonfoot, my previous one was in July 1973 in Cunning Park Marsh.

Equipment: Canon 1DX mk2, Canon 600mm f4 lens + 1.4x converter, Aperture Priority, ISO 2000, shutter 1/250, aperture f8.

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