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# Scottish Birds

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Yellow Wagtail, Crail, Fife,
22 April 2018. © *John Anderson*

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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 | |
| Family (2 adults and all juniors at same address) | £ | 48.00 | |
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| Student (in full-time education) | £ | 14.00 | |
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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 2020 (†31 December 2020), 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

# Scottish Birds 40:2 (2020)

# Lockdown observations

**Plate 70.** Ian Bainbridge, May 2020. © *Carole Bainbridge*

What on earth do I write about at a time like this? Exceptional, unprecedented, the only thing we can be certain about is that the current coronavirus pandemic is going to change many aspects of our lives in ways we have not yet considered. Our travel, social gatherings, meetings and working relationships will all be affected in various ways for some time to come, I am sure. Writing this at the end of April, with the next Government review due in a week's time, it's impossible for me to second-guess what we might be permitted to do by the time you are reading this, but I strongly suspect that we will still be in or close to lockdown, and that your birding, and mine, will be taking place at, or very close to, home.

Similarly, we have no way to predict when we might be able to reopen Waterston House, and it is credit to our staff that they have managed to keep working from home and 'keep the show on the road'; we're thankful for all their efforts. We also hope that offering the March issue of *Scottish Birds* free to access online has been appreciated by members and non-members alike, in times when reading interesting articles about birds may be more important to folk.

Down here in Galloway, we're very grateful to be in a rural location and to have a decent-sized garden. We have started a 'lockdown list'; species we have seen from home, or on the mile-long trip to the local shops, and we're adding weekly records to BirdTrack. To my surprise, it has reached 58 species already (not the 101 that friends locked down in Spain have managed, and certainly no Pallid Harrier or Glossy Ibis!). The spring migrants are still arriving, and perhaps the best for us are the Pied Flycatchers singing in the wood behind the garden. Now is a brilliant time to learn those less familiar bird songs; I'm still waiting for the Redstarts.

Perhaps equally interesting are the daily changes in bird behaviour: no Siskins this spring, in my view this is linked to the sunny weather, which means that Larch cones are open and easy to feed from. We had two yesterday for the first time in weeks, after two days of rain. The Yellowhammers here are beginning to use the sunflower heart feeders; until now they have only fed on the bird table. Every morning we're watching Blue Tits hunting all around the greenhouses, presumably looking for spiders' webs for nest linings. It's sometimes good to have a little more time to watch; we've even seen day-flying Noctule and Common Pipistrelle bats.

So, until we can get back out and about and meet again, keep safe and enjoy the birds you can watch. Now, where are those Pied Wagtails nesting? [late news – they are building under the solar panels].

**Ian Bainbridge, SOC President.**

**Plate 71.** Parrot Crossbill, male, Helendale & Sound, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, 3–13 October 2017. © *Rory Tallack*

# Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2018

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

This is the 11th annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), describing rare birds recorded in Scotland during 2018. Details of previous annual reports that cover the period 2005 to 2017 can be found in McInerny & McGowan (2019), some of which are cited in this report.

A summary of the rare bird species considered by SBRC, the SBRC List, and other committees is given in Appendix 2, and is shown at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists.

Recent changes to the SBRC List include, from 1 January 2019, White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* being removed from the SBRC List, with records now assessed by local Scottish committees. Additionally, from this date, all records of Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni* are considered by BBRC; and Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* were added to the SBRC List, being no longer assessed by BBRC. From 1 January 2020, Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* and Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* were removed from the SBRC List, and instead are considered by BBRC.

The range and number of rare birds seen in Scotland were similar to other years, with no exceptional events. However, a number of SBRC species were not seen in Scotland during 2018 including: Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Kentish Plover, Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*, Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* and Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*.

During 2017, the influx of Parrot Crossbills *Loxia pytyopsittacus* to the Northern Isles was a major occurrence. Seventeen birds were recorded in total, with up to 14 seen in Shetland, two in Orkney and one reaching the Outer Hebrides. This was the first significant influx into Scotland since 1982, when 20 appeared (Forrester *et al*. 2007).

## Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual BBRC reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the latest version of the *Scottish List*, which follows the 9th Edition of the British List (BOU 2018, Forrester *et al*. 2018).

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

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al*. (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At Sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al*. (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year.
- Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
- Total number in the current year (2018).

Occasionally, adjustments to totals have been made to take account of late retrospective acceptances by local committees, or when corrections are detected from Excel spreadsheet totals.

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2018, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2018 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years can be accepted by Local Recorders without submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided in this report. Revised and/or corrected details are also provided for some pre-2018 records, published previously.

For each record listed in full, the following information is provided:

- Year
- Recording area www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present throughout; in some cases, it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Use of DNA analysis to aid identification.
- Existence of a photograph or video, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited: if the submitter was the Local Recorder this is shown as '*per* Local Recorder'. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'.

- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen accession number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird at a different location, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, Local Recorder and/or others.

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

## Species coverage

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

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC List each year for the period 2016-20. Appendix 3 lists corrections to previous SBRC reports.

## SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current members are Mark Wilkinson (Chairman), Jim Dickson, Mark Lewis (replacing Martin Scott in 2019), David Parnaby, Dave Pullan, Martin Scott, David Steel and Mark Warren. Chris McInerny is non-voting Secretary and Bob McGowan is non-voting Museum Consultant. For more information about SBRC, see www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/about-sbrc.

Records accepted by SBRC are published on the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/recent-decisions as soon as they are processed, and thereafter in annual reports, such as this, published in *Scottish Birds*. When published, the accepted record details are also added to Excel spreadsheets which list all records for SBRC species. These Excel spreadsheets display the data chronologically, by recording areas, and graphically. Examples of the graphs have been used in SBRC reports published in *Scottish Birds*. The Excel files are archived at the Waterston Library, SOC Headquarters, Aberlady www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/library. They may be consulted on request, and we encourage interested parties to use this resource, which is a convenient way to access and interrogate SBRC records. The Excel spreadsheets have also been placed on the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-species-analysis, from where they can be downloaded.

## Acknowledgements

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

Next, we thank the following current and former Local Recorders for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Yvonne Benting, Ian Broadbent, Paul Collin, Martin Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Rob Fray, Nick Littlewood, Sinclair Mason, Russell Neave, David Parkinson, David Parnaby, Scott Patterson, Graham Sparshott, Peter Stronach, Stephen Welch, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas included in this report.

## Systematic list of accepted records

**Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis*
19 (of 23 birds): 52: 1

**Table 1.** Accepted record of Lesser Scaup in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Highland** Alturlie, Inverness-shire, adult, male, 18 April, photo (H. Addlesee *et al.*). |

Lesser Scaup is a rare though increasing visitor to Scotland, since the first in 1990, with observations throughout the country. Most records have been of singles, although multiples, including a group of three, have been seen. A number of individuals have remained for extended periods, sometimes moving between sites, and have returned in following years.

The Alturlie, Highland bird was found amongst Scaup *Aythya marila* on saltwater which is unusual as most Lesser Scaup seen in Scotland are found on freshwater, often instead associating with Tufted Ducks *A. fuligula*. There was a previous sighting at this locality, an adult female observed between December 2013 and January 2014 (Hudson *et al.* 2014).

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

**White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii*
194: 309: 28

**Table 2.** Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Caithness** Holborn Head, adult, 7-8 January, photo (R. Hughes *et al.*).<br>**Fife** Fife Ness, adult, 26 October (K.D. Shaw).<br>**Fife** Fife Ness, adult, 27 October, photo (B. Farquharson).<br>**Highland** Broadford Bay, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, 6 February, photo (N. Bennett).<br>**Highland** Tongue Bay, Sutherland, adult, 19 May, photo (J.A. Hanlon).<br>**Highland** Tarbat Ness, Easter Ross, Ross & Cromarty, adult, 22 May (D. Tanner).<br>**Moray & Nairn** Cullen, adults, three, 1-29 April, photo (D. Pullan *et al. per* Local Recorder).<br>**Moray & Nairn** Portknockie, adult, 9 April (A. Coia, K.D. Shaw).<br>**Moray & Nairn** Burghead, adult, 16-25 April, photo (J. Clarke, A. Saunders *et al.*).<br>**North-east Scotland** Lido beach, Peterhead, dead on tideline, 29 April, photo (D. Grant).<br>**Orkney** The Ouse, Finstown, Mainland, adult, 6 January, photo (H. & D. Aiton).<br>**Orkney** Houton Head, Orphir, Mainland, adult, returning, 2017 to 26 March, photo (McInerny & McGowan 2019).<br>**Orkney** Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, adult, 6-7 May, photo (S.J. Davies).<br>**Orkney** South Bay ('Nouster Bay'), North Ronaldsay, adult, 29 May, photo (A. Saunders *et al.*).<br>**Orkney** Papa Sound, Westray, 19 June (M. Hoit *et al.*). |

**Plate 72.** White-billed Diver, Holborn Head, Caithness, 7–8 January 2018. © *Rob Hughes*

**Orkney** Brig o' Waithe, Mainland, adult, 19 December, photo (S. Charlton).
**Outer Hebrides** Eòlaigearraidh (Eoligarry), Barra, 25 March to 10 May, photo (B.A. Taylor).
**Outer Hebrides** Sgiogarstaigh, Nis (Skigersta, Ness), Isle of Lewis, two, 26-29 March, photo (B.A.E. Marr).
**Outer Hebrides** Port Nis (Port of Ness), Isle of Lewis, two, 14 April, photo (B.A.E. Marr).
**Outer Hebrides** Sgiogarstaigh, Nis (Skigersta, Ness), Isle of Lewis, 14 April, photo (B.A.E. Marr).
**Outer Hebrides** Sgiogarstaigh, Nis (Skigersta, Ness), Isle of Lewis, 29 April, photo (R.D. Wemyss).
**Outer Hebrides** Àird a'Mhuile (Ardvule), South Uist, 31 October, photo (J.B. Kemp).
**Outer Hebrides** Àird Mhòr (Ardmhor), Barra, 24 November to 2019, photo (B.A. Taylor).
**Shetland** Bluemull Sound, adult, returning, 2 January to 7 April, photo (W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).
**Shetland** Mousa Sound, adult, returning, 19 January to 9 February (J.G. Brown *et al.*).
**Shetland** South Nesting Bay, Mainland, adult, returning, 19 January to 3 May (W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).
**Shetland** Flubersgerdie, Unst, adult, 30 April, photo (D. Cooper).
**Shetland** Lamba Ness, Unst, adult, 2 November, photo (D. Cooper).
**Shetland** South Nesting Bay, Mainland, adult, returning, 2 November into 2019, photo (A.H.J. Harrop *et al.*).

White-billed Diver is a scarce though regular visitor to Scotland, with up to 40 being reported each year. Most occur in spring at a number of favoured localities in the Outer Hebrides, Moray & Nairn and North-east Scotland where birds stop-over to moult before moving to summer breeding areas in the high Arctic (McInerny & Shaw 2020). In Shetland and Orkney, a few wintering individuals return to the same sites in successive years, and a very small number of immature, non-breeding birds have been observed during the summer.

There may be some overlap among Scottish records given the species' mobility. It also seems likely that some of the spring birds return to use the same stop-over sites each year. As it is impossible to distinguish these and they are registered as new, SBRC total numbers are probably inflated.

The two Fife Ness observations, the fifth and sixth for the recording area, are interesting as they likely relate to the wintering population known to occur in the North Sea (McInerny & Shaw 2020). Increasing numbers of White-billed Divers are being seen along the British east coast, particularly during autumn seawatches, with digital cameras aiding this reporting. The second Fife Ness bird was identified by the observer from a photographic image.

Records of White-billed Diver from 1 January 2019 will not be assessed by SBRC, but instead by local committees (Appendix 2).

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

**Cory's Shearwater** *Calonectris borealis*
*c.* 228: 32: 1

**Table 3.** Accepted record of Cory's Shearwater in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Dumfries & Galloway** Corsewall Point, 8 August (B.D. Henderson). |

Cory's Shearwater is a rare visitor to Scottish waters, recorded near-annually, with most seen off North Ronaldsay and the Outer Hebrides during the late summer and early autumn. A very few enter the North Sea where they are observed moving along the east coast. Although an increase in sightings from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s occurred, numbers since have decreased, with about two or less seen annually, although none were observed in 2010, 2012 and 2015.

The only bird seen during 2018 was just the second record for Dumfries & Galloway, with the first seen from the Mull of Galloway on 5 June 1996.

(Breeds on the Azores, Canary Islands and other nearby Atlantic islands, with the closely related Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea* breeding in the Mediterranean. Both species occur in North Atlantic waters in autumn and are on the British List, but most are assumed to be Cory's, with Scopoli's not yet recorded in Scottish waters.)

**Great Shearwater** *Ardenna gravis*
*c.* 522 (1950-2004): 9,227: 1
(excluding 'At Sea' records)

**Table 4.** Accepted record of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2018.

2018: **Dumfries & Galloway** Corsewall Point, 19 September (B.D. Henderson).

Great Shearwater was rarely seen in Scotland until many were observed during 2005-07. Since then, however, no more than six have been recorded in any one year, if 'At Sea' records are discounted. This underlines the exceptional nature of the influxes witnessed during 2005-07.

The species is a late summer and autumn visitor, with most sightings from North Ronaldsay, Orkney, and a few from the Outer Hebrides and along the east coast of mainland Scotland.

The only bird seen during 2018, by the same lucky observer who saw Cory's Shearwater at the same site in the same year, was the fifth record for Dumfries & Galloway. The most recent previous record was of two seen from the Stranraer to Larne ferry, an undated sighting during 1980.

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

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*
3: 15: 4

**Table 5.** Accepted records of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2018.

2018: **Argyll** Calgary, Mull, 12 October to 13 November, photo (W. McPhail, A. Prasad *et al.*).
**Clyde** North Porton Farm, Bishopton, 12-17 November, photo (G. Keyes *et al.*).
**Dumfries & Galloway** Caerlaverock WWT, 7 October, photo (A. Hiller *et al.*).
**Outer Hebrides** Frobost, Rubh' Àird-mhicheil & Ormacleit, South Uist, 16-28 October, photo (J.B. Kemp, I. Thompson *et al.*).

Cattle Egret remains very rare in Scotland, although more are being found. This reflects the large increase in numbers present in

**Plate 73.** Cattle Egret, Calgary, Mull, Argyll, 12 October to 13 November 2018. © *Anand Prasad*

England, where over 200 appeared in 2007, with the species first breeding in 2008; a second influx occurred in 2016, resulting in breeding and flocks of 51 and 87 observed in Devon and Somerset during 2018 (McInerny & McGowan 2019).

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

**Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus*
45: 6: 0
(excluding young from known Scottish nests)

**Table 6.** Accepted record of Montagu's Harrier in Scotland, 2013.

2013: **Fair Isle** Da Water & various locations, second-calendar-year, 3 June, photo (D. Forsman, G. Gordon, D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Montagu's Harrier is a very rare migrant to Scotland, with the few records mostly in spring along the east side of the country from Borders to Shetland. A few breeding attempts have been successful, though none since 1955, and the total of 51 birds to the end of 2018 excludes fledged young from these breeding attempts.

**Plate 74.** Montagu's Harrier, second-calendar-year, Da Water & various locations, Fair Isle, 3 June 2013. © *David Parnaby*

The 2013 Fair Isle bird was initially thought to be a Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* and submitted as such to BBRC. Circulation of the file was inconclusive with it suspected that the bird was instead a second-calendar-year Montagu's Harrier. Expert independent opinion was sought and this identification confirmed. Immatures of these two species are extremely difficult to separate having a similar shape and structure, very different to the more distinctive adults.

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

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*
19: 32: 2

**Table 7.** Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Fair Isle** Plantation & roaming, 7-12 June, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*); same **Orkney** Brides, North Ronaldsay, 7 June, photo (S.J. Davies). **Shetland** Vigon, Yell, 24 May, photo (C. Dodd, S. Pinder). |

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most have been seen in spring, from April to June, with far fewer sightings in summer and autumn. There have also been instances of summering, and a single case of hybridisation with Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. Occurrences have increased in recent years; there were 30 during 2007-18, following just nine in the period 1997-2006.

The bird seen on both Fair Isle and Orkney was recognisable as the same individual through examination of photographs. These images also raised the possibility that the bird was a Black Kite of one of the eastern subspecies, such as *M. m. lineatus* or a hybrid. Accordingly, the record was forwarded to BBRC for subspecific identification, where it is currently being considered.

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

**Plate 75.** Stone-curlew, Rigifa Pond, Cove Bay, North-east Scotland, 19 August 2018. © *Graeme Ruthven*

**Stone-curlew** *Burhinus oedicnemus*
29: 7: 2

**Table 8.** Accepted records of Stone-curlew in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Highland** Balnakeil, Sutherland, adult, 15 May, photo (C. Leslie).<br>**North-east Scotland** Rigifa Pond, Cove Bay, 19 August, photo (B.J. Stewart *et al.*). |

Stone-curlew is a very rare visitor to Scotland; there were just 38 observations to the end of 2018 with almost half of these in the Northern Isles, and the remainder scattered across the country, though mostly along the east coast. There is a peak in occurrence in late May and early June.

Such is the rarity of Stone-curlew in Scotland it is a remarkable coincidence that Balnakeil, Sutherland has hosted an adult of the species twice: the 2018 record listed here and another on 28-30 May 2016 (McGowan & McInerny 2018). Despite being two years apart it is therefore possible that these two records refer to the same returning individual.

(Nominate *oedicnemus* breeds in open habitats in southern Europe east to the Caucasus, extending as far north as England and Poland; migrates south to winter in Spain and North Africa. Five other subspecies.)

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*
15: 7: 0

**Table 9.** Accepted record of Kentish Plover in Scotland, 2017.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2017: | **Outer Hebrides** Borgh, Beàrnaraigh (Borve, Berneray), 15 May, photo, colour-ringed (G. Wyatt). |

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

The 2017 Outer Hebrides bird was colour-ringed, showing that it had originated from Brittany, France where it was marked in 2015/16, with likely the same individual seen at Tacumshin, Wexford, Ireland in April 2017.

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

**White-rumped Sandpiper** *Calidris fuscicollis*
69: 91: 3

**Table 10.** Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Outer Hebrides** Baile Gharbhaidh (Balgarva), South Uist, adult, 18 September (J.B. Kemp).<br>**Shetland** Virkie, Mainland, adult, 15-23 August, photo (P.V. Harvey *et al.*).<br>**Shetland** Virkie, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 14 October, photo (R.M. Fray *et al.*). |

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

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

**Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinnans*
**0: 10: 1**

**Table 11.** Accepted record of Caspian Gull in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| **2018:** | **Fife** Leven, second-calendar-year, 11-13 May, photo (M.A. Wilkinson *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 39: 75-78). |

Caspian Gull is extremely rare in Scotland. Occurrences have been from late autumn to spring. Most observations have been in coastal East Lothian, amongst flocks of gulls.

It is now known that a regular movement of the species takes place each year through England, with most recorded in the south and east. The majority are immatures present in summer and autumn having moved west from their Eastern European breeding areas. However, Caspian Gull remains very rare elsewhere in the UK. Under-recording of this difficult-to-identify species is also likely, especially immatures (McInerny 2010).

The only Caspian Gull observed in Scotland during 2018 was the first record for Fife (Wilkinson 2019). Found on Leven beach this second-calendar-year was seen by just a few observers over its three-day stay.

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

**Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*
**12: 25: 3**

**Table 12.** Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| **2018:** | **Argyll** Loch Gilp, second-calendar-year, 17 May, photo (J.M. Dickson).<br>**Caithness** Thurso, adult, 15 April, photo (R. Hughes).<br>**Clyde** Balgray Reservoir, second-calendar-year/third-calendar-year, 1-20 January, photo, same as 2017 (McGowan & McInerny 2019); returning Balgray Reservoir, third-calendar-year/fourth-calendar-year, 8 December to 2019 (J.J. Sweeney).<br>**Clyde** Blythswood Square, Glasgow, adult, 5-10 April, photo (R. Miller *et al.*). |


**Plate 76 a–b.** Yellow-legged Gull, adult, Blythswood Square, Glasgow, Clyde, 5–10 April 2018. © *Rod Miller*

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

It seems likely that most if not all records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland refer to the nominate subspecies *L. m. michahellis*, which has a Mediterranean and south-west European distribution, including England (McInerny 2009). However, observers should be aware that one record in Scotland of Yellow-legged Gull of the subspecies *L. m. atlantis* has been accepted recently by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) and BBRC, as the first for Britain (Stoddart & McInerny 2017, BOU 2020). All potential records of this subspecific taxon, which breeds on the Atlantic Islands of the Azores, Madeira and Canaries, should be sent to BBRC (Appendix 2).

Away from Clyde the species remains very rare in Scotland shown by the birds in Caithness and Argyll being the first and third records for their respective recording areas.

The Blythswood Square observation was notable in that the bird was associating with breeding Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* at a central Glasgow location where the latter two species nest on rooftops. The bird was holding territory and was seen displaying and long-calling to gulls of the other two species, suggesting that it was attempting to pair up and mate. This is the first time that such behaviour of a Yellow-legged Gull has been noted in Scotland, although hybrid pairs have been observed in southern England (Olsen & Larsson 2004).

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

**White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus*
59: 23: 1

**Table 13.** Accepted record of White-winged Black Tern in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Highland** Melvich, Sutherland, adult, 30 May, photo (R. Hughes, D. Stevens, P. Stronach *et al.*). |

White-winged Black Tern is a rare visitor to Scotland, mostly observed along the east side of the country and on islands between late spring and late autumn.

(Breeds on marshy lakes in central and Eastern Palearctic areas, migrating south to winter in Africa, Australasia and the Indian subcontinent.)

**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator*
86: 28: 2

**Table 14.** Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2018.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Shetland** Baltasound, Unst, adult, male, 17 April, photo, died, skin at National Museums Scotland (accession number NMS.Z 2018.121) (R.J. Brookes *et al. per* Local Recorder).<br>**Lothian** Barns Ness, first-calendar-year, 16-29 September, photo (I.J. Andrews, M. Till *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 39: 81-82). |

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

The Lothian bird was third record for the recording area, with the last an adult at Tyninghame on 19 August 1967 (Andrews & Till 2019). Many appreciated its extended stay, almost all of whom could add it to their Lothian List.

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

**Woodlark** *Lullula arborea*
68 (1950-2004): 27: 2

**Table 15.** Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2018.

2018: **Fife** Ferry Hills, North Queensferry, 10 November, photo (G. Sparshott).
**Orkney** Sandar, North Ronaldsay, 3 April (G. Gay).

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

The 'flyover' sighting in Fife was the first for the recording area, and only the second mainland occurrence since 2000. Since 1950, the majority of observations have been on the Northern Isles, with 70% on Fair Isle and Shetland.

(Two subspecies. *L. a. arborea* breeds in north and central European areas from western Russia through Finland and Norway to England, where present north to Yorkshire. The other subspecies breeds from Iran and the Middle East through southern Europe to north-west Africa. Most populations move south to wintering areas, with more northerly populations moving the farthest.)

**Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*
286: 96: 3

**Table 16.** Accepted record of Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2018. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 17.

2018: **Isle of May** 26 May to 2 June, photo (J. Harrison, M. Newell *et al.*).

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

This was the sixth occurrence on the Isle of May, with the last on 28 May 1998.

**Table 17.** Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2018.

| | Number of birds | | Date range | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Spr. | Aut. | Spr. | Aut. |
| Fair Isle | - | - | - | - |
| Orkney | - | - | - | - |
| Shetland | - | 2 | - | 1–13 Oct |

There were only two sightings in the Northern Isles and this was the second consecutive blank year for Fair Isle.

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

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica*
40: 50: 2

**Table 18.** Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2018.

2018: **Fair Isle** various locations, adult, 3-4 May, photo (R. Cope *et al.*).
**Shetland** Ham, Foula, 1-2 May, photo (G. & D. Atherton).
**At Sea** c.50 km east of Lybster, Caithness, 26 May, photo (H. Verdaat *et al. per* Local Recorder), identified as *C. d daurica/japonica* (Holt *et al.* 2019).

Red-rumped Swallow is observed in Scotland annually in small numbers from April through to November, mainly along the east coast and on islands. A small increase in frequency over the last 14 years or so is thought to reflect a northward expansion of the European continental breeding range. An individual of an eastern subspecies, either *daurica* or *japonica*, was observed on Orkney and then Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, Highland, in June 2011 (McGowan *et al.* 2013).

The Fair Isle and Shetland sightings conform to the usual timing and distribution. The 'At Sea' occurrence is the second of Asian origin, though the current policy precludes 'At Sea' records being included in the overall total. This bird was first accepted as a Red-rumped Swallow *sensu latu* by SBRC before being forwarded to BBRC where it was accepted as either *daurica* or *japonica*.

**Plate 77.** Red-rumped Swallow (right), Furze, Fair Isle, 3–4 May 2018. © *Richard Cope*

Almost 70% of sightings in Scotland have been made since 2000.

(Eleven or 12 subspecies. Breeds widely from southern Europe eastwards across the Palearctic region, and in sub-Saharan Africa. *C. d. rufula* breeds in Europe and the Middle East, with nominate *daurica* and *japonica* in Asia. Northern populations are migratory, wintering in Africa and southern Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western European areas.)

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
60: 60: 1

Dusky Warbler is a rare but more or less annual visitor to Scotland, with the autumn migration period accounting for all but two sightings. It occurs mainly in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. Nearly all other sightings have been along the east coast of mainland Scotland.

For the second year running, none were recorded outwith the Northern Isles where there was only a single sighting on Shetland, at Garth, South Nesting, Mainland on 8 November. Radde's Warbler, a species with a similar eastern distribution and rare autumn incidence in Scotland to Dusky Warbler, was not observed in Scotland during 2018.

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

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
157: 108: 6

**Table 19.** Accepted record of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2018, and additional records from 2014. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 20.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Isle of May** 27-28 May, trapped, photo (M. Newell *et al.*). |
| 2014: | **Outer Hebrides** Bornais (Bornish), South Uist, first-calendar-year, 3-4 September (A. Stevenson). **Outer Hebrides** Bàgh a' Chaisteil (Castlebay), Barra, first-calendar-year, 13 September (A. Stevenson). |

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

The occurrence on the Isle of May was the first spring sighting on the island since two birds in June 2012.

**Table 20.** Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2018.

| | Number of birds | | Date range | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Spr. | Aut. | Spr. | Aut. |
| Fair Isle | - | 1 | - | 31 Aug–3 Sep |
| Orkney | - | 1 | - | 7–12 Sep |
| Shetland | 2 | 1 | 27–31 May | 1–2 Aug |

The sightings in the Northern Isles conformed to the usual pattern.

(Four subspecies. *P. t. viridanus* breeds from the Baltic east through Russia to central Siberia and northwest China, wintering in the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. Other subspecies breed in central and eastern Palearctic areas, wintering in southern India and northern Indochina.)

**Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
**46: 122: 13**

**Table 21.** Accepted records of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Scotland, 2018. Records for Fair Isle and Shetland are summarised in Table 22.

2018: **Orkney** Holland House, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year, 3 October, trapped, photo, later died (S.J. Davies *et al.*).
**Outer Hebrides** Creachan, Brèibhig (Brevig), Barra, first-calendar-year, 4-5 October, trapped, photo (K. Gillon *et al.*).

Blyth's Reed Warbler is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly seen since 2000. Although the first Scottish record dates from 1910, 66% of occurrences have been in the last decade. The increasing frequency of the species in Scotland follows a westward spread from European Russia through southern Finland, Estonia and Latvia, with breeding also noted in Sweden and Poland.

The recent significant increase in numbers seen in Britain means that the species no longer meets criteria for consideration by BBRC and is instead reviewed by SBRC. However, from 1 January 2017, the species has been assessed by local committees on Shetland and Fair Isle (Appendix 2).

The overwhelming majority of sightings (88%) have been in the Northern Isles. While most occurrences are in September and October, there have been an increasing number of spring singing males over the last several years

**Table 22.** Accepted records of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Fair Isle and Shetland, 2018.

| | Number of birds | | Date range | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Spr. | Aut. | Spr. | Aut. |
| Fair Isle | 1 | 3 | 27 May | 8–19 Sep |
| Shetland | - | 7 | - | 6 Sep–18 Oct |

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

**Marsh Warbler** *Acrocephalus palustris*
**many: *c.* 387: 59**

**Table 23.** Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2018. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 24.

2018: **Argyll** Balephuil, Tiree, 3 June, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).
**Caithness** St John's Pool, male, singing, 10 May to 10 June, photo (J. Smith *et al.*).
**Caithness** Skirza, two, males, singing, 2 June to 7 July, photo (R. Hughes, N. O'Hanlon *et al.*).
**Fife** Fife Ness, male, singing, 12 May, photo (M.A. Wilkinson *et al.*).
**Isle of May** 26 May, trapped, photo (M. Newell *et al.*).

**Plate 78.** Marsh Warbler, male, St John's Pool, Caithness, 10 May to 10 June 2018. © *Julian Smith*

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

The three birds in Caithness were the first for the recording area since 2005.

**Table 24.** Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2018.

| | Number of birds | | Date range | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Spr. | Aut. | Spr. | Aut. |
| Fair Isle | 12 | 5 | 19 May–20 Jun | 3 Aug–8 Sep |
| Orkney | 2 | 1 | 30 May–8 Jun | 8 Sep |
| Shetland | 30 | 3 | 12 May–28 Jun | 28 Jul–6 Oct |

The 60 Marsh Warblers observed in Scotland during 2018 was the second highest total in the period 2005-18, when 68 were seen in 2008, and this total is double the annual mean (29.8) for that period. The fluctuating spring annual abundance of this species is related to the prevalence of easterly winds in late May and early June, which are presumed to cause birds to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia during northerly spring migration from Africa (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

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

**Melodious Warbler** *Hippolais polyglotta*
**53: 15: 3**

**Table 25.** Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2018.

**2018:** **Borders** St Abb's Head, first-calendar-year, 2 September, photo (D. Graham *et al.*).
**Shetland** Melby, Sandness, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 3 September, photo (R. Tallack *et al.*).
**Shetland** Lunna, Mainland, 29 September to 8 October, photo (D. Bradnum *et al. per* Local Recorder).

Melodious Warbler is a very rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, recorded in most years but not all. About three quarters of occurrences have been in the Northern Isles.

The sighting at St Abb's Head was only the second for Borders, with the first occurrence at the same site in May 2002. Over the period 2000-18, the annual mean total for Scotland was 1.6 birds. The last spring sighting was made in May 2013 on Fair Isle.

**Plate 79.** Melodious Warbler, first-calendar-year, Melby, Sandness, Mainland, Shetland, 3 September 2018. © *Rory Tallack*

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

**Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans*
193: 95: 5

**Table 26.** Accepted record of Subalpine Warbler in Scotland, 2018. Northern Isle records are summarised separately in Table 27.

2018: **Argyll** Torosa, Cornaigbeg, Tiree, male, 8 June (K. Gillon), *S. cantillans* species.

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

Records to subspecies level have been assessed by BBRC, while Subalpine Warbler *sensu latu* is assessed by SBRC apart from the Northern Isles where it is reviewed locally. However, from 1 January 2019, all records will be considered by BBRC (Appendix 2). Northern Isles records are listed in Table 27.

The Cornaigbeg bird was the second consecutive annual occurrence on Tiree; all three records for Argyll are from that island.

**Table 27.** Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2018 and additional records for 2016 and 2007 (*per* Holt *et al.* 2019, and local committees).

2018: **Fair Isle** Lower Stoneybrek, female, 22 May (M. Golley), *S. cantillans* species.
**Fair Isle** Lower Stoneybrek, second-calendar-year, female, 1 June to 31 July, trapped, DNA analysis, photo (J. Bloor, D. Roche *et al.*), *S. c. albistriata*.
**Shetland** Brekins, Foula, second-calendar-year, male, 17 May, photo (D. & G. Atherton), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.
**Shetland** Burrafirth, Unst, female, 19-21 September, photo (I. Johnson, D. Watson *et al.*), *S. cantillans* species.

2016: **Shetland** Mossbank, Mainland, second-calendar-year/adult, male, 9-11 May, photo (G. Graham *et al*. *per* Local Recorder), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.

2007: **Caithness** Wick, second-calendar-year, male, 5 May, photo (D. May *per* Local Recorder), *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*.

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

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*
139: 28: 5

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

There were five occurrences in 2018. On Orkney, birds were seen twice at Holland House, North Ronaldsay, first on 16-17 May and then on 13-21 August. Three observations were made on Shetland: at Burns, Foula on 24 April, at Everland, Fetlar on 16 May and at Dale of Walls, Mainland on 1 June.

Also reported here are two records from 2017, both from Fair Isle. A sighting at Furze on 2 May was omitted from last year's report. A bird seen at Utra on 16 May and previously accepted by BBRC as Thrush Nightingale *L. luscinia* was reviewed and considered not proven (Holt *et al.* 2019); it is now accepted locally as Nightingale. The relevant total in the header above has been adjusted accordingly.

(Nominate *megarhynchos* breeds from Morocco and western Europe through North Africa and southern and central Europe to the Ukraine and Turkey; *L. m. golzii* from the Aral Sea to Mongolia (one record in Scotland, and another two in England); and another subspecies from the Caucasus area and eastern Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola*
105: 90: 4

Table 28. Accepted records of Citrine Wagtail in Scotland, 2018.

2018: **Outer Hebrides** Hirta, St Kilda, first-calendar-year, 30 September, photo (C.R. Hatsell).
**Shetland** Culsetter, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 31 August (R.M. Fray).
**Shetland** Norwick, Unst, first-calendar-year, 21-22 September, photo (K. Bayes, I. Johnson, M. Kerby, D. Watson *et al.*); same, Haroldswick and Norwick, Unst, 30 September to 4 October, photo (P. Cosgrove, S. O'Hara *et al.*).
**Shetland** Gardie, Bressay, first-calendar-year, 2-13 October, photo (A. Marashi, S.A. Stirrup *et al. per* Local Recorder).

Citrine Wagtail is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular since the 1990s, though found mostly on islands. Occurrence is generally in autumn, with few seen in spring. The overwhelming majority (85%) have been in the Northern Isles, with a further 7% in Outer Hebrides. Despite the recent increase in numbers, Citrine Wagtail remains an extreme rarity in other parts of the country, being unrecorded in many recording areas.

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

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni*
151: 203: 4

Table 29. Accepted record of Olive-backed Pipit in Scotland, 2018. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in the text.

2018: **Isle of May** 11-13 October, trapped, photo (T. Southall *et al.*)

Olive-backed Pipit is a rare but regular autumn migrant in Scotland. There was a marked increase in occurrences in Britain and Europe since the 1980s. The species has been considered by SBRC since 2013 and assessed locally in the Northern Isles since 2015 (Appendix 2).

The vast majority of sightings in Scotland are in the Northern Isles. On Fair Isle, two were seen: the first at Stackhoull on 13 October and another at Johnny Peats on 17 October. There was only one sighting on Shetland, at Aywick, Yell on 13 October. The mid-October dates are typical.

The four observations in Scotland in 2018 is the lowest annual total since three sightings in 2008. In the period 2009-17, the mean annual total was 19 birds, so 2018 represents a marked decrease.

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

**Arctic Redpoll** *Acanthis hornemanni*
366: 160: 7

Arctic Redpoll is a scarce though annual visitor to Scotland. Most sightings since 2005 have involved the subspecies *A. h. hornemanni* (Hornemann's Redpoll), though many earlier occurrences referred to *A. h. exilipes* (Coues's Redpoll).

Records to subspecies level have been assessed by BBRC, while Arctic Redpoll *sensu latu* is assessed by SBRC apart from the Northern Isles where it is reviewed locally. However, from 1 January 2019, all records will be considered by BBRC (Appendix 2).

No records were assessed by SBRC for 2018. A summary of records accepted by BBRC is provided in Table 30.

Table 30. Accepted records of Arctic Redpoll in Scotland, 2018 and additional records from 2017. (*per* Holt *et al.* 2018, and local committees).

2018: **Borders** Bell Wood, Cranshaws, first-calendar-year or older, 16 December to 2019, photo (D. Graham *et al.*), *A. h. exilipes*.
**Moray & Nairn** Ordiequish Forest, third-calendar-year or older, male, 25 March, photo (S.J. Message, S. Mills), *A. h. exilipes*.
**Shetland** Skibberhoull, Whalsay, third-calendar-year or older, male, 7 February to 17 March, photo (J.L. Irvine *et al.*). *A. c. exilipes.*
**Shetland** Foula, first-calendar-year or older, 29 October, photo (G. Atherton), *A. h. exilipes*.
**Shetland** Norwick, Unst, first-calendar-year or older, 29 October, photo (D. Cooper, M.G. Pennington, B.H. Thomason), *A. h. exilipes*.
**Shetland** Mid Dale, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 30 October, photo (R. Riddington, R.M. Tallack), *A. h. exilipes*.

**Shetland** Cauldbeck, Baltasound, Unst, first-calendar-year or older, 26 December to 2019, photo (B.H. Thomason), *A. h. exilipes*.

2017: **North-east Scotland** Nigg Bay, Aberdeen, first-calendar-year, 18 October, trapped, photo (S. Langlois, M. Lewis, A. Penn, G. Platt), *A. h. exilipes*
**Orkney** Christie's Brae, Stromness, Mainland, first-calendar-year or older, 13-15 December, photo (P. Slater, T. Wootton), *A. h. exilipes*.
**Shetland** Norwick, Unst, first-calendar-year or older, 8-14 October, photo (D. Cooper, J.F. Cooper *et al.*), *A. h. exilipes*.
**Shetland** Norwick & Skaw, Unst, first-calendar-year, 23 November, photo (B.H. Thomason), *A. h. exilipes*.

Only seven Arctic Redpolls were sighted in Scotland in 2018, all of them *A. c. exilipes*. The bird in Borders was the fourth in that area, and observed at the same site as the third in January 2011.

Four *exilipes* seen in 2017 have been added to the total in the header above.

(Breeds on the Arctic tundra, with a circumpolar range divided between two subspecies: *A. h. hornemanni* on Ellesmere and Baffin Island (both Canada) and in Greenland, and *A. h. exilipes* elsewhere. Winters to the south of the breeding range.)

**Parrot Crossbill** *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
**many: 39 passage records of 128 birds in 7 influxes: 0**

**Table 31.** Accepted records of Parrot Crossbill in Scotland, 2017.

2017: **Orkney** Heddle Hill, Finstown, Mainland, two males, 6-7 October, photo (A.J. Leitch *et al.*)
**Outer Hebrides** Langais Wood, North Uist, female, 23 October, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
**Shetland** Setters Hill Estate, Baltasound, Unst, two males, three females, 2-11 October, photo (N.C. Crouch, P.J. Eele *et al.*); same Haroldswick, Unst, 4 October, photo (A.M. Conlin, N.C. Crouch, P.J. Eele *et al.*).
**Shetland** Haroldswick, Unst, one male, two females, 4 October, photo (A.M. Conlin, N.C. Crouch, P.J. Eele *et al.*).
**Shetland** Sand, Mainland, two males, one female, 3-4 October, photo (*per* Local Recorder).
**Shetland** Helendale & Sound, Lerwick, Mainland, two males, one female, 3-13 October, photo (W. Bowell, P.V. Harvey, R.M. Tallack *et al.*).

A total of 17 Parrot Crossbills were observed in six groups across three recording areas, with all present between 2-23 October. The sighting in Orkney was the fourth, the last one seen in October 1985. In Outer Hebrides, a single observation was made at the same location as the previous sighting, four birds in October

**Plate 80.** Parrot Crossbill, male, Helendale & Sound, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, 3–13 October 2017. © *Jim Nicolson*


**Plate 81 a–d.** Parrot Crossbills. **a).** female, Langais Wood, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 23 October 2017. © *Steve Duffield.* **b).** male, Helendale & Sound, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, 3–13 October 2017. © *Rory Tallack.* **c).** male, Haroldswick, Unst, Shetland, 4 October 2017. © *Mark Wilkinson.* **d).** female, Helendale & Sound, Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland, 3–13 October 2017. © *Jim Nicolson*

1982. The remaining birds were noted at various localities in Shetland, the recording area where the last sighting took place in October 1994. This was the first influx into Scotland since 1982, when 20 were recorded (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

(Breeds in Scots Pine forests from Scandinavia eastwards across Finland and Russia to the Kola Peninsula and Pechora River.)

**Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*
many: 57: 5

**Table 32.** Accepted record of Ortolan Bunting in Scotland, 2018. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 33.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2018: | **Isle of May** first-calendar-year, 1-2 September (B. Minshull *et al.*). |

Ortolan Bunting is a rare and declining, but still annual, passage migrant to Scotland. In recent years the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally, have accounted for more than 90% of occurrences. The general trend of decreasing numbers over the last two decades appears to be continuing. This reflects the steep decline of the west European population since 1980 thought to be due to habitat destruction and unsustainable hunting (Jiguet *et al.* 2019).

The Ortolan Bunting on the Isle of May was the first to be recorded there since September 2010. Outwith the Northern Isles, this is the only area with a total in double figures (31 birds). The dates for the four Northern Isles records were typical. The annual mean total since 2000 is 4.6 birds, thus the five sightings in 2018 is normal for the period.

**Table 33.** Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2018.

| | Number of birds | | Date range | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Spr. | Aut. | Spr. | Aut. |
| Fair Isle | - | 2 | - | 6–27 Sep |
| Orkney | - | - | - | - |
| Shetland | 2 | - | 16–31 May | - |

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

**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*
**593: 453: 6**

**Table 34.** Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2018. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 35.

**2018: Outer Hebrides** Linsiadar (Linshader), Isle of Lewis, 9-10 April, photo (A. Laffin *per* Local Recorder).
**Outer Hebrides** Hirta, St Kilda, 9 July, photo (C.R. Hatsell).

Little Bunting is a scarce but increasingly regular passage migrant to Scotland, mostly in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. The great majority are found in autumn, but there have also been a few in winter and spring.

The total sightings in Scotland in 2018 was six, this being the lowest number since 1999 when only four birds were seen; remarkably this was Fair Isle's first blank year since 1956. The mean annual total for the ten years to 2018 was 39.8 birds, so this fall-off in observations is marked. In Scotland, Little Buntings are rare in April and were previously unknown in July; this makes the two observations in the Outer Hebrides notable.

**Table 35.** Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2018.

| | Number of birds | | Date range | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Spr. | Aut. | Spr. | Aut. |
| Fair Isle | - | - | - | - |
| Orkney | - | 1 | - | 11 Oct |
| Shetland | - | 3 | - | 17 Sep–13 Oct |

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

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## Appendix 1

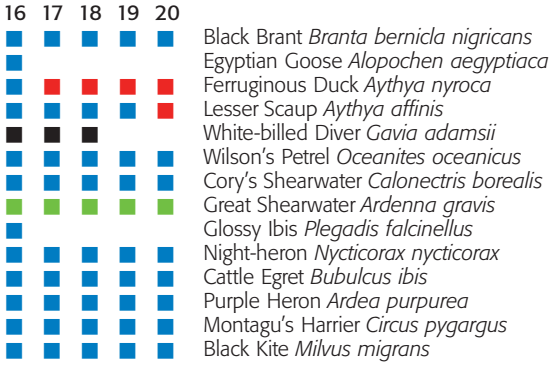
List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

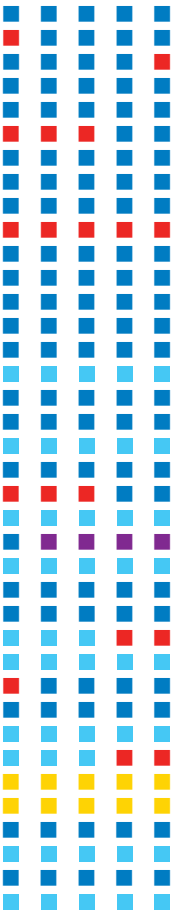
**2018: Lesser Scaup** St John's Pool, Caithness, 1–2 July; **White-billed Diver** Stennabreck, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 3 March; **White-billed Diver** Lurn, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 12 March; **Night-heron** Lochmaben, Dumfries & Galloway, 19 August; **Montagu's Harrier** Strath Farm, The Laggan, Argyll, 12 May; **Yellow-legged Gull** Bishop Burn, Loch Ryan, Dumfries & Galloway, 26–27 July; **Yellow-legged Gull** Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway, 31 July; **Yellow-legged Gull** Bishop Burn & Soleburn, Loch Ryan, Dumfries & Galloway, 7 August to 1 September; **Yellow-legged Gull** Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, 22 August; **Red-footed Falcon** Ancum, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 27 August; **Woodlark** Loch Park, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 20 March; **Cirl Bunting** Port Righ, Carradale, Argyll, 11 April.

**2017: Radde's Warbler** Barns Ness, Lothian, 16 October; **Parrot Crossbill** Auld Haa, Fair Isle, 3 October.

## Appendix 2

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), the SBRC List, and other committees, 2016–20. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species on the *Scottish List* have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC that are not shown here. Species and subspecies considered by BBRC are listed on www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/species-taxa





Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Continental Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*
White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* (except *L. m. atlantis* - BBRC)
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Franz Josef Land Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*
Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* (except *L. s. badius* - BBRC)
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (except *C. d. daurica* or *japonica* - BBRC)
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*
Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans**
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* (except *L. m. golzii* - BBRC)
Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni**
Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*
Serin *Serinus serinus*
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

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

* Up to 31 December 2018 only birds not identified to any particular subspecies were considered by SBRC or local committees; birds identified to subspecies were assessed by BBRC. From 1 January 2019, all records to be considered by BBRC.

The species and subspecies considered by SBRC listed here are also shown on www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

## Appendix 3

Correction to previous reports:
**2017:** Add record – Nightingale: Fair Isle, Furse, 2 May 2017

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# Movements of House Sparrows in the Uists, 2010–17

I. THOMPSON

The ringing of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* was actively discouraged by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) from 1970 because the species was considered to be largely sedentary. This restriction was removed in 1993 when it became clear that the population was in serious decline. Most of the relatively few recoveries have been of dead birds and were mainly human-related or associated with domestic pets, principally cats. Nationally, the median value for all the 5,963 ring-recoveries is under 1 km. Movements greater than 20 km from the place of ringing appear to occur year-round, except in the breeding season, although only a small proportion (c. 3%) of the population is involved (Wernham *et al.* 2002).


**Figure 1.** Locations where colour-ringed House Sparrows were reported, highlighted in green with the ringing site at Askernish shown in blue (site R). Garrygall, Barra (site P), shown in red, is where a House Sparrow was originally ringed prior to being caught at Askernish. See Table 1 for location details.

House Sparrows have been colour ringed at Askernish in South Uist since 2010 as part of the BTO's Retrap of Adults for Survival (RAS). Data for this national scheme are only required during the breeding season, April to September, but we decided to continue throughout the year. By doing so, it meant that we were aware of new (unringed) birds arriving in our study area. In addition, because our birds are colour ringed, it meant that we were able to follow the movements of individual birds away from our study area via reported sightings by other observers throughout the islands. These observations were generated by our own searches and by raising awareness of our project with articles posted on a local website (www.outerhebridesbirds.org.uk).

Figure 1 shows all the locations where our colour-ringed birds have been seen. There have been no reports of birds outside this area. Of 1,050 birds ringed, 119 individuals (11.3%) have been seen at 16 other locations throughout the Uists. Seventeen moved north; the furthest was 47 km from the ringing site while 102 moved south; the furthest 26 km from Askernish. Of those that moved south, the majority (83) were recorded at two sites, Daliburgh (36) and South Glendale (47) where there are established House Sparrow populations and may be a reflection of the observer effort at these two sites. All but three were newly dispersed juveniles. In almost all instances, birds were aged by ring number after the event as it is not possible to age them in the field after September when their post-juvenile moult is complete.

Most sightings of newly dispersed birds at other locations occurred during the autumn and winter with only four reported sightings during spring. There were no sightings of colour ringed birds to suggest dispersal during the breeding season, but as unringed adult birds appeared between April and August in the study area, it appears that some dispersal may occur throughout the year. It may be that to the casual observer, the re-occurrence of a sparrow with a colour ring in the same location would be the same bird, but that is not necessarily the case.

**Table 1.** Locations where House Sparrows were reported and distances involved.

| Site letter (see Figure 1) | Place | Number of birds reported | Distance from Askernish |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Balranald NR, North Uist | 1 | 47 km |
| B | Bayhead, North Uist | 1 | 43 km |
| C | Clachan a Luib, North Uist | 1 | 41 km |
| D | Caranish, North Uist | 2 | 37 km |
| E | Kallin, Grimsay | 1 | 36 km |
| F | Carnan, South Uist | 8 | 24 km |
| G | Kildonan, South Uist | 3 | 3 km |
| **R** | **Askernish, South Uist** | **study area** | |
| H | Daliburgh, South Uist | 36 | 3 km |
| I | Lochboisdale, South Uist | 4 | 7 km |
| J | Orosay, South Uist | 5 | 7 km |
| K | North Smerclete, South Uist | 5 | 11 km |
| L | South Glendale, South Uist | 47 | 11 km |
| M | South Smerclete, South Uist | 1 | 13 km |
| N | Kilbride Camp Site, South Uist | 2 | 13 km |
| O | Brevig, Barra | 1 | 26 km |
| P | Garrygall, Barra | 1 *controlled at Askernish* | 28 km |

Table 2 shows the number of birds seen at these other locations per calendar year. House Sparrows are thought of as being a sedentary species, therefore 5 km is considered to be a significant movement (Summers-Smith 1956), yet 90 (8.6%) exceeded that distance. Of those, 16 (1.5%) travelled in excess of 20 km, six (0.6%) in excess of 30 km and three (0.3%) in excess of 40 km. The furthest distance travelled by an individual was 47 km to Balranald, North Uist which was seen at the nature reserve visitor centre.

There was a total of 550 reported sightings from other locations involving 119 birds, 414 of which were confirmations of birds still in residence. Most sightings were of newly dispersed juveniles. Others were of individual birds seen at different locations or having been seen elsewhere only to return to Askernish at a later date. This may well be an indication of the random nature of post juvenile dispersal (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Number of colour-ringed House Sparrows seen at other locations per calendar year and those travelling in excess of 5 km.

| | Number of birds | Number of birds moving more than 5 km |
|---|---|---|
| 2010 | 0 | 0 |
| 2011 | 7 | 7 |
| 2012 | 31 | 27 |
| 2013 | 34 | 11 |
| 2014 | 13 | 7 |
| 2015 | 11 | 6 |
| 2016 | 12 | 12 |
| 2017 | 32 | 20 |

**Table 3.** Number of juvenile House Sparrows that moved from Askernish.

| | |
|---|---|
| Number of juveniles seen at other locations | 116 |
| Number of juveniles seen at one location | 99 |
| Number of juveniles seen at two locations | 17 |


**Plate 82.** House Sparrow '054' (with Chaffinch), Brevig, Barra, Outer Hebrides, November 2017. © *Bruce Taylor*

Current thinking is still that once juveniles have settled in a colony, paired and bred, they then remain sedentary (Summers-Smith 1956). Therefore, for two adult birds to be seen at different locations (South Glendale and then Daliburgh) would not have been expected. Similarly, four adult birds appeared briefly at Askernish after long absences (in excess of one year) only to leave as quickly.

More birds travelled south than north and South Glendale appears to be a particular attraction. We had assumed that this was a natural end point when the birds travelled south as it was the last vegetated, sheltered rural location on South Uist with an established population of House Sparrows. However, in November 2017, there was a greater than usual movement of House Sparrows at Askernish with 12 new birds (seven females, five males) being caught within a two-week period. One of these birds had been ringed on 18 September 2017 as a juvenile at Garrygall, Barra. This was our first record of a House Sparrow crossing water to other islands. Coincidently, a bird ringed in Askernish on 7 November 2017 made the reverse journey and was seen at Brevig, Barra on 26 November 2017 where it remained into 2018.

The movements of our House Sparrows appear to follow that described by Wernham *et al.* (2002) where most are sedentary but a few move 20 km or more. This, in contrast, has not been the experience of others involved in the study of House Sparrows elsewhere in the UK where ringers only see movements of less than 1 km or very often, none at all (BTO House Sparrow RAS Forum, pers. comm.).

## Acknowledgements

To Yvonne Benting for considerable help with the ringing effort and to Bill Neill for the time and effort he expends helping us with this project. We also thank all those who took the time and trouble to report their sightings to us, especially John Kemp and Bruce Taylor. The BTO House Sparrow RAS Forum, a private Facebook group, is thanked for their discussion.

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# Rook nestlings in November in Scotland

On the morning of 19 November 2019, a dead Rook nestling *Corvus frugilegus* was found on the road verge (Plate 84) under a small rookery, situated across two trees in the centre of a village at the base of the Ochil Hills, Clackmannanshire (Upper Forth) (Plate 83). This is a small rookery, first appearing only a handful of years ago with around 10–12 active nests, slowly building year on year. The main, larger rookery is a few hundred metres away, sited in woodland and numbers approximately 100–200 nests. On inspection the following day, the nestling on the road verge had gone (the road had been swept) and another nestling was found on the verge on the other side of the pavement (Plate 85). Both of these nestlings were found directly below nests. At the time both nestlings were found, most of the nests had pairs of Rooks in attendance, generally sitting in pairs beside nests. Around seven nests looked to be intact and large, with three more scrappy looking remnant nests.

Rooks are colonial, spring nesting birds, their rookeries tend to be abandoned during late summer after the breeding season but then often returned to during autumn and early winter when pair-bonding and sexual display is commonly observed (Coombs 1960). Yarrell (1845), drawing from the writings of Gilbert White of Selbourne, reports brood production during November in the 1800s in Gainsborough [Lincolnshire], Penzance [Cornwall] and Oxfordshire. More recently (Marshall & Coombs 1957) in Rook populations in southern England reported increased gonadal activity during late autumn, in both males and females, though at lower levels than during the spring. However, they did report that in some individuals, gonadal activity was quite pronounced during this autumn period and that eggs may even be laid. Hollyoak (1967) mentions that autumn laying has not infrequently been recorded in Rooks, but that there were no nest record cards in his own data sources and notes that autumn nests are rarely if ever successful due to the onset of winter conditions.

**Plate 83.** Rookery, Upper Forth, November 2019. © *Eleanor Moodie*

**Plate 84 (above).** First dead Rook nestling, Upper Forth, 19 November 2019. © *Eleanor Moodie.* **Plate 85 (above right).** Second dead Rook nestling, Upper Forth, 20 November 2019. © *Eleanor Moodie*

Specific to Scotland, endocrinology changes examined in wild populations of Rooks in Aberdeenshire identified partial recovery of gonad activity in both sexes during what is known as the 'recovery phase' (September to January) of the Rook breeding cycle (Lincoln *et al.* 1980). Although gonadal activity during the autumn period followed a similar pattern to that observed in the southern England populations, the level changes in Aberdeenshire were quite slight compared to those in the south. Importantly, there was no evidence of a return to fertility in these Scottish populations.

This observation apparently represents the earliest ever confirmed return to fertility in a Rook population in Scotland.

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# Attempted capture of Teal by female Hen Harrier on Islay

In late December 2019, I visited Ardnave Loch while on Islay. As I approached, a bird of prey was quartering low over the water, which I identified as a harrier. My first reaction was that, despite the date, it might be a Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. However, when I got my binoculars on it, it was clearly a ringtail, and based on size, a female Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*.

The harrier was flying low over the water within a metre of the surface, with legs extended. On occasions it was blown higher in the strong wind to heights of 5–10 m, but it quickly swooped down to the lower level and eventually picked up a bird by the head and carried it around 20 m towards the shore before dropping it. From photographs I later identified the bird as a male Teal *Anas crecca*. The Teal did not appear to be dead. The harrier then flew over the Teal and landed on it. It kept its wings fully spread as it 'mantled' the Teal for around a minute. The situation reminded me of an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* or a White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* which had taken large prey and then become forced to 'row ashore' using its wings. I feared that the harrier would become waterlogged. However, it kept its wings out of the water most of the time. After around two minutes it took off, picked up the Teal again and was blown towards the back shore of the loch where it dropped the body again before getting to the shore.

The harrier returned to try to lift the Teal again, but by this time other predators had seen the activity. Two of three Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* flew over and looked as if they would try to lift the Teal's body, with their necks extended, before an adult Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus* flew in and removed the corpse. The harrier circled two times and made a pass at a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* before departing.

A male Teal weighs around 340 g and a female Hen Harrier around 508 g (Hickling 1983), so lifting the Teal, which would have been wet, represents at least two thirds of the weight of the harrier. Watson (1977) records Teal as Hen Harrier prey identified in Britain and Ireland, but does not indicate whether this was an adult Teal or an immature. Watson also quotes Bannerman (1953) who noted an 'unusual attempt by a Hen Harrier to lift a fully-grown duck, probably a Wigeon, from the sea. The harrier (the sex was not stated) made two unsuccessful attempts to secure its prey, once carrying it for ten metres before dropping it', not dissimilar to the incident at Ardnave Loch.

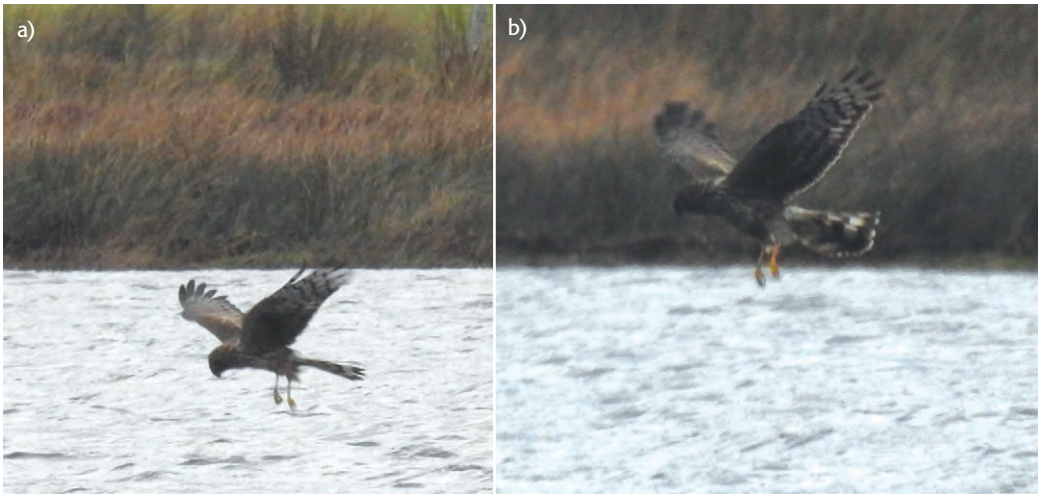


**Plate 86 a–b.** Female Hen Harrier, hovering over male Teal, Ardnave Loch, Islay, December 2019. © *David Jardine*


**Plate 87 a–d.** Female Hen Harrier swooping and carrying male Teal, Ardnave Loch, Islay, December 2019. © *David Jardine*

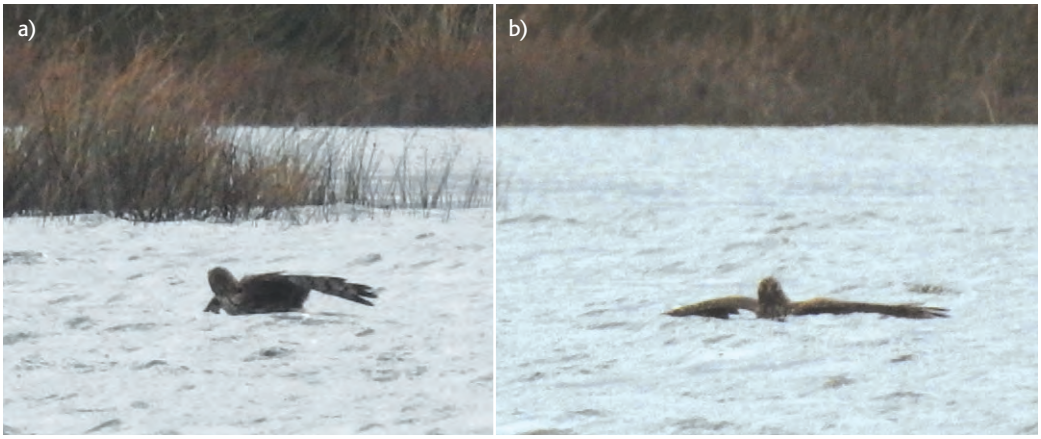


**Plate 88 a–b.** Female Hen Harrier mantling male Teal, Ardnave Loch, Islay, December 2019. © *David Jardine*

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*Revised ms accepted January 2020*

## Another instance of Hen Harrier preying on Teal on Islay

Having been asked to comment on an interesting note submitted by David Jardine for inclusion in *Scottish Birds,* I was immediately struck by the similarity of his Islay observation to a similar one I made on the same island and in the same winter. In my case the observation was on 12 February 2020 and from Hide 1 on the Loch Gruinart RSPB reserve.

On entering the hide, I soon spotted a female Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* hunting over the extensive flooded area. The bird was hunting over land but also flew low over the open water areas on many occasions. The various wildfowl did not appear unduly disturbed and none took to flight although some swam away as the harrier approached. After about 20 minutes, the harrier suddenly dropped on to a male Teal *Anas crecca* sitting on the water's edge. Other nearby Teal seemed largely unperturbed and just swam slowly away.

The harrier dragged the Teal to the edge and perched on it for about 10 minutes before commencing to pluck and eat it. As soon as it started eating, two Hooded Crows *Corvus cornix* landed very close by but were ignored by the harrier. After a few more minutes, a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* arrived and flew purposefully towards the harrier which abandoned its prey and flew off. The Buzzard picked up the carcass and flew some distance to a bush underneath which it appeared to cache the remains.

About 15 minutes later, the Hen Harrier reappeared and recommenced hunting in the same manner. Unfortunately, I had to leave soon after so did not see if the harrier was successful again.

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*Revised ms accepted January 2020*

## Marsh Harrier breeding in Upper Forth in 2019

The Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* is an annual passage migrant in the Upper Forth recording area, with most birds seen in August and September along the Forth estuary. It has been assumed that these records relate to migrating birds from the Tay reedbeds.

On 27 April 2019, I located a second-summer male bird at a Clackmannanshire estuarine reedbed, and on 30 April this bird was joined by a female. The male bird lacked the normal grey upper wing panels and tail, and showed some pale grey on the underwing. On 12 May, I was pleased to see the pair carrying out a soaring and chasing display with some calling, and then both birds carrying large strands of Reed *Phragmites australis* into a tidal reedbed. I continued visiting the site when I could find time and, on every visit, I saw at least one of the birds and often the pair. During the week commencing 22 May, I convinced myself that incubation had started. According to the literature this date was nearly a fortnight outwith the normal laying date range. At this point, I made contact with Steve Moyes of the Tay Ringing Group, and

**Plate 89.** Marsh Harrier, female, Loch of Kinnordy, Angus & Dundee, April 2018. © *John Anderson*

Harry Bell of the Tayside Raptor Study Group, who have monitored Marsh Harriers for many years in the Tay reedbeds. They gave me some helpful tips and stressed that breeding Marsh Harriers could be sensitive to disturbance during the incubation phase. Since the male of this pair was a second-summer bird, my hopes were not high for a successful breeding attempt. During late May and June, I visited the site on a number of occasions and sometimes saw the male bird; however, it was clear that he was foraging some distance from the nest. During June there was a record of a female seen in the Kincardine Bridge area about 7 km from the nest which I suspect was this second-summer male bird wrongly identified. Around 24 June, there were several torrential rain events in the Stirling area, including one that resulted in the collapse of a supermarket roof. I was also watching high tides on the Forth estuary with trepidation. I feared the worst for the breeding harriers!

However, on 29 June, my fears were allayed when I observed a food pass between the male and female, a clear indication that hatching had taken place. On 5 July, I went to the site and saw three food passes in one hour. From the third week of July, I noted that both adults were foraging and bringing in food. On 8 August, I saw the female bird bring in food to the nest when three young Marsh Harriers leapt out of the reedbed in an attempt to grab the prey. The adult birds and the three young remained in the general area of the reedbed until the end of August. By the end of the first week of September, it seemed that the adult female had migrated. By mid-September, at least two of the young were still present before finally migrating themselves.

This is the first known successful breeding of Marsh Harriers in the Upper Forth recording area. I plan to monitor the nesting site again next breeding season if the birds return; however, Steve Moyes tells me not to count on this based on his experience in Tayside and Fife.

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*Revised ms accepted November 2019*

## Annual occupancy of an urban Stock Dove colony in Glasgow

In a previous Short Note, I described a colony of wall-nesting Stock Doves *Columba oenas* at an urban location, the first such example in Scotland (McInerny 2018). The colony uses a stonewall above the River Kelvin next to Hamilton Park Avenue, in the West End of Glasgow (Clyde).

In light of the limited knowledge about the breeding biology of Stock Doves in Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007), I monitored the colony over a two-year period to obtain information about occupancy, breeding biology and numbers.

The colony was visited 1–2 times most weeks during 2018 and 2019. On each visit, which lasted up to 15 minutes, the numbers of adult and recently fledged juvenile birds were counted, with courtship, display and mating activity also recorded (Figure 1). Adults were identified having pink bills and pink legs (Plate 90a), with juveniles instead having dull bills with dark tips and dark legs (Plate 90b) (Cramp 1985). Courtship activity was either males calling, often in response to each other, or males chasing and displaying to females. Mating was observed on a few occasions.

Birds were present at the colony for most of the year, with courtship noted from January through to December (Figure 1). Adults were seen usually perching on branches, both high in trees near to the colony and low near nest holes. They were also often watched flying up and down river, circling in groups (up to 12) above the colony area, and flying away from the river over adjacent tenement houses, invariably to the north. Birds occasionally rested on nearby rooftops or flew c.200 m downstream to sit on

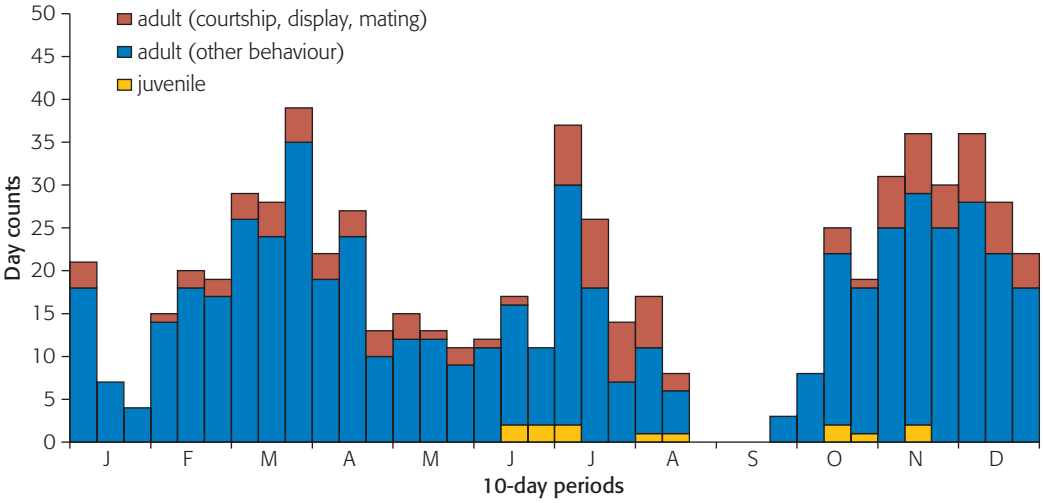


**Figure 1.** Numbers and behaviour of Stock Doves at an urban riverside colony, Glasgow, Clyde, 2018–19. Day counts (the number of individuals seen on each day) for 10-day periods of adults and juveniles; and courtship, display and mating behaviour, are plotted.

the spire of a church; Stock Doves have been recorded on buildings elsewhere in the UK (Blathwayt 1908, Riviere 1909). They were also seen drinking water from the River Kelvin under the colony, but never observed feeding. During both 2018 and 2019, juveniles were first noted in mid-June when they would perch unobtrusively on branches near nest holes (Plate 90b), sometimes returning to nests.

The appearance of newly fledged birds from mid-June coincided with increased courtship activity, with much calling of males, and males pursuing and displaying to females (Figure 1). This likely reflects pairs second brooding following the first clutches of the year. Up to five broods a year have been noted elsewhere in the UK and Scotland, with eggs present from March to September (Freeman & Bates 1937, Murton

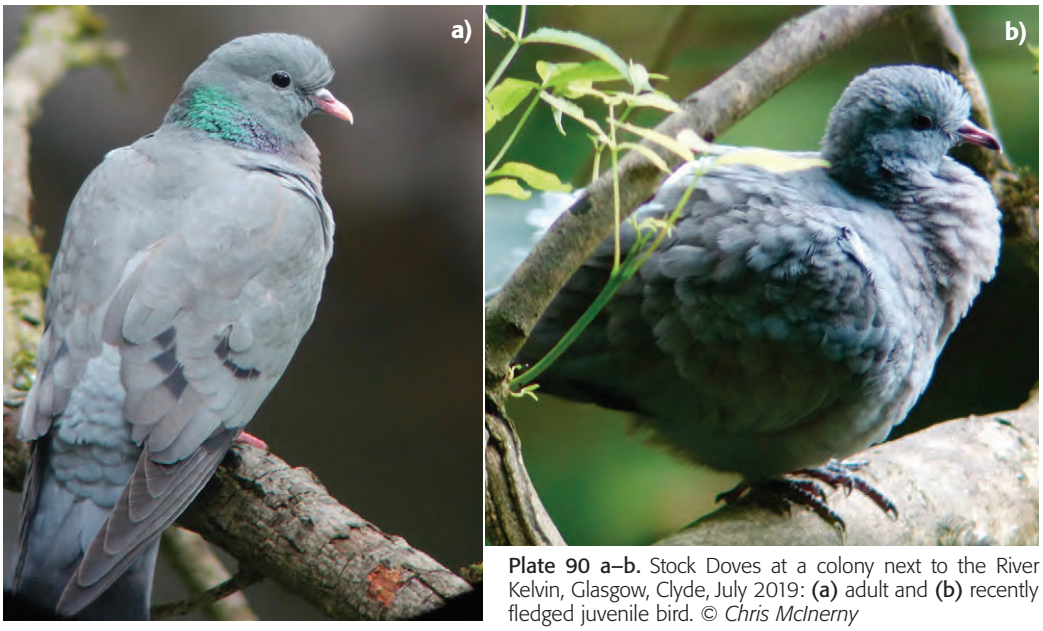


**Plate 90 a–b.** Stock Doves at a colony next to the River Kelvin, Glasgow, Clyde, July 2019: **(a)** adult and **(b)** recently fledged juvenile bird. © *Chris McInerny*

1966, O'Connor & Mead 1984, Jardine 2000, Forrester *et al.* 2007). Eggs and/or young have been observed in May at other urban locations (Blathwayt 1908). Increased courtship was also noted in late October and November, again coincident with the appearance of juveniles.

The reduced number of birds at the colony from late August through to mid-September (Figure 1) was surprising as the species is thought to be highly sedentary (Wilkinson 1950, Ash *et al.* 1956, O'Connor & Mead 1984, Wernham *et al.* 2002). However, it is possible that birds remained in the vicinity, while seeking food elsewhere. The diet of Stock Doves is restricted to the seeds of weeds and cereals, with leaves, tree buds and tree fruits not consumed (Murton *et al.* 1964, Cramp 1985). As birds were never seen eating or carrying food at the colony this suggests that they have to disperse to feed. The absence of birds during this period also implies that nesting had finished at the colony by August, which was unexpected as clutches of eggs have been noted up to September elsewhere in Britain (Murton 1966). However, juveniles were recorded in October/November in both years, again during periods when increased courtship activity was observed. Indeed, mating was seen on 24 November 2019, a day on which calling between birds was heard.

Nine nests were counted during 2019, an apparent increase on the seven reported in 2018 (McInerny 2018), although this is only an estimate as thick vegetation covering the stonewall made identifying nests difficult. Ideally, nest productivity would be measured to compare this colony with other Stock Dove colonies, where nest boxes or convenient natural sites have allowed such analysis (Freeman & Bates 1937, Jardine 2000, Forrester *et al.* 2007). Unfortunately, the inaccessible nature of the stonewall nests of the Glasgow colony precludes this. Future monitoring of the colony will determine whether it increases or decreases in size.

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*ms accepted December 2019*

**Postscript** The data for 2018-19 showed no juvenile birds recorded at the colony before June, which was surprising as adults were seen displaying from January. In 2020, a juvenile was observed on 9 April indicating that birds can nest at the colony earlier in the year, and suggesting a breeding season from March to November.

# Artist visits to NMS collections

Two visits to the National Museums Collection Centre were organised for artists connected to the SOC.

The first visit, to the Entomology Collection, took place on 4 February 2020. This was a research opportunity for artists planning to take part in a future exhibition at Waterston House on the theme of Insects. We were totally overwhelmed by the level of interest from artists and were only able to accommodate the first ten to sign up. Ashleigh Whiffin, assistant curator, gave us a fascinating tour of the Entomology Collection and organised a series of specimen boxes for us to draw from at leisure afterwards. While we were drawing, Ashleigh told us about the specimens we were looking at, as well as the history of the collection itself. As a result, I finally learned how to tell damselflies from dragonflies (damselflies can fold their wings up). I was also surprised to hear that part of the NMS collection originated from the acquisition of the private collection of Louis Dufresne, a French naturalist and curator of the Museum d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris under Napoleon. His extensive private collection was bought by the University of Edinburgh in 1819 and now forms some of the oldest parts of both the Entomology and Ornithology NMS Collections. The visit provided rich material for the artists present, prompting new ideas for submissions to the group exhibition. This exhibition, 'Insectarium', was due to take place at Waterston House in May and has now been rescheduled in 2021. It is organised jointly with the Society of Scottish Artists and aims to present varied responses to this theme in a wide range of media including painting, sculpture and small installations, a first at Waterston House! (An art installation focuses on presenting an idea or creating an experience rather than producing an art object such as a painting or a sculpture.) We will show some of the selected entries on Facebook and Instagram in the next few weeks and we look forward to presenting the full exhibition at Waterston House in spring 2021.

**Plate 91.** Bob McGowan, Senior Curator of Vertebrates, National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh, February 2020. © *Laura Gressani*

The second visit, on 25 February, was hosted by Bob McGowan and allowed a number of current SOC exhibitors to learn about the Ornithology Collection and sketch from it. It was truly a fascinating visit. Bob not only gave us a thorough tour of the collection but also regaled us with many of the stories behind its creation (Plate 91). We really appreciated the freedom Bob was able to give our small group to explore the collection. We were thrilled to be able to move from hummingbirds to Dunlins, look at the egg collections as well as the amazing diaries of past collectors. The poignant specimen of the Great Auk proved a particular inspiration for many of us and prompted a marvellous study by Derek Robertson (Plate 92). The history of collecting itself became for me a subject of fascination. Bob brought to life the stories of the people who devoted their time to creating collections. Where our modern minds sometimes recoiled from their pursuit, Bob was able to show us the knowledge and deep respect for nature that their collecting also revealed, as well as their strong aesthetic sense in presenting their collections.



Both visits proved truly inspiring for the 17 artists who took part overall. They provided opportunities to marvel at the beauty, and weirdness, of nature and to ponder on the endeavours of humans to make sense of it by collecting, categorizing, naming as well as drawing… We are all extremely grateful to Ashleigh and Bob for making the time and sharing their knowledge.

*Laura Gressani*


**Plate 92 a–c.** Great Auk studies based on the specimen in the National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh, February 2020. © *Derek Robertson*

# NEWS AND NOTICES

## New Members

**Borders:** Mrs K. Campbell, Mr D. Graham, Mr R.M. Jackson, Mrs K. Parkinson, **Caithness:** Mr S. Langlois, Mr A. Spirit, **Central Scotland:** Mr J. Davidson, Mr R. Doets& Mrs R. McLeod, Mr D. Pickett, Mr J. Wyllie, **Clyde:** Mr M. Connelly and family, Mr A. Davies, Mr D. Dunphy& Ms L. Williamson, Mr C. Gallacher, Dr N. Hammatt, Mr G. Martin, Mrs M. McLennaghan, Mr E. Smith & Ms K. Kane, Mr R. Whitson, **England, Wales & NI:** Mrs J. Andrews, Mr A. MacGarvey, Ms A. Ross, Mr S. Taylor, **Fife:** Mr P. Davey, Ms C. Lacey, Rev E.G. McKimmon, Mr A. Seymour, Miss A. Strachan, **Highland:** Mr & Mrs S. Connolly, Mr C. Forbes, Mr & Mrs K. Johnston, Dr S. Ludwig, **Lothian:** Mr J. Adams, Mr E. Austin, Dr R. Black, Mrs J. Broderick, Mr A. Cranston, Mr I. Crosbie, Miss C. Cruickshank, Mrs S. Duncanson, Mr A. Foulkes, Dr S. Haynes, Mr & Mrs D. Houston, Mr P. Hutchison & Dr E. Glass, Mr B. Johnson, Dr E. Kungu, Mr K. Lannan, Ms A. Mackie, Mr & Mrs A. Mullay, Mr G. Rubienski, Mr G. Simpson, Miss L. Wadle, Mr & Mrs C. Webster, **Moray:** Miss K. Crookston, **North-East Scotland:** Miss J. Choi, Mr & Mrs C. Hall, Dr G. Rose, **Overseas:** Miss A. Multhaupt, Mr J. Sackton, **Scotland - no branch:** Ms S. McKenzie, Mr C. Verstraete, **Tayside:** Mrs S. Ashton, Mr B. Caudwell, Mr A. Guthrie, Mr B. Johnston, Mr C. Maxwell, **West Galloway:** Ms D. Stevens.

## Covid-19 outbreak: impact on Club activities

**Talks and outings programmes:** All branch outings as well as any scheduled indoor meetings were cancelled at the outset of the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak in March. At the time of writing, it looks unlikely that outings will resume over the summer but we will contact members if this changes. We are working on the basis that Club activities will resume in September, when the new season of indoor meetings and outings would be due to commence. However, this may of course change depending on how the situation unfolds and, again, we will keep members informed.

If you do not currently receive email notifications about branch meetings and/or outings but would like to, please go to www.the-soc.org.uk/gdpr-consent to sign up to our mailing list. For members who do not have access to the internet to be able to check for updates on the SOC website, please call your local branch Secretary in August to check for details of the September meeting (assuming the Government ban on social gatherings has been lifted by then). If the winter programme of talks and outings are to go ahead then the printed programmes for both will be circulated with the September issue of *Scottish Birds.*

**SOC Annual Conference & AGM (Provisional):** 20–22 November 2020, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. Printing of the programme and booking information will be postponed to September in order to allow for the possibility of having to cancel the event. Updates will be posted on the Events page of the SOC website. If you are not already on our mailing list to receive Club news and events notices and would like to receive email updates on the Annual Conference, go to www.the-soc.org.uk/gdpr-consent and complete the short sign-up form.

**Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference: 'Northern Seas & Coasts' (Rescheduled):** 20 March 2021, Elgin Town Hall. Booking for the event will re-open in December 2020.

## Waterston House

Following the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak, Waterston House closed to visitors in mid-March with all staff working from home. Staff can still be contacted by email but if you wish to speak to someone, call the office on 01875 871 330 and you will hear details of an alternative number to call.

### Staff updates

Alyssa Parker, Communications Officer, moves on. Alyssa, who was appointed last November, left the team in March to pursue a permanent full-time position with RSPB Scotland. Unfortunately, her departure coincided with the start of the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak so there was no opportunity to organise a formal farewell. Council thanks Alyssa for facilitating the

smooth running of Club communications during her short time in post and for her comprehensive and swift handover to staff taking up her key tasks. We wish her all the best in her new job.

Staff working from home (as opposed to covering front-of-house duties at Waterston House) meant that there was some spare capacity on the team for taking on extra workload. This along with having the necessary skills and experience on board, put us in the fortunate position of being able to cover the communications role without having to deal with recruitment at what was already a very challenging time: Kathryn Cox (Membership Officer) is managing the SOC website, assisted by Stephen Hunter (volunteer, SOC Lothian branch) and Rosie Filipiak (Librarian) is dealing with branch communications and the mobile app, as well as continuing to produce *The Hoot*. Social media has been a team effort, with staff drawing on their different areas of expertise to provide varied and engaging content for members and the wider birding community stuck indoors during the lockdown.

**Plate 93.** Chaffinch. © *Lucy Newton*

**Art has moved online**

Following the closure of Waterston House, the exhibitions that were due to take place over the next few months have been rescheduled to 2021. As a result, we are taking to our social media platforms (Facebook in particular) to continue to share the best of wildlife art from existing and future SOC exhibitors.

We feature a different artist each week in a series of posts on Facebook, primarily. Here is, for example, one of the recent posts from Lucy Newton, a regular exhibitor at Waterston House. Reflecting on the changes that the lockdown has imposed on her practice, Lucy explains: "I usually spend my most productive days working from various hides across Scotland. Last spring, I was lucky enough to have an extended encounter with a beautiful Jay at Bavelaw hide. I had seen many Jays before, but all too fleetingly. This one seemed happy to pose for a long time. Not being able to travel at the moment has pushed me to focus on my own back garden. The birds I see this spring at my feeders are not as varied, but they are every bit as fascinating and I am really learning to appreciate them all the more, such as the tiny Wren I have seen every day tirelessly gathering materials for his nest. The current circumstances make us all appreciate our common garden birds. I think the Chaffinch, for example, is an underrated garden bird: may be common but it is definitely beautiful if you take the time to look…" Kittie Jones, Darren Rees, Lara Scouller, Carry Akroyd and Keith Brockie are among the artists who have featured in our lockdown shows of work. If you don't already follow us on Facebook, do consider doing so to see the wonderful work that continues to be produced by top wildlife artists in the UK. www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub

*Laura Gressani*

## Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

SOC has been one of nine partner organisations that comprise the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) since its inception in 2002. The SRMG meets regularly to oversee the work of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS). Gordon Riddle has been the SOC's representative on the SRMG for many years, but from 2020, Mike Thornton will take over this role.

Council wishes to thank Gordon for his valuable contribution over the years. The SRMS collates, curates and reports on raptor monitoring data from across Scotland and makes the information available for a wide range of conservation purposes. For more information on the SRMS, see: raptormonitoring.org/about-the-srms.

## SBRC - seeking a new member for the committee

The Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) is seeking a new member to replace David Parnaby, who retires later this year. To maintain geographical representation across Scotland, SBRC would prefer a candidate from the Northern Isles of Scotland. Any potential candidates should send their name to the Secretary (Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk). If more than one name is put forward, a ballot will be instigated, with Local Recorders having one vote each.

*Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC*

## Local Bird Recorders

**Change of contact details**

Angus Hogg, Ayrshire
Email: dcgos@yahoo.com
David Parnaby, Fair Isle
Email: warden@fairislebirdobs.co.uk

## 2018 Highland Bird Report

This latest issue features a stunning front cover photograph of the Lesser Yellowlegs at Broadford in October 2018 by Martin Benson.


2018 saw first-ever records of breeding in Highland by Hawfinch and Nuthatch, and there is a detailed history of Nuthatch in Highland by Bob McMillan. There are also accounts of how Common Tern breeding in the Inner Moray Firth has been greatly enhanced on man-made rafts by Dave Galloway, and how Tree Sparrows have been encouraged to breed at Leys Castle Estate by Alan David MacAskill.

The report is produced by the Highland Bird Report Editorial Committee on behalf of SOC Highland Branch and copies are available from Alex Joss, 8 Green Drive, Inverness IV2 4EX. Please send a cheque for £12 (includes £2 p&p) payable to 'Scottish Ornithologists' Club HBR' For any queries, call Alex on 01463 221661 or email ejoss99@btinternet.com.

## Arran Bird Report: the first 40 years


The annual Arran Bird Report for 2019 is included in this publication celebrating 40 years of bird reporting on the isle. The uniqueness of Arran bird life is featured as are the changes in that bird life, together with a range of birding highlights from these first forty reports. In addition, the first report, the Arran Bird Report for 1980, is included in its entirety together with the 40th report, the Arran Bird Report for 2019. Overall it gives a fascinating insight into the birds of Arran.

The 110-page report is priced at £5 + £1.50 p&p and can be purchased directly from Arran Natural History Society. Email: arrannaturalhistorysociety@gmail.com

## Birds in Dumfries & Galloway (No. 29) 2018


Copies of the latest Dumfries & Galloway Bird Report may be obtained for £10 each (+ £2 p&p) from: Peter Swan, 13, Robb Place, Castle Douglas DG7 1LW Email: pandmswan@btinternet.com Note that copies of some previous years' reports are available priced at £6 each (including p&p). Contact Peter for details. Cheques should be made payable to 'SOC Dumfries & Galloway Branches'.

## An SOC/Calmac collaboration - birdwatching on board

SOC Development Officer, Jane Allison, made contact with CalMac back in early 2019, ahead of the launch of the Club's mobile app, *Where to Watch Birds in Scotland*. We secured the ferry company's support for the app, with an A2 poster being displayed on board the Ullapool to Stornoway ferry and in Ullapool terminal. In return, SOC agreed to promote CalMac's Marine Awareness Programme (see page 140). In October, CalMac enlisted SOC collaboration with a series of large-scale vinyl panels on some of its key vessels: MV Isle of Mull (Oban to Craignure), MV Isle of Lewis (Oban to Barra) and MV Lord of the Isles (Oban to Mallaig/Lochboisdale/Colonsay).


**Plate 94.** A poster advertising the SOC app on CalMac ferries.

These were designed to capture children's imagination and focus on the varied wildlife likely to be seen on the sea journeys.

SOC's main input was in assisting with fun facts about the different birds that could be seen on the various routes, as well as commenting on the accuracy of the illustrations being produced by contracted artists. Work on the vinyl panels began just as Jane was preparing to go on maternity leave, with SOC Birding Officer, Stuart Rivers, ably taking up the reins in Jane's absence.

## Accessible birdwatching sites in Angus for all abilities - a guide by the Angus and Dundee Bird Club

This is a first attempt to collate information intended to help those less able to find information about sites where birdwatching can be undertaken, and without the need to move far from the car or transport. From an idea following a discussion with a birdwatcher, who thought they'd have to give up their hobby when they became less able.


**Plate 95.** One of the 'fun facts' posters produced by CalMac ferries in collaboration with the SOC.

The guide provides some detail based on site visits with many photos, hoping to show and describe the 'lay of the land', parking, path information and any obstacles that would hinder access. None of these are guaranteed to stay the same, let's just hope that differences are improvements to access, and more facilities.

This current version contains 29 sites or places where anyone can see birdlife from accessible bird hides, public places, roadsides, beaches, lochs and moorland.

Access the guide online at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yZKZIYAmg9I1ElArcWbv3i-PmE2dP5LF/view?usp=sharing

## ABC - The Aberdeen Birding Calendar

Just before lockdown, the North-East Scotland branch launched an exciting and rather different programme of outdoor events. For years the branch didn't do outings, but a member survey indicated enthusiasm, so the committee got to work.

ABC - Aberdeen Birding Calendar - is an enticing, and unusual, programme of outdoor gatherings for those new to birding and lifelong enthusiasts too. Enjoyable field meetings and workshops where participants can explore topics in some depth, meet like-minded people, share experience and have a good day out. The Calendar has 12 sessions through the year, covering topics to help build interest and skills, and encourage bird recording. The topics include, amongst other things, sessions on active and passive sound recording, seabird censusing, nest-finding and recording, observing and recording migration in various ways, and bird photography. An experienced leader will introduce each topic and coordinate a field outing, with a short session to set the scene for the day, and/or a follow-up review, with plenty of birding in between.

**Plate 96.** Reed Bunting nest, Corby Loch, North-east Scotland, May 2005.© *Chris Jones*

The outings are free but booking is essential and numbers are limited. To see the full programme and make bookings, go to: tinyurl.com/soc-events and follow us. We'll restart the programme when it is safe to do so.

*Alan Knox, Chairman,*
*North-East Scotland branch*

## Important notice for photographers contributing to *'Scottish Birds'*

The popularity of *Scottish Birds* owes much to the generosity of the many photographers who contribute their amazing work to the journal. By default, photographers give permission for their work to be published in the printed journal; copyright is retained by them. With the move away from the simple printed mailing towards online extracts, archives of back issues and the possible option of a digital subscription in the future, the Club would like to make a further request from photographers.

When *Scottish Birds* was released to the Biodiversity Heritage Library in 2013, we sought permission from copyright holders (*Scottish Birds* 33(1): 50). We would now like to extend this to current and future issues of the journal. Consequently, our guidelines to contributors have been updated to include the use of all photographs and artwork in digital as well as printed material.

Arrangements are in place to have material removed from web access where necessary, but contributors should make their view clear when sending us material.

## Correction

Clyde SOC member Jim Coyle has pointed out that in the article 'My Journey towards patching in the Glasgow Area' (*Scottish Birds* 40: 56), the descriptive titles 'Gartloch' and 'Gartloch Loch' should rather be 'Gartloch Pool' and 'Gartloch Pools' respectively.

# OBITUARIES

## Christopher John Savory (1943–2020)

**Plate 97.** John Savory, Waterston House, Aberlady, December 2013. © *Wendy Hicks*

John studied zoology at the University of Aberdeen, where he was an enthusiastic member of The Lairig Club and from where he took part in university expeditions to Bakhtiari (Iran) in 1965 and to Afghanistan in 1968. He moved to the Blackhall Grouse Research Station at Banchory for his PhD on Red Grouse feeding behaviour (1974) supervised by Adam Watson and Bob Moss. John's father, Harry Savory, was a friend of George Lodge and John inherited memorabilia from that relationship which generated a keen interest in publications about Lodge (most recently in 2019 in *Scottish Birds* 39: 220–223).

John's main work was on domestic fowl; he spent most of his career at the Poultry Research Centre (PRC) at Bush near Edinburgh. His research was meticulous, and he enjoyed an environment where the emphasis was on captive birds with carefully controlled conditions enabling some elegant experimentation. This part of John's career exemplified his approach to ornithology. His experience in the late 1960s at Blackhall, under the leadership of Adam Watson, stressed the importance of scientific rigour, and John's experimental work at PRC demonstrated the benefits that accrue from this approach. John always took care over even small details which could make him seem argumentative at times, but he was often right, and listening to his point of view was always worthwhile.

After retirement, John continued to study birds but now back in the wild. He took over charting the changes and increases in the breeding birds in the exciting Carrifran wildwood project in Dumfries & Galloway from Peter Gordon. In 2016, he analysed the data and published an important paper on this in *Scottish Birds* (36: 135–149). He was much in demand as a speaker on the subject. As biological recorder for the project, he led the application by which Carrifran became joint winner of the New Native Woods category in the 2017 Scotland's Finest Woods Awards.

John was the first chairman of the SOC's Archive Committee in 2008 and joined the Library Committee when the latter absorbed the archives group. He remained an active member of the Library Committee until his death, taking a particular interest in all matters regarding bird art.

He continued to be interested in research. His last contribution to our journal, on the food of Snowy Owls in the 1960s, appeared in *Scottish Birds* 39: 202–204 and is a classic John Savory, with due attention to the human historical context of the observations.

He is survived by Eileen, his children Matthew and Fiona, and grandchildren Arran, Ethan and Lewis.

***Mick Marquiss, Alan Knox and the editors***

**Plate 98.** Talking methods on a training run. Yes, it is always that calm... Feb. 2018. © *Mark Lewis*

# Volunteer Seabirds At Sea - a new opportunity to help monitor Scotland's seabirds

The UK hosts important breeding populations of several species of seabird, including internationally important numbers of 13 species such as Great Skua and Manx Shearwater. Scotland holds the majority of these populations. Breeding seabirds have been monitored since 1986 by the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP), led and co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) in partnership with 19 other organisations, using a combination of censuses and annual sample-based monitoring to gather data on breeding numbers and breeding success.

Seabird populations are typically monitored during the breeding season when most species aggregate at colonies and accurate, cost-effective, surveillance can take place. Most seabird species, however, spend much of their lives at sea and a large proportion of the total population comprises immature birds or non-breeding adults which cannot be monitored using land-based surveys. Monitoring seabirds at sea is, therefore, essential to fully understand their population status, to identify trends, their drivers and to ensure appropriate and timely mitigation of them. Collecting data on seabirds at sea has always been an expensive endeavour. Most data in recent years has been collected to support offshore renewable energy developments. This has involved intensive short-term monitoring (usually over two years) using professional observers on dedicated survey vessels, often at sea for several weeks or, more recently, by using digital aerial surveys. These surveys are very effective in determining the distribution and relative abundance of seabirds within a defined area over a period of time. However, the UK has responsibility for an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 773,676 km$^2$, which means long term monitoring using such approaches is financially and logistically impractical.

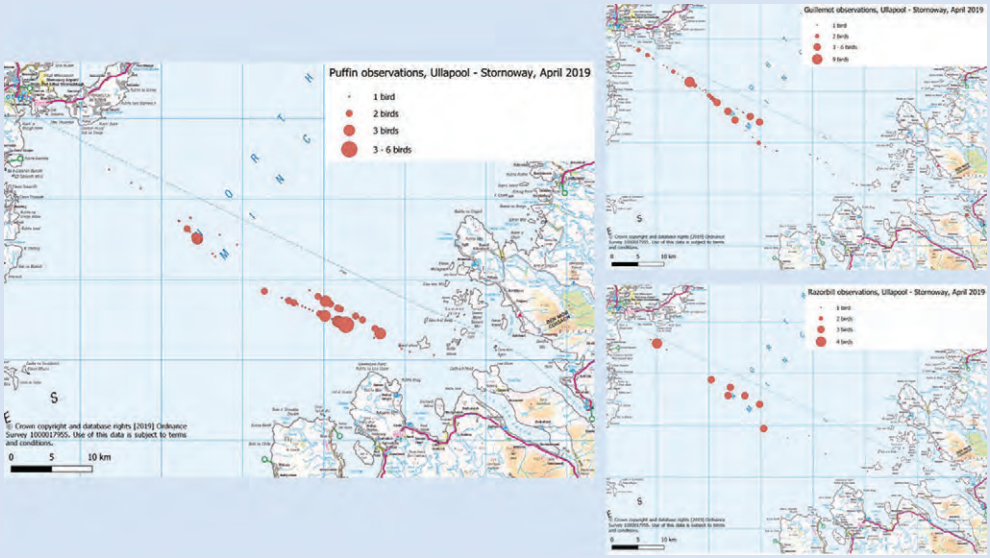


**Figure 1.** Puffins aggregating in areas away from those favoured by other auk species during April 2019 Ullapool to Stornoway survey.

Fortunately, there is another option. If we can regularly sample smaller sea areas and collect long term time-series data across a geographic area that is representative of the larger UK EEZ, it should be possible to detect trends in both the relative abundance and distribution of seabirds at sea. To do this does not require costly commissioning of boats or aeroplanes, as our waters are regularly traversed by a network of ferries and other merchant vessels that follow the same route with each journey.

In 2016, CalMac ferries initiated its Marine Awareness Program which, among other things, sought to develop and initiate monitoring of seabirds and cetaceans from CalMac routes in western Scotland. Rather serendipitously, JNCC had been developing a Volunteer Seabirds At Sea (VSAS) scheme and have since been working with CalMac and Marine Awareness Program partners on implementing this approach. Among these partners are NGOs such as MARINElife and ORCA, both of which have considerable experience and expertise in using volunteers on ferries and merchant shipping for data collection, primarily for cetaceans. The design of the seabird monitoring element has drawn strongly on MARINElife and ORCA's existing schemes and MARINElife have been working closely with JNCC and CalMac to coordinate volunteer effort. Input from these partners has also been invaluable in the development of our training programme for volunteers.

The European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) method is well established as the industry standard for boat-based surveys of seabirds in North Western Europe. Data have been collected using this method since the 1980s and are stored in a database that currently comprises over 3 million records, a number anticipated to rise by millions when the database is updated in the next two years. The ESAS partnership (comprising 10 countries) has ensured that the majority of seabirds at sea data collected are compatible, developed a pool of ESAS trained observers and trainers and provided a long-term dataset to give context to newly acquired datasets. JNCC manage the UK ESAS database and training scheme and have developed a modified training program designed to ensure data standards are maintained without the need for volunteers to attend a traditional three-day ESAS course. This modified approach involves giving volunteers some basic training and experience and then pairing them with a more experienced mentor from whom they can learn during surveys. The new approach has demonstrated that volunteers and mentors can

work together to collect survey data of a suitably high standard. During 2018 and 19, JNCC staff trained enough volunteers to allow ferry-based surveys to begin in Spring 2019. The data collected by this project will eventually inform analyses of trends in the relative abundance and distribution of seabirds across on the west coast of Scotland, and hopefully in future, throughout UK waters.

In April 2019, surveys began on three CalMac routes: Kennacraig to Islay, Oban to Barra and Ullapool to Stornoway and continued on a monthly basis until September. Some interesting results have already been seen from this first season of surveys, for example large aggregations of Puffin in the north-eastern Minch in April. These birds were using different areas to the large numbers of Guillemots and Razorbills present further west.

Another feature of note is the large aggregation of Manx Shearwaters recorded to the north of Coll, in both April and May 2019. Presumably these birds are linked to the colony on Rum, approximately 25 km to the north.

Our surveys cover important areas for divers (especially Great Northern), with the Islay routes being particularly productive for this species. With hundreds of Great Northern Divers recorded from this route in the past, we're keen to see what the data collected on these more recent surveys can tell us about trends in the number, feeding areas and phenology of this species. Throughout the whole survey area, observations of juvenile auks later in the summer may also give us some idea of productivity at local colonies. These are just two examples that could contribute to the

**Plate 99.** A Great Northern Diver photographed from the CalMac Kennacraig to Islay ferry, February 2018. © *Mark Lewis*

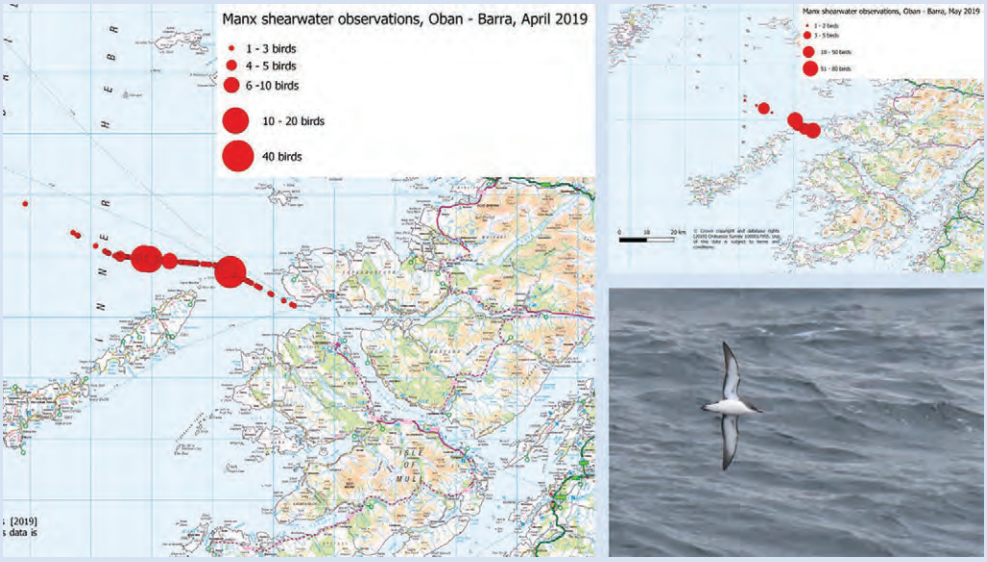


**Figure 2.** Manx Shearwater aggregations north of Coll during April (left) and May (right).

long term aim of the project: to accumulate time-series data from as many routes as possible which will contribute towards the monitoring of trends in the relative abundance, distribution and phenology of seabirds in Scottish waters (and hopefully throughout the rest of the UK). Data on cetaceans, seals and basking sharks will also be collected and fed into the relevant recording schemes.

**Plate 100.** Iceland Gull photographed from the Islay ferry, March 2017. © *Mark Lewis*

Data are collected on a tablet using our bespoke app, which is supplied to survey teams before each survey. The app allows us to collect standardised data and streamline our validation and data processing routines. It also massively reduces the level of effort required from those volunteering to carry out the surveys. Surveys of this type have generated a lot of paper in the past and it was felt that the burden of data entry would discourage volunteer participation. The app allows very quick processing of survey data (with reduced scope for human error during processing allowing survey reports to be quickly produced and circulated among volunteers. All data recorded on the surveys are freely available by request to JNCC and in future will be made available online.

During 2019, a total of 13 surveys were completed, comprised 25 crossings and covering approximately 2080 km over approximately 78 hours, during which 25 species of seabird were recorded (along with many other interesting birds and of course, good numbers of cetaceans). In total, 4592 birds were observed. These numbers would be increased dramatically if we had managed to run a full schedule of surveys later in the season (for logistical reasons we only managed to man one of the three routes in both August and September). The suite of species

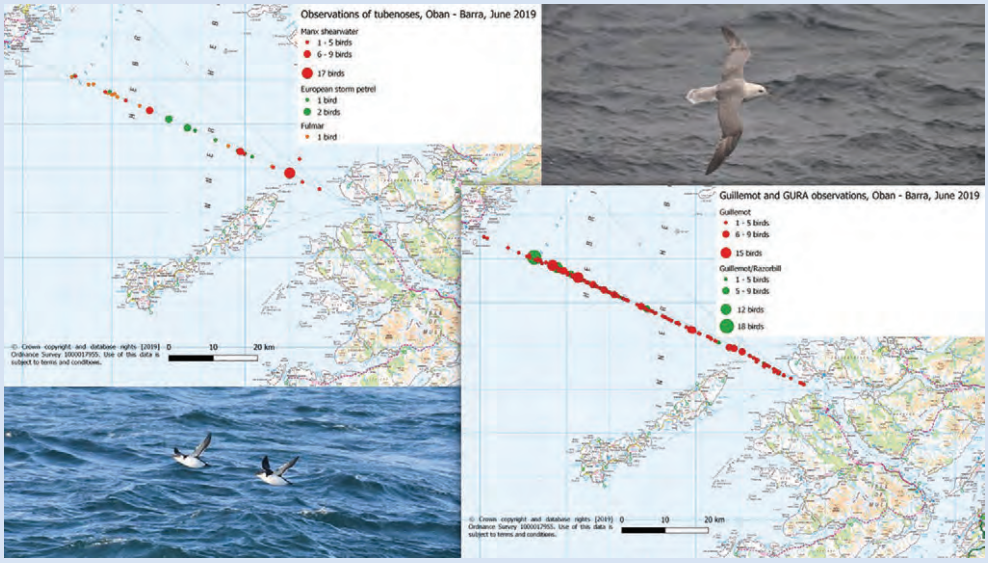


**Figure 3.** Examples of the outputs created by the data collection app. These feature heavily in survey reports, along with summaries of the numbers of each species of bird and marine mammals observed.

**Plate 101.** Composite image of the pale juvenile Long-tailed Skua recorded during a training course on the Kennacraig to Islay ferry in August 2018. © *Mark Lewis*

recorded would also be improved with better coverage later into the survey season. Highlights from the 2019 surveys include Storm Petrels and Pomarine Skua, with training courses run on the Kennacraig to Islay ferries producing several Sooty Shearwaters, a couple of Long-tailed Skua and a Balearic Shearwater. With better coverage, especially on Minch crossings later in the summer, it is likely that large shearwaters, Sabine's Gulls, Leach's Petrels, Grey Phalaropes, and maybe other even rarer species will be recorded.

With lessons learned from a relatively successful first year, and with the continued support of CalMac ferries, an expanded suite of surveys is planned for 2020. The existing routes will have monthly surveys throughout the year and new, twice-monthly, crossings from Ardrossan to Brodick have been included. This means that between April 2020 and March 2021 there will be a total of 60 surveys to be carried out. While we already have a pool of mentors and volunteers, it will be necessary to increase the numbers of trained observers to meet these new requirements. As such, JNCC will run at least seven free training courses throughout the year. Most of these are likely to be based in Glasgow but if SOC groups are keen on getting involved in this project, bespoke training courses will be considered where there is sufficient interest. The training is focused on the survey method and data recording rather than on bird identification, although there are optional modules on seabird and cetacean identification as this helps those with less experience to get involved. The support of CalMac ensures that crossings are free to those carrying out scheduled surveys as are the multiple crossings that make up the practical parts of the training courses.

If you're keen to learn more about this project, get involved with surveys or would like to discuss putting on a training course for your local SOC branch or bird club, please contact mark.lewis@jncc.gov.uk

Details of past courses, as well as survey trip reports and other project information can be found on the CalMac Marine Awareness Program website: www.calmac.co.uk/article/5977/Marine-Bird-Surveys and the project's dedicated Facebook page - www.facebook.com/groups/2210051269207485/

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# Little Gulls re-using a Scottish site in consecutive winters

The Little Gull is an uncommon to rare passage visitor to Scotland, with occasional influxes of larger numbers seen mostly along the east side of the country during the summer and autumn (Forrester *et al.* 2007). It is observed far less on the west side, where it remains rare and irregular, particularly in winter. There has been just one confirmed successful breeding record for Scotland, during 2016, although other nesting attempts have been suspected (Humpidge 2016).

In this context, the appearance of up to three adult Little Gulls on 15 January 2017 at Ironotter Point, Battery Park, Greenock (Clyde), some of which were observed nearby in Cardwell Bay, Gourock until 24 March was noteworthy, particularly as four were seen on 5 February. Two of the presumed same birds returned to the same site the following three consecutive winters from 2 November 2017 to 25 February 2018 (Plate 102a), from 4 November 2018 to 8 March 2019, and from 24 November 2019 until 30 January 2020 (Plate 102b).

Gulls of a range of species have been observed using the same locations in consecutive winters, sometimes establishing territories (e.g. Cheke & Burrell 2017). Being long-lived species, some up to 30 years, a few individuals in Scotland have become 'famous' being recognised and returning to the same site over many years; examples include single Ring-billed Gulls at Stromness (Orkney), Dingwall (Highland) and at Strathclyde Country Park (Clyde). At Cardwell Bay, an adult



**Plate 102 a–b.** Adult Little Gull, Cardwell Bay, Gourock, Clyde, (a) 30 January 2018, (b) 19 January 2020. © *Chris McInerny*

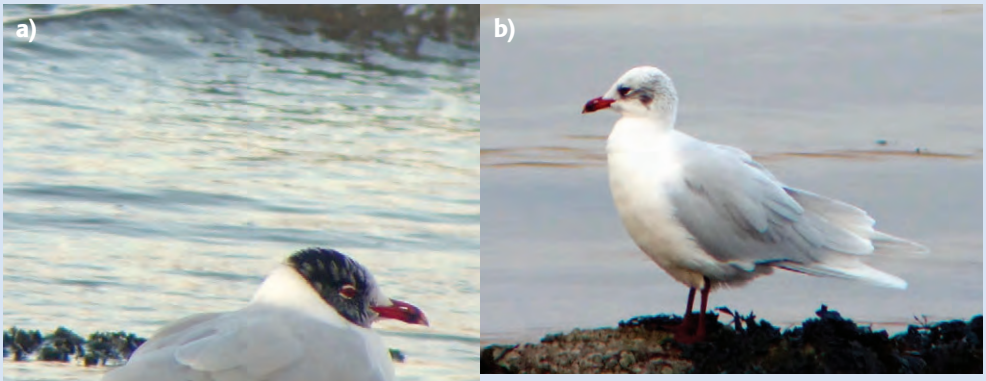


**Plate 103 a–b.** Adult Mediterranean Gull, Cardwell Bay, Gourock, Clyde, (a) 25 February 2018, (b) 19 January 2020. © *Chris McInerny*

Mediterranean Gull possessing a distinctive red bill with a black band and pale tip has returned each winter from 2016/17 to 2019/20 (Plate 103); and an adult Bonaparte's Gull was present in both early 2017 and 2018 (Plate 104). However, as far as I am aware, this is the first observation of Little Gulls re-using a site in consecutive winters in Scotland (Hutchinson & Neath 1978, Forrester *et al.* 2007).

The Firth of Clyde provides breeding, feeding and roosting habitat for large numbers of seabirds throughout the year, including gulls, with Little Gulls being observed irregularly since 2011. In winter, the tidal rips and currents often hold dip-feeding gulls, mostly Black-headed, Common and Herring Gulls. It is presumably these feeding opportunities that have attracted the Little Gulls and resulted in them returning each winter to Cardwell Bay from 2016/17 to 2019/20. It would be fascinating to know where they spend other times of year, including the location of their breeding grounds.

I thank Val Wilson for access to Clyde records that contributed to this note.

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**Plate 104.** Adult Bonaparte's Gull, Cardwell Bay, Gourock, Clyde, 15 March 2018. © *Chris McInerny*

# Best sparrow hotel

I have been studying birds for 20 years now and also have a great love for conservation. I have made my own nesting boxes for birds for a few years now, constructed from many different items that have included bread bins, logs and spare wood.

**Plate 105.** Tree Sparrow at a feeder, Dundee, March 2020. © *Dale Johnston*

When I first started my job with the Scottish SPCA in Dundee, although the building was surrounded by trees, there were very few birds to be seen. After adding a feeding station and some holders with nesting materials, I soon started to notice certain species of birds arriving that included Blue, Great and Coal Tits, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches and Siskins. Also, House Sparrows appeared, soon to be followed by the endangered Tree Sparrows (Plate 105).

After a while I decided to introduce a couple of nesting boxes to the surrounding areas to see if any of the birds would use them and to my surprise as soon as I was off the ladder and back into the building, the birds were investigating them. After a while, I started to make my own nesting boxes using spare pieces of wood and making the normal square boxes which many species used. As time went on, I started to be a little more adventurous, moving into logs that I would hollow out and even adapting them to allow two nesting holes so that multiple birds could nest. After a couple of years, I saw that the numbers of the Tree and House Sparrows were starting to rise and on reading that sparrow species prefer to live in colonies, I decided to build a larger nesting box to accommodate this (Plate 106).

**Plate 106.** Nesting shelves inside the sparrow box, Dundee, February 2020. © *Dale Johnston*

**Plate 107.** Tree Sparrow taking material into the box, Dundee, June 2019. © *Dale Johnston*

A family member decided to get rid of a small chest of drawers and I realised that this could be the foundation for my larger box. I first removed the drawers leaving the shell and took them apart using the wood to create the eight nesting sections within the box - all the same size and length. I then found a piece of wood to cover the front of the box and judging the distance of each nesting section, drilled 32 mm holes for birds to access. I painted the exterior only of the box in a brown waterproof non-toxic paint.

I decided to position it c. 1.5 m up a wired fence facing the kitchen window, south facing and in direct sunlight, knowing that the temperature would not become extreme in such a large box. And the same thing happened, as before I got back into the centre the birds were out there investigating the new accommodation.

The box has been up for five years now and a number of pairs have nested in the "Sparrow Hotel" as my colleagues call it. Approximately six pairs have nested in the box continually for this period of time. I only clean the box out every couple of years because the sparrows use the nests all year round from raising young to then using it for warmth in the winter and are continually bringing in new materials and removing any dirt and wet bedding. When the box was checked out and re-roofed with waterproof felt, I found that seven of the eight sections had been used. The box had to be slightly repositioned on the fence and since then two pairs of Tree Sparrows have investigated it and are now taking in grass and straw and soft linings such as wool and feathers (Plate 107).

The most interesting behaviour I found from both species of sparrow is that they both build two nests close together and when one clutch has fledged, the female then moves into the other clean nest to start her new family again and if they have more clutches they alternate them so that one is kept relatively clean. The two species seem to get along well together except when one lands at the wrong entrance hole and then the squabbling starts. Apart from that it is usually a peaceful "hotel".

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# BOOK REVIEWS

**Moult and Ageing of European Passerines** (second edition). Lukas Jenni & Raffael Winkler, 2020. Helm, London, ISBN: 9781472941510, hardback, 336 pages, £95.00.


This is the much-awaited revised and enlarged second edition of what has become something of a legendary book. The first edition (1994) was a revelation in providing very detailed accounts for correctly ageing 58 species of European passerines ranging from Red-backed Shrike to Reed Bunting, with representatives from most families and many genera. Its strength was a series of uniformly presented photographs of the respective species' right wing and detailed captions and text to guide the user through the difficult task of assessing the state of wing moult shown by individuals of different ages. The photos elevated the process from the previously available texts which were almost exclusively illustrated by black-and-white drawings. The book was an instant hit, rapidly sold out, and then was being offered second-hand at inflated prices.

This second edition retains the high production values of the first (it feels classy!) and covers an additional 16 species (see internet sites for details of the 74 species covered). Photographs retained from the 1994 book are reproduced with better saturation (some in the first edition were too pale), and many new ones have been added for the species first featured in the 1994 edition. The number of photos per species varies from two (Tree Sparrow) or three (Sand Martin, Starling, House Sparrow) to 17 (Whitethroat), with all relevant moult stages shown. There is also a slightly enlarged section on the use of stages of skull pneumatisation as a technique for assessing age.

In addition to the species accounts (pp. 99–291) there are enlarged and revised chapters at the start on: The function and consequences of moult; Terminology and methods in moult research; The moult of adults; The moult during the first year of life, and Ageing European passerines. At the back, there is an increased list of references, scientific names with corresponding English, German, French, Italian & Spanish common names, an index and finally a 'quick reference key' (which is also helpfully copied for one to cut out [or photocopy] as a transferable guide).

The only drawback of the book is the possible reluctance of the owner to use it in the field and the consequent deterioration in condition! It is far more suited for a ringing hut or room where it can be better looked after. While invaluable for experienced bird ringers, it also presents an ideal way for the less experienced and for non-ringers to begin and develop their understanding of the moult strategies for many of our most regularly trapped species.

It is a tremendous product and will be the new valued reference, prized by bird ringers and birders alike who are interested in understanding moult in birds and how this can be used to correctly age a wide range of European passerines.

***Stuart L. Rivers***

**Rebirding: rewilding Britain and its birds.** Benedict Macdonald, 2019. Pelagic Publishing, Exeter, ISBN 978-1-7842-7187-9, 300 pages, 30 colour plates, hardback, £19.99.


The interesting argument is that Britain is uniquely poor in wildlife despite having the highest membership of conservation groups in Europe. We should recreate a countryside closer to that of the post-Ice Age with natural woodlands (together with reintroduced mammals including carnivores) accompanied by a big reduction in deer and sheep numbers. The author considers that birds will then prosper. He disagrees with the view that Britain is too small and densely populated for largescale rewilding to succeed. British national parks would not qualify for that status in many other countries and many are blighted by sheep farming and commercial forestry. However, people seem to accept them that way judging by the numbers who visit. He rightly questions the subsidies given to upland farms and shooting estates but doesn't acknowledge the revenue that our degraded landscapes already generate; over £1 billion is estimated to be due to walkers in Scotland. If, as many readers of *SB* and this reviewer would like, native trees and animals are restored, will that lead to a big increase in income? Tourism on Mull has benefitted from the White-tailed Eagles as has Speyside from the Ospreys, but as these species recolonise further, they don't automatically create more income. He rightly praises Glenfeshie where the current Danish owner has reduced Red

Deer numbers allowing natural woodland to regenerate without reducing the income from stalking. That is not the same as the extra millions the author forecasts will flow from rewilding. Lynx are rarely seen in the wild, so can we be sure that their presence will bring in millions more in tourist revenue? The Alladale Estate, in Sutherland, is praised for its controversial rewilding plans but he fails to acknowledge the criticism from outdoor groups over attempts to limit public access by erecting tall fences there. It seems the Bison and Elk have had to be removed.

Another reviewer has commented that "you find yourself swept along by the wave of enthusiasm created by the author" who I fear is oversimplifying reality by glossing over some of the problems.

Political reality has to be faced given the Scottish Government's Rural Affairs Secretary's recent statement that "Wolves, Bears and Lynx will be reintroduced to Scotland over my dead body." There are already issues with Beavers in Perthshire, Wild Boar in England and White-tailed Eagles on the west coast. This book is a good read but it will take hard work demonstrating good practice if its aims are ever to be realised.

*Stan da Prato*

**RSPB Garden Birds.** Marianne Taylor, 2019. Bloomsbury Wildlife, London, ISBN 9-781-4729-5591-3, 224 pages, c.200 illustrations, hardback, £25.


Described by the publisher as "a lavish celebration of 47 of our most familiar garden birds", this book is a well-produced and attractively illustrated hardback with many high-quality colour photos. The chosen 47 are grouped into ten categories starting with tits and ending with aerial feeders (Swallow, martins and Swift). For each species, there is good information on numbers, habits and habitat. Interesting snippets are scattered through the book e.g. Chairman Mao's anti-sparrow campaign in China, early theories about Swallows hibernating at the bottom of ponds or 'bum biting' in Dunnocks. A final chapter describes another 22 'less-regular visitors' - somewhat optimistically for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker or Crested Tit depending where you live but demonstrating the wide variety of species that occur in a garden somewhere in this country. An introductory chapter provides some guidance on managing a wildlife garden. This book will be most valuable to new birdwatchers who have discovered the fascination of wildlife through watching the birds in their garden. It would make an attractive present or a good way of utilising any book tokens received at Christmas.

*Stan da Prato*

**Birds of Cyprus.** Colin Richardson & Richard Porter, 2020. Helm, Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-6084-9, paperback, 256 pages, £30.00.

Cyprus has long been a favourite destination for visiting birders, being on the eastern Mediterranean migratory route and with a total island checklist of some 405 species, seven of which are endemics. In addition, the richly varied scenery, the long association with Great Britain, and the general welcome given to visitors make for a very popular destination. This new Helm A5-sized field guide will become an important item in any birder's hand luggage.


Cyprus offers a varied range of habitats, from salt lakes to steep cliffs, agricultural plains, and the largely forested Troodos mountain range. Together these provide habitats for a wide variety of species. Indeed, the book effectively starts with 26 pages detailing the principal birdwatching sites which will be a great help to visitors. These include sites in Northern Cyprus, which is particularly welcome as access to the Turkish-controlled north becomes easier. As a very minor criticism, I think that it is perhaps a little unnecessary to include the latitude and longitude of so many locations.

The bulk of the book covers the individual species with clear, albeit inevitably brief descriptions. Each is shown with a clear distribution map which differentiates between resident and migrant breeders, and which also shows the passage and/or winter range for regularly occurring species. The colour plates of each species are extremely clear and accurate.

As a very long-ago Recorder of the Cyprus Ornithological Society, which in those days was only really able to cover southern Cyprus, I can thoroughly recommend this new guide.

*Mike Betts*

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

# 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

The last Obs. Roundup ended at the end of September with the hope that the forecast for easterly winds would deliver some good birds in October, and it certainly did that. A spell in the middle of the month saw some really epic birding and, whether your interest was rarities, scarcities or the spectacle of migration, there was something for everyone! A quiet start to the month was quickly forgotten when a Black-winged Stilt pitched up on the North Haven beach on 9 October. Found by Isle resident Stewart Thomson it was (unsurprisingly) a first for the Isle and appeared to involve a bird that has toured the UK for several weeks before heading north. A six-day spell from 12 October saw a remarkable 13 additions to the Isle year list (that finished on a respectable 215, subject to acceptances etc). Rarity highlights in that spell included Brown Shrike, Pechora, Red-throated, Olive-backed and Richard Pipits (two each of the latter two species), three Red-flanked Bluetails (part of a total of five seen in the autumn), Lanceolated, Pallas's, Radde's and Dusky Warblers.

Arguably the best day of the spell though was on 16 October, when a light south-easterly wind and murky start at dawn gave way to a sunny day that saw the Isle littered with birds. Census counts for the day produced 12,820 Redwing (the highest count since 2000), 686 Song Thrush (the highest count since 2014), 407 Robins (the highest autumn count since 2000), 326 Fieldfare, 296 Blackbirds, 54 Blackcaps, 37 Chiffchaffs and 18 Woodcock,

**Plate 108.** David Parnaby, Rob Hughes, Richard Cope and Nina O'Hanlon watching the Radde's Warbler at Klinger's Geo - note the distinctive downwards viewing of birders on Fair Isle, 18 October 2019. © *Deryk Shaw*

**Plate 109.** Thrushes and sheep, Fair Isle, 16 October 2019. © *David Parnaby*

amongst others. Over 180 birds were ringed that day, despite the comparative lack of visitors meaning that those of us on the Isle wanted to be everywhere at once, it was certainly a day to remember for all those present.

There was still time later in the month for a Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll, our first Woodlark since 2012 and an unexpected record movement of 512 Siskin on 30 October, whilst Grey Seals produced a total of 48 pups, an average season. A spectacular visit from a group of Killer Whales on 3 November brought the season nicely to a close.

The Isle held a fundraising and very fun social night in aid of the Obs on 30 November, raising over £300, and also raising spirits considerably (with the team, containing the Warden, getting a bird related question wrong in the quiz being a particular highlight for many!).

The winter was largely unspectacular from a birding point of view, with the usual scatter of white-winged gulls and Little Auks, a few Waxwings and wildfowl but various spells of stormy weather didn't deliver anything unusual.

**Plate 110.** Killer Whale, Fair Isle, 3 November 2019. © *David Parnaby*

**Plate 111.** Little Auk, Fair Isle, 13 November 2019. © *David Parnaby*

The year list opened with a solid 46 species on 1 January (the highest opening day total since 2014), but the winter stayed in the same vein of stormy, often unpleasant weather, with little in the way of movement. Things were then pretty quiet though, with the undoubted early highlight being a White-tailed Eagle on 12–13 March. It was first spotted from the fire truck during an exercise (if you're going to find a bird during a fire-training exercise, then go for a big one!) before heading high south out to sea the following morning.

A few early migrants made it through in a calm spell in late March before the winds turned back to the North and slowed things right down. At the same time, the decision was taken to delay the start of the season due to the situation with coronavirus, so we're waiting to see what happens to the rest of the year, although it is certain to be severely disrupted.

The Obs rebuild project is going well, with the planning application submitted in February and, for the time being at least, the rest of the work on the project has been able to continue as the staff, FIBOT directors and others involved in the project are able to work from home. There may be a time when the current situation with coronavirus does have an impact on plans, so please keep an eye on the FIBO Facebook and Twitter accounts and website for updates and all the latest news from Fair Isle.

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## Isle of May Bird Observatory

It had been a glorious 2019 season on the Isle of May with some stunning highlights. Autumn had commenced early with the arrival of Scotland's earliest-ever Aquatic Warbler in late July, swiftly followed by a Melodious Warbler two days later. August–October brought further reward before migration slowly ebbed away but not without a final flourish. Late October produced the islands ninth-ever Radde's Warbler from 22nd–24th, whilst three Long-tailed Tits graced the island for several days late in the month.

Migration can be productive in early November if the right conditions prevail, and with north-easterly winds blowing, the island produced a final flurry which really was a fitting end for such a good season. A fly-over Hawfinch on 2 November may have succumbed to an over-wintering Merlin, whilst a scattering of Waxwings during 3th–5th took advantage of sliced apples placed on the branches of stunted Elders. The purple patch of birding, just like the weather, continued, with a splendid Pallas's Warbler trapped and ringed on 4–5 November. The bird showed incredibly well on the banks of the Loch and represented only the nineth record for the island and first since 2001. It is interesting to speculate that this total may be influenced (artificially low) by the fact that in most previous years the bird observatory traditionally closed at the end of October. The recent move towards prolonged recording well into November may give a truer picture of the late migration period and contribute more records to the year list in the future.

**Plate 112.** Radde's Warbler, Isle of May, 22 October 2019. *© David Steel*

In contrast, a species which is booming on the island and east coast in general is Olive-backed Pipit, and in 2019 an elusive bird favoured the area around the Main Lighthouse on 5 November. Although this represented the 11th for the island, it was the fifth consecutive year they have been recorded involving a remarkable seven individuals since 2015. Throughout this early November period several other species were noted around the island including up to nine 'Siberian Chiffchaffs' which remained in residence until mid-month allowing close scrutiny of this interesting subspecies. Each day appeared to bring further good birds, and a stunning male Firecrest found along Holymans Road remained settled for seven days between 7–13 November. Seawatching produced the usual winter wildfowl including Scaup and a handful of Little Auks, whilst a Little Grebe was present on the Loch from 12 November.

The Observatory closed its doors on 9 November and the island staff departed the following week. It was an excellent year overall with the outstanding records including our first-ever Collared Flycatcher, second Crane (last in 2004) and Red-flanked Bluetail (last in 1975), fourth 'Eastern Stonechat' (last in 1980), fifth Blyth's Reed Warbler (last in 2016), seventh Arctic Warbler (last in 2017) and eighth Aquatic Warbler (last in 2001) and Melodious Warbler (last in 2012). A total of 178 species were recorded - the second highest on record and just behind the all-time record of 180 set in 2016.

**Plate 113.** Red-flanked Bluetail, Isle of May, 5 October 2019. © *David Steel*

Whilst there were great highlights, a few species not recorded this year included Wryneck (last recorded in May 2016), Barred Warbler (first blank since 2013) and Buzzard (first blank year since 2003). It was also worryingly poor for Lapwing (just one record all year) and Greenfinch (just two records) reflecting the declining national status of both species.

The Isle of May is generally dormant during the winter months with no permanent residents, but reserve staff and researchers made occasional visits. During the early part of 2020, as expected, highlights were few, although the Little Grebe made several reappearances on the Loch (where was it going in between?), whilst a Buzzard (a species not seen in 2019) was wintering on the island throughout February–March - somewhat ironic given how much we tried for one in 2019.

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**Plate 114.** 'Eastern Stonechat', Isle of May, 22 September 2019. © *Iain Livingstone*

# A hat-trick of Highland firsts in 2019

P. STRONACH

I had always hoped to find a first for Highland, I've come close in the past with the second Citrine Wagtail at Durness in 2014, but finally my dream was realised in 2019.

## Iberian Chiffchaff, Balnakeil, Highland, 17–19 May 2019

On 17 May 2019, I was birding in one of my favourite places to bird in the world, the Durness and Balnakeil area, a stunning part of the Gàidhealtachd which every now and again can produce hoped for rarities. I have been birding there for a long time but the last five years especially I have birded it intensively during migration times. It was a classic spring overshoot day, sunny with blue skies, and I was hopeful, as ever!

Mid-morning, I was returning to my car in the beach car park and heard a strange song coming from Balnakeil Farm. I strained to hear it in the wind, but it was enough to attract my attention. As I walked along the drive, I realised the songster was an Icelandic Redwing singing on the last piece of land it would see before its breeding grounds. I was stood listening to it singing when suddenly an Iberian Chiffchaff started singing from the same trees! I couldn't believe it, one of those moments where you just can't believe what is happening!

**Plate 115.** Iberian Chiffchaff, Balnakeil, Highland, 17 May 2019. © *Peter Stronach*

I knew it was crucial to get recordings of the song and calls to get it accepted, so I started using my shotgun microphone but it wasn't till later I realised it was broken and didn't record a single thing! Luckily, I got videos on my phone which I could take the audio off and had plenty of photos as it fed just a couple of metres from me.

It really was a subtly stunning bird with a beautiful lemony yellow wash across the tips of the feathering on the upper body, that and the classic three-part song being belted out at full volume made it a really memorable find. In recent years, I had deliberately made sure that every time I was out and about in the Highlands in May and June, I would stop at isolated woods and listen for singing - especially for this species and for spring Yellow-browed or Greenish Warblers etc which must surely occur.

### Iberian Chiffchaff status in Scotland

*There have been three accepted records of Iberian Chiffchaff in Scotland to date (see below). Pending acceptance of this record and the acceptance of a 2018 North Ronaldsay record, this would be the fifth for Scotland.*

*2018: Sangar, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 28 April 2018 (pending BBRC acceptance)*
*2014: Rousay, Orkney 7–8 July*
*2010: Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, 4 June*
*2006: Pitcox Farm and Pressmennan Lake, Lothian, 5 May and 6–13 May*

## Olive-backed Pipit, Tarbat Ness, Highland, 5 November 2019

Bob Swann and I had both seen the promising overnight forecast on 4 November, so we arranged to meet at Tarbat Ness. Tarbat Ness is not a typical east coast location for migrants. Unfortunately, the classic autumn south-easterlies don't usually deliver for us, as Moray and North-east Scotland recording areas are in the way! It needs to be east or north-east straight from Scandinavia ideally to stand a chance of a fall.

**Plate 116.** Olive-backed Pipit, Tarbat Ness, Highland, 5 November 2019. © *Peter Stronach*

On arrival, we immediately went into the plantation at the point, a small rectangle of planted Scot's Pine, and started slowly moving through it. We had hardly gone any distance at all when we flushed a Tree/Olive-backed-type pipit from the grass below the pines. It called once before flying to a clearing in some gorse and landing. Given the date and the call we were understandably very excited. We positioned ourselves to see if we could view it, but the grass it was in was too deep and the gorse almost completely surrounded it. We decided to walk up to it, when we got to the clearing, the bird called again and flew up and perched in the pines for several minutes in clear view.

We confirmed our suspicions that it was an Olive-backed Pipit, with that beautiful strong buff wash across the flanks and the face and the characteristic striking head pattern. We got several more views as it dropped down into the grass and flew back up into the pines when disturbed.

The find was especially pleasing as I had long said that this species was overdue in Highland, and had even suggested the plantations at Tarbat Ness were the ideal place for one to turn up!

### Olive-backed Pipit status in Scotland

*Olive-backed Pipit is scarce vagrant in Scotland. Following the first record found on Fair Isle in 1964, there had been 354 records up to 2017 (McInerny & McGowan 2019). The vast bulk of these records are from the Northern Isles with an east coast bias to the majority of the mainland records. The species is a classic autumn vagrant with very few recorded on spring passage. The autumn passage is from late September through to November with a pronounced peak in early October.*

## Hume's Warbler, Tarbat Ness, Highland 5–11 November 2019

Having just found the Olive-backed Pipit above, we moved down to the pool area at Tarbat Ness and found a Yellow-browed-type warbler feeding in the scrub, nettles and willows. The muted colours, black bill and black legs as well as the buff in the supercilium meant we were strongly suspicious that this was a Hume's Warbler rather than a Yellow-browed Warbler. As I watched it in a line of willows, it called on three occasions with the classic Hume's Warbler call, twice without provocation and once in response to playback of a Hume's Warbler call from the *Collins Bird Guide* App. The latter caused a reaction in that the warbler flew directly towards the played tape.

Plumage. Overall the plumage was very muted compared to a Yellow-browed Warbler, and had a greyish cast all over in comparison, with a buffy colouration on the supercilium especially and the ear coverts. There was a very, very muted pale crown stripe. The lores were dark and there was a dark eye-stripe through the eye. The throat was whitish and the belly and upper breast too. The flanks were buffish and the undertail coverts were a clean white colour. The crown was a grey mossy green, as was the mantle, with the nape a greyish colour. The rump was a lighter yellowish green.

**Plate 117.** Hume's Warbler, Tarbat Ness, Highland 5 November 2019. © *Peter Stronach*

Wing. The median covert bar was quite broad at the feather tip, but very faint and hard to see, the colouration was buff. The greater covert bar was not a bright yellow but a washed out pale lemony yellow with buff colouring away from the leading edge of the wing. The wing feathering, primaries/secondaries were edged bright yellow green. The tertials were more muted with thicker broad edges on the outer of the feather only a light lemony yellow similar in tone to the greater covert bar. The tail feathering was black to the yellow-green edging, the tips were pointed and all feathers were present.

Bare parts. The eye was completely black. The bill was very dark with the base of the upper and lower mandible yellowish. The legs were completely dark, very similar to a Siberian Chiffchaff.

The bird was later caught in a mist net, processed and ringed. A single contour feather lost during processing was sent to Martin Collinson and Thom Shannon at Aberdeen University, the DNA from which was a 100% match for nominate ssp *humei*.

### Hume's Warbler status in Scotland

*Hume's Warbler is a species of upland, montane forests of Central Asia, its breeding range stretching from the Hindu Kush to the Altai mountains of Mongolia. It is migratory and winters mainly in India. Vagrants have been recorded in Scotland since the first record in 1991, despite the 3,000 km distance from its breeding grounds!*

*Pending acceptance and acceptance of a 2019 Fetlar record, this would be the 30th record for Scotland. This species is a typical late autumn migrant, the earliest record is from 14 October with the latest on 13 December, but the bulk arrive in late October and November. Of the 30 records, 16 have come from Fair Isle and Shetland, with all the mainland records coming from east-facing coasts. Borders, Moray & Nairn and Caithness being the only recording areas with eastern coasts not to have recorded this species.*

*Hume's Warbler is definitely a species that is prone to influxes in suitable air flows with six in both 2008 and 2011.*

## Reference

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## Acknowledgements

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**Plate 118.** Isle of May, 11 May 2017. © *David Stafford*

# The 'island effect' – a century on

*A comparison of the occurrence patterns of vagrant and scarce migrant land birds between an island and mainland migration watchpoint*

A.W. LAUDER, K.D. SHAW & D. STEEL

*Ode to the West Wind (extract)*

*Far on the wide Hungarian plains*
*The Hoopoe waves his tawny crest -*
*But not at us. The wind remains*
*Perpetually West.*

*Huge flocks of Phalaropes and Cranes*
*And Ortolans with reddish beast*
*Speed south unseen. The wind remains*
*Inexorably West*

*M.F.M. Meiklejohn,*
*24 September 1948, The Isle of May*

## Introduction

For those of us who enjoy Scottish Islands and bird migration, *Studies in Bird Migration* by Dr William Eagle Clarke (1912) is almost essential reading. In volume 2 of this huge work there is the start of the development of the theory of 'the island effect'. The idea that islands concentrate migrants while coasts receive a more dilute arrival. Clarke wrote "My forecast of the importance of Fair Isle as a bird observatory has been more than realised. Seven years' investigations have made it the most famous bird observatory in our islands; indeed, it has become the British Heligoland. Quite a number of species which were previously regarded as rare, casual visitors to our isles have, as a result of these observations, been found to be regular migrants. They doubtless occur on the mainland, too, but owing to its broad acres they almost entirely escape notice". Clarke's work on Fair Isle, St Kilda and the Flannan Isles was to prove an inspiration to those who followed.

Amongst those 'the good ladies' Baxter and Rintoul always loom large in the history of Scottish ornithology. The authors of *Birds of Scotland* (1953), they had many ornithological interests one of which was bird migration. In their influential paper on this subject (Baxter & Rintoul 1918), they put forward the theory that wind direction was important in bird migration and notably how easterly winds were important to British east coast watchpoints. As Clarke assumed, and we now know, migration occurs on a broad front (Gauthreaux & Belser 2003, Newton 2008) and mainland bird observatories on the east coast have played their part in helping to understand it.

The importance of easterlies was further underlined by M.F.M Meiklejohn in his poem *Ode to the West Wind*. In recent times, this has been further developed to include in autumn the importance of high pressure over Scandinavia and Siberia, allowing migrants to leave their breeding or staging areas before being displaced westward (e.g. Elkins 2005). More recently still, rare birds from these areas have arrived without the assistance of strong east winds and this may be due to the role of reverse migration (Nisbet 1962, Rabøl 1969, Cottridge & Vinicombe 1996) or perhaps random dispersal driven by genetic anomalies as proposed by Gilroy & Lees (2003), with relatively benign conditions being enough to bring them to our shores. However, large 'falls' of migrants still require classic conditions as outlined by Howey & Bell (1983) in describing the great Siberian fall of October 1982 and also well summarised by Elkins (2005).

Birdwatchers who regularly stay at bird observatories or on islands enjoy the spectacle of large numbers of birds migrating but finding rare birds is usually a strong element of the pleasure. Indeed, Baxter and Rintoul themselves found the discovery of Britain's first 'Eastern Pied Chat' (now Pied Wheatear) a pleasurable experience in 1908 (Baxter & Rintoul 1910).

Now, most students of migration and rarity hunters would probably prefer to spend October on an appropriate island than on an east coast headland. Statistics of course play a strong part in their thinking and simply keeping track of bird news can provide evidence but some more detailed analyses have occasionally been carried out. S.L. Rivers, in analysing statistics of rare and scarce bird occurrence on the Isle of May for the relevant chapter (Campbell *et al.* 2010) in the book *The Bird Observatories of Britain and Ireland* (Archer *et al.* 2010) was struck by the stark difference in the level of occurrence of a wide range of scarce migrants on the Isle of May compared with nearby coasts. Stuart commented, "While I was aware of the general idea that islands were often more attractive to passerine migrants than the mainland... many species showed a pro Isle of May bias, including Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Yellow-browed, Marsh, Icterine and Barred and Subalpine Warblers, Bluethroat and Red-breasted Flycatcher. It was most extreme for Common Rosefinch with 71 on the May but only four in Fife and two in Lothian [1990–2008]".

In this paper, we bring a modern context to the island versus headland debate and compare a well-studied island with an adjacent well-studied headland and ask one particular question: why are some rare species recorded more often on the island and others more often on the headland?

## The study sites

The study sites are Fife Ness and the Isle of May. Their locations are shown in Figure 1.

### Habitats

Fife Ness is a large coastal strip extending from Boarhills to the north, south east to Fife Ness and south-west as far as the village of Kilrenny. The area selected for this study encompasses around 5,000 ha of land and takes in a range of familiar Fife birding sites (Figure 1). The area is predominantly arable farmland but there is mature deciduous woodland at Denburn Wood, Kilrenny, Kingsbarns, Boarhills, Wormiston and Balcomie, gardens in all of the small villages, golf courses at Fife Ness and Kingsbarns and scrub at 'The Patch', Kilminning and Boarhills. There are few wetlands of note though Boarhills pond is a rarely watched exception. There are extensive coastal grasslands along the coastal path from Fife Ness to Kilrenny. Bird ringing has historically taken place regularly during migration periods at 'The Patch', mainly through the efforts of Dr J.L.S. Cobb.

The Isle of May is a small rocky island (Figure 1) and its habitats are dominated by extensive areas of low maritime vegetation such as beds of Sea Campion. There are a few patches of low scrub, in the old walled lighthouse gardens and a now large patch, close to the Low Light. Other cover includes large nettle beds, stands of umbellifers and Henbane. Freshwater is scarce but there is the artificial loch (at Fluke Street) and there are small seasonal pools scattered in many areas, notably on the South Plateau. The cliff faces, gullies and the lighthouses and other buildings, can provide shelter for tired migrants

and in east winds the high west cliffs can be attractive to arboreal species. The scrub, mainly derived from plantings by the members of the bird observatory, is mainly associated with the four active Heligoland traps and there has been active ringing effort on the Isle of May since its establishment in 1934.

## Ornithological history

Fife Ness, the most easterly point of mainland Fife, has long had a reputation for bird migration. In her book *The Birds of Fife - an outline of their status and distribution* Anne-Marie Smout (1986) describes a spring day in 1985 when 15 Bluethroats and a wide range of spring migrants were present. Smout puts forward the theory that Fife Ness was 'discovered' in the late 1960s and early 1970s and the records bear this out. Certainly, birdwatchers would have known its significance, in terms of migration, before that but it seems fair to say that it does not have the early history to match the Isle of May. Smout goes on to mention the early pioneers of the site namely Dr J.L.S. Cobb, D.W. Oliver and R.W. Byrne.

The early 1980s saw a further upturn in records and a new set of younger observers contributing, particularly D.E. Dickson, G.J. Fichett, R. Shand and M. Ware. Around the late 1990s, the Fife Bird Report was revolutionised under the editorship of D.S. Fotheringham resulting in further increase of interest in the county and the resulting bird records from 'the Ness'.

The early 2000s was a stable, productive time at Fife Ness with a series of very good years. The site probably had 15 dedicated observers during these years as the Fife Bird Reports of 2002 to 2004 clearly show. The ultimate reward came in late October 2004 when Kilrenny Common, a little west of the Ness, hosted Britain's first Masked Shrike (Glass *et al.* 2005). There was, perhaps, a slight reduction in observer effort through the decade from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s but this has been somewhat reversed in recent years with several dedicated birdwatchers/rarity finders turning their attentions once more to the East Neuk sites.

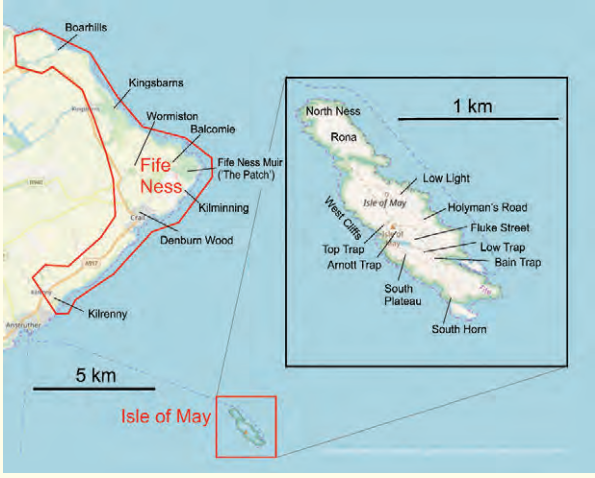


**Figure 1.** The location of the main Fife Ness sites and the Isle of May.

The Isle of May National Nature Reserve (NNR) is owned and managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and is located at the mouth of the Firth of Forth, 8 km south-east of Anstruther and is made up entirely of volcanic greenstone. It is 1.5 km long and 0.5 km wide with an area of 57 ha at high tide. It became a National Nature Reserve in 1956 and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is part of the Forth Islands Special Protection Area (SPA).

Historical information suggests that the island has been inhabited since at least the seventh century (Eggeling 1960) but it wasn't until the modern-day era that its ornithological importance was discovered. Late in the 19th century, it was Clarke who drew attention to the island in terms of studying bird migration and this inspired Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul to begin regular trips to the Isle of May. The 'good ladies' visited the island during the period 1907–33 (with the exception of 1914–18). In 1918, they published 'The Birds of the Isle of May: a migration study', in *Ibis*, the journal of the British Ornithologists Union (BOU). Here, they presented their then revolutionary theory that migration routes are affected by wind direction.

With this knowledge a greater interest was taken in the May. In 1934, Scotland's first bird observatory was set up on the island. Since then (except during World War II), bird migration has been studied on the island. The island has contributed five British and seven Scottish 'firsts' amongst an array of rare and

scarce birds. The 1950s in particular were a very productive decade for migration studies on the Isle of May. During this period, many of Scotland's top ornithologists of the time including M.F. Meiklejohn, J.H.B. Munro, A.D. Watson and W.J. Eggeling were regular visitors. Eggeling's book *The Isle of May,* was first published in 1960.

In more recent times, bird observatories have become popular once again and this combined with the refurbishment of the Low Light accommodation in 2013–14 and an enhanced boat service has consolidated an increase in coverage of the Isle of May. The combination of SNH wardens with strong birding skills, experienced groups at the observatory and enhanced guidelines for coverage has led to the Isle of May being probably the 'most covered' 57 ha in the UK.

## Methods/approach

Our approach to analysing the issue was to breakdown the occurrence patterns of a range of selected rare and scarce species and to compare these patterns with the species behavioural characteristics. Notably looking at habitat preference and species activity behaviour and thereby deriving a relative 'detectability score' of the species concerned.

### Species and records selection

Species were selected to represent a range of the most typical vagrant or scarce migrant species groups and to take account of those exhibiting a range of rarity 'value', habitat preference and behaviour type. Inevitably, this is not exhaustive but aimed to illustrate patterns of occurrence. Additionally, there was a general aim of trying to include species which could feasibly occur at both sites, given habitat preference, even if there were no recent records.

Only autumn records since 1990 are included in the analysis. This is mainly to avoid comparing vastly different levels of coverage between the sites which would have been prevalent before the 1990s (both sites have received moderate to high coverage since 1990) and to avoid the complexities of looking at occurrence over two seasons. Where relevant, comparisons to older records are made in the text.

### Approach to the analysis

A 'detectability' scoring system is used which combines species habitat preference with behaviour to create a matrix within which species can be placed. This score, compared with their frequency of occurrence at the study sites, allows an analysis of any patterns derived and provides the potential to propose reasons for inter-specific differences found. Table 1 provides the scoring system and Figure 2 shows the scoring matrix.

The scoring system is designed to give low scores to those species with a preference for habitats which are difficult to search (low detectability) with the score increasing with the ease of 'searchability' of the habitat (higher detectability). This ranges from one point for species which use extensive open

**Table 1.** Scoring descriptions.

| Score | Habitat preference (H) | Behaviour (B) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Very difficult to search - large open, homogeneous grasslands or crop fields, very extensive bare ground | Cryptic and usually not vocal |
| 2 | Difficult to search - tall marsh, reedbeds or dense thorny scrub | Skulking and seldom or not vocal |
| 3 | Searched with moderate effort - scattered or usually less dense scrub, woodland understorey, hedges, dense gardens | Low activity moderate to low vocalisations |
| 4 | Easy to search - mature trees, single or thinly scattered bushes or small orchards, gardens and parkland | Active forager or canopy gleaner and regularly vocal or; less active but often vocal |
| 5 | Easy to observe: High open perches or aerial | Highly active, open perching and/or highly vocal |

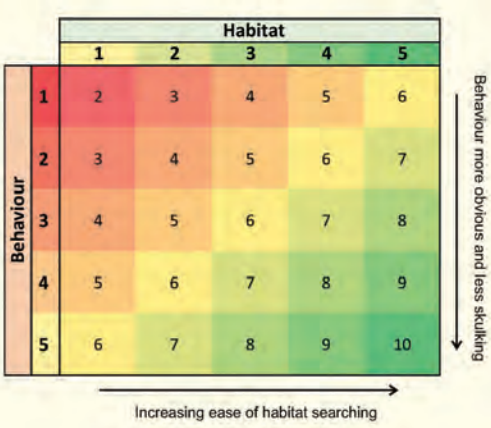


Figure 2. Detectability scoring matrix.

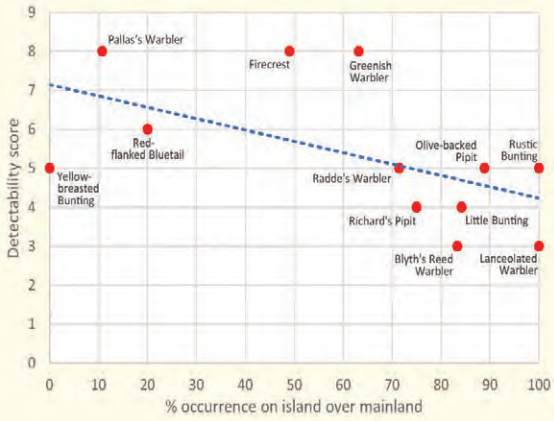


Figure 4. Occurrence pattern of selected species.

ground areas which can be hard to work, through scores of 3–4 for more open scrub, hedgerows and woodland types, to five points for those using open perches (such as fences, telegraph poles, lines and large rocks). Species behavioural traits are also included. Behavioural scores are low for cryptic, inactive, skulking and non-vocal species (low detectability) with higher scores for very active, vocal and perching species.

Adding the two scores together gives the overall detectability score. All scores and the frequency of occurrence at each site is shown in Table 2 and the species are ranked in order of detectability score. Species accounts then focus on a narrative assessment of the species occurrence and detectability.

## Results

The detectability scores and the frequency of occurrence at both sites is provided in Table 2. There is a clear ordination of species along lines of detectability. Those skulking or cryptic species of low, dense or large, open habitats such as Lanceolated Warbler, Olive-backed Pipit and Little Bunting have low scores. Those active, perching or gleaning species of more wooded, tall or deciduous scrub habitats such as Red-flanked Bluetail and Pallas's Warbler, have high scores.

The relative occurrence patterns show a strong ordination towards the Isle of May for all of those species with low detectability. The species with higher levels of occurrence on the mainland were those with detectability scores in the higher range.

Table 2. Detectability and occurrence of selected rarities at the Fife Ness and Isle of May study areas in autumn.

| | Species | Total records | Fife Ness (since 1990) | Isle of May (since 1990) | % of records on Island | Habitat preference (H) | Behaviour (B) | Detectability score (D) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lanceolated Warbler | 1 | 0 | 1 | 100 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | Blyth's Reed Warbler | 6 | 1 | 5 | 83 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 3 | Little Bunting | 19 | 3 | 16 | 84 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 4 | Richard's Pipit | 12 | 3 | 9 | 75 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 4 | Rustic Bunting | 11 | 0 | 11 | 100 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 6 | Olive-backed Pipit | 9 | 1 | 8 | 89 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 7 | Radde's Warbler | 7 | 2 | 5 | 71 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 8 | Yellow-breasted Bunting | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 9 | Red-flanked Bluetail | 5 | 4 | 1 | 20 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| 10 | Greenish Warbler | 19 | 7 | 12 | 63 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| 11 | Firecrest | 51 | 26 | 25 | 49 | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| 12 | Pallas's Warbler | 28 | 25 | 3 | 11 | 4 | 4 | 8 |

Exceptions do occur. Firecrest, Radde's and Greenish Warbler show a more even split of occurrence between the island and mainland, albeit with the island still hosting significantly more Greenish Warbler records.

Further examining the species occurrence patterns, Figure 4 illustrates that those species with a detectability score of 6 or above are most likely to occur more frequently on the mainland and those with a score of 5 or lower are more frequent on the island.

Only one species has occurred on the mainland since 1990 and has not occurred on the Isle of May in that period, Yellow-breasted Bunting. This species historically was more frequent on the island, however. Two species have occurred on the Isle of May since 1990 which have not occurred in mainland Fife; Lanceolated Warbler and Rustic Bunting. Individual species accounts are provided below.

### Firecrest

Generally, Firecrests are very rare on islands around Scotland, for example on Fair Isle with around 10 records, the species is more than twice as rare as Paddyfield Warbler and there are almost ten times as many Lanceolated Warbler records. Firecrest has a fairly southern distribution and does not breed widely in Scandinavia (restricted mainly to the southern parts) which may explain some of the bias away from the Northern Isles. Both sites in Fife can have good and poor years. Mainland Fife provides an example of this, with no records at Fife Ness between 1994 and 2001, then 2002 produced an unprecedented six records during 10–18 October. However, it should be noted that there may be some bias here caused by timing of observer coverage. Weather patterns in the past often prevented access for observatory visitors to the Isle of May in late October and early November, which can be a good period for the species.

**Plate 119.** Pallas's Warbler, Kilminning, Fife, 11 October 2019. © *John Anderson*

### Greenish Warbler

Today, Greenish Warbler is more of a scarcity than a rarity. Part of the reason for this is that its occurrence is fairly predictable (Lauder & Shaw 2004) as, with high pressure over Scandinavia in late August–early September, birds will arrive down the east coast. The Isle of May has twelve autumn records compared with nine at Fife Ness. This is perhaps the proportions one might expect and is similar to the historical records of Yellow-breasted Bunting which occurs (or used to occur) at the same time of year. An early autumn scarcity which occurs when there always has been good coverage on the May. The species likes sycamores, with plenty of them in 'The Patch', Balcomie and Kilminning. Once any recording area gets to three or four records of a fairly predictable rarity or scarcity the experienced rarity finders 'know' how to find it. Unlike Yellow-breasted Bunting, both recording areas can expect more.

### Pallas's Warbler

This species is considerably more regular on the Fife Ness headland (27 records) than it is on the Isle of May (nine records) and this is reflected by its detectability score. Due to its relative ease of detectability and its habit of actively feeding in carrier flocks of Goldcrests in open canopy areas or scrub, it is more likely to occur on the mainland. However, other factors may be at play in some years. Difficult access in poor weather, resulting in lower coverage on the Isle of May, especially in early November when many records occur elsewhere. The opposite is true of Fife Ness which has a social history element; giving a known reputation amongst birders for being good in late autumn falls. At this time observers habitually search sycamores looking for this species. It is then a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' compounded further by relative ease of access and searchability of the main woodland blocks.

Two questions remain; why are Pallas's Warblers generally so rare on small islands? (e.g. only one on Fair Isle since 2005) and why is the Pallas's Warbler pattern between Fife Ness and the Isle of May, reversed with Greenish Warbler? Rabøl (1969) first suggested that Pallas's Warbler are relatively rare further north in UK/Europe and the lack of occurrence on northern isles mirrors their breeding range through the action of reverse migration but that doesn't in itself explain the variation in occurrence at the local level of this study. While Greenish having a similar detectability scoring to Pallas's and clearly sharing a habitat preference show the opposite pattern. Again, the pattern and timing of observer coverage may hold the answers.

### Radde's Warbler

This medium-sized, stocky, warbler is a species which has a heavy bias towards islands with 74% of all Scottish records occurring there. Shetland alone has 41% of all records. The Isle of May remains one of the best sites with 12% of all records. A total of 9 individuals have been recorded on the island between 28 September and 22 October. Interestingly there are two distinct arrival periods with five records occurring in the first week of October with three later in the month between 16th–22 October. It is also noticeable that records appear to increase in frequency, with two in the 1960s (1962 and 1968), one in the 1980s (1982) and one in the 1990s (1991) yet five since the turn of the century. In contrast, the species remains a true rarity in Fife with just three records.

### Lanceolated Warbler

The species remains a true Northern Isles speciality as Shetland and particularly Fair Isle, lay claim to 84% of all records. Indeed, Fair Isle is on the verge of seeing its 100th record (98 individuals to date). This is in contrast to anywhere else in the UK. Outside of this area, Orkney has a handful (North Ronaldsay has five records) and the rest of Scotland has just three including an individual found in a toilet bowl in a ship in the Forties oilfield in October 1978 (Thorpe 2001). The other two records are both claimed by the Isle of May as an individual was photographed on 2 October 1987 whilst another was discovered on Rona, on 11 September 2014. No mainland sites have any records; *Locustella* warblers are notoriously difficult to find on mainland Britain. It is envisaged that the species status will alter very little and although it remains on the radar of birders on the Isle of May, a Fife record seems remote at best.

### Blyth's Reed Warbler

Blyth's Reed Warbler has seen a huge shift in status in the last decade as a combination of range expansion and improved identification criteria has seen this species become firmly fixed on the radar of rarity hunters. The shift in the levels of identification are best displayed in the species recent history as just over 20 years ago records were only accepted if the bird was processed in the hand but we are now at the level of accepting non-trapped individuals, some even without photographs. Despite this, its occurrence on islands remains high. The Northern Isles claiming over 88% of all Scottish records, elsewhere it remains a rare visitor. This island bias is shown within this study as the Isle of May has five records with just a single in mainland Fife. The Isle of May has seen an upturn in recent years, mirroring the national trend, with the first discovered dead in September 1991. As records continue to increase, Fife birders wait expectantly for a long overdue second.

### Red-flanked Bluetail

Outside of the Northern Isles, Fife is the best county for the species in Scotland with five records from mainland Fife and two from the Isle of May. In particular, Denburn Wood in Crail has three of the five mainland records. The first was discovered at Fife Ness in October 1976 but it was another twenty-seven years before the next in October 2003. Since then the number of national records has increased annually as the species range has continued to move west. As a result, Fife has produced three records in just six years. In contrast, the Isle of May has a poor track record for the species despite claiming only the 12th for the UK in October 1976. A long, barren spell ended with a second record, after a 43-year wait, on 4–6 October 2019. With only 20% of records on the Isle of May, habitat preference is probably a factor as well as the westward range expansion

allowing birds to travel a shorter distance which may suggest an ability to pick out the most suitable habitat upon arrival and make straight for the mainland.

### Olive-backed Pipit

The status of this species has changed significantly on a national level over the past decade as the number of records has increased rapidly since the late 2010s. This led to its removal as a national rarity by the BBRC in 2013. In Fife, the Isle of May has mirrored this national trend as the island now boasts eleven records in total including an impressive seven in the last five years (seen annually since 2015). It is becoming evident that increased observer coverage, and knowledge of the species has increased the number of individuals found on the island alongside the increasing national trend. There is only one mainland Fife record however: at Wormiston on 25 October 2005 (another was on the Isle of May during the period). This species can be notoriously difficult to pin down and its flighty nature may have resulted in a small number getting away from observers on the mainland. Furthermore, mainland Fife offers a lot of suitable habitat for such a species with such low detectability.

### Richard's Pipit

Richard's Pipit is a robust pipit and can often be located by its distinct loud call and large size; often arriving in mid-autumn and annual along the Scottish east coast. The Isle of May has produced nine autumn records since 1990 and a further two spring records. The autumn records all fall in the range 24 September to 25 October with a peak in the second week of October. In contrast, Fife Ness has produced only three records since 1990 including two together at Kilminning in 1997, the last being in 2000. The search patterns of birders may be leading to under recording in both areas as Fife Ness birders concentrate on trees and low scrub whilst Isle of May observers concentrate on bushes, gullies and trapping areas. It is possible that less-experienced birders may let fly-over records pass them by, a problem less attributed to the island, where birds will often pitch down in the close vicinity to allow further investigation. It may also be worth speculating that as coverage has increased on the island away from trapping areas, the number of records may start to increase. Mainland birders may find greater reward in walking large grass and stubble fields to increase their tally.

### Rustic Bunting

The contrast in records could not be any more skewed for any species as the Isle of May has produced 13 records involving 16 individuals with zero for mainland Fife. On the Isle of May, records are evenly spread out between the two seasons with autumn involving seven records (of nine birds) between 11 and 30 September. An upturn of records in the 1990s saw it dropped as a BBRC rarity in 2006. Since then, records showed a rapid decline through the 2000s and there were no further records for the Isle of May between the 1999 sightings and a spring record on 18 June 2016. The species was subsequently reinstated as a BBRC species in 2016. The lack of records in mainland Fife may centre around a number of factors including the bird's habits (can be flighty), observer coverage in the right areas (checking of field margins and weedy cover) and the vast amount of habitat available must all play a part.

### Little Bunting

Smout (1986) described the Little Bunting as a rare passage migrant to mainland Fife and that remains the same today. The species has become more regular elsewhere in Scotland, particularly in Shetland but is still essentially a rarity in mainland Fife. Following an individual at Kilminning on 23 September 2019, the previous record was ten years earlier. In complete contrast, the Isle of May boasts over 35 records and has followed the recent increasing national trend with ten individuals noted since 2010 including an impressive six in the record-breaking autumn of 2016. Habitat choice may herald a clue to the lack of recent Fife records as Little Bunting is a bird of field edge and low scrub, whilst mainland Fife birders are often looking mainly in trees and tall scrub during peak passage. Interestingly only two of the last seven Little Buntings on the Isle of May have been ringed or found by ringers, suggesting effort away from ringing areas is very important to be able to document this more skulking species. For mainland Fife, if we are to change the status of Little Bunting

at Fife Ness, we, the observers, may have to change our own search patterns.

### Yellow-breasted Bunting

This species has become extremely rare in the UK but it wasn't always thus. In the 1970s to early 1990s, it was almost 'expected' on Fair Isle at the end of August and through September. Sadly, it is now not even annual in the UK. The drastic decline has been shown to be due to illegal trapping in its far eastern range (Ijen 2015) and perhaps also as a result its western breeding range has significantly contracted. Outside the Northern Isles, Fife was the number one county for records in the past. Overall Fife Ness and the Isle of May account for 16 records with the island claiming 13 and three at Fife Ness. The paradox of Fife Ness having three Yellow-breasted Bunting records but still no Rustic Bunting records is obvious. This is despite their not dissimilar habitat preferences and the much more common status of Rustic elsewhere.

## Discussion

The simple answer to whether an 'island effect' exists is yes. We believe it is shown and explored quite effectively by this study and is reflected by statistics included in Campbell *et al.* (2010) and records from many other sites. In general, there is a greater detected occurrence of most rarities and scarcities on the study island than on the nearby mainland. Where there are exceptions to this for a few species, there is less extreme bias towards mainland records and this is in species which are strongly linked to habitats of greater prevalence on mainland sites.

The factors involved in generating island effect are undoubtedly complex but are likely to include ease and extent of searchable habitat, relative level of observer coverage and timing of that coverage and importantly, the behavioural dynamics of how birds migrate and choose where to arrive.

There is a clear pattern whereby species of a skulking nature and which prefer habitats which are difficult to search are significantly more common on the island. A large element of island effect may well relate to the generally lower density and area of vegetation to search. Typical, well-known migrant islands are relatively barren and birds concentrate in low, patchy habitats, but only rarely are they as dense as typical crop fields, large wetlands or extensive woodlands on the mainland and certainly never as extensive. This does not mean it is easy; islands still require long, hard and intensive search efforts but with rewards coming more frequently.

The density of observers on an island will also have a large role to play. A typical autumn day at Fife Ness may see observer density, at best, of perhaps 1 birder per 100 ha. The Isle of May on a typical autumn day may support 5–8 birders and hence see observer density of 10–20 times that of the mainland. There is also variation between the behaviour of observers. Rare bird finders are creatures of habit. However, for those who spend time on both islands and east coast headlands the habits are probably not the same. Small islands (Isle of May, Out Skerries

**Plate 120.** The Low Light bushes were planted by observatory volunteers and now form the best tall cover on the island, 26 September 2016. © *Alan W. Lauder*

**Plates 121–124 (top to bottom).** The ringing hut on the Isle of May (L–R: D. Steel, M. Newell) © *Bex Outram*. Mrs Flower ringing Woodock, Isle of May, 1954 © *Tom Weir.* Low Trap during construction *c.*1954. © *Nancy Gordon.* Observers turn to seawatching on a quieter day (L-R: V. Hastie, A.W. Lauder, C. Hatsell, R. Outram). © *David Steel*

etc) can be covered several times a day even by one observer. Intensive, near continual coverage of the whole island is the main technique in those circumstances. This is not practical on most headlands which usually have small numbers of regular observers perhaps with limited time. Cherry picking sites becomes inevitable, usually with one or two observers visiting and revisiting areas where they have been successful in the past. There are probably two reasons for this, apart from time constraints; the rarity hunter is very familiar with the resident birds in the area so even one unusual movement may indicate a migrant and enable ease of searching known sites. Secondly, most visits are unsuccessful in terms of finding rare birds but psychologically it is easier to 'keep at it' when the area reminds you of past successes. Bring all this together and it becomes obvious that huge parts of the majority of a headland may be rarely visited, if at all.

This differential in observer coverage was well illustrated by Pete Fraser, in his paper looking at how many rarities are missed by birdwatchers (Fraser, 1997). It strongly illustrates the large differences in estimated detection rates of rare birds between island sites and mainland sites.

Simultaneous observation of common migrant numbers between Fife Ness and the Isle of May in the early 2000s (J.L.S. Cobb & A.W. Lauder pers. obs.) show that most often, the Isle of May holds greater numbers of typical common migrants such as Redstart and Pied Flycatcher on any given day in autumn than the Fife Ness area. Taking the rarities in this study as a proxy for general migration we can deduce that the island is better than the mainland at attracting or holding birds or at least holds higher densities. This is the central premise of this study and of the so-called 'island effect'. The main question remaining being why this should be the case?

Any given point on the mainland is adjacent to further mainland habitats whereas, the space around an island is water. All birds migrating within a zone that is closer to the island than the mainland will be likely to concentrate onto the island. This is particularly so in low visibility. Then, with limited space, they are not

then able to disperse further until they regain flight resources. On the mainland, birds arrive across the broad front and so are dispersed along the length of the coast (but with perhaps some 'hotspots' around headlands or perhaps due to lights at night) and can easily disperse through large areas of habitat making searching and retention of birds difficult as previously mentioned. There are undoubtedly a range of other complex factors at play in determining migrant arrivals, particularly the impact of lighthouses and other lights, which are likely important under certain conditions but the effect of an island concentrating bird arrivals from a broad front into a narrow arrival point may well explain one of the most significant factors at play.

The issue of the presence of large areas of varied habitat available to birds as soon they make landfall on the mainland clearly contributes in part to the challenge of locating migrant birds. Most birders at mainland sites intuitively recognise this and almost certainly accept that the numbers of birds which are missed are likely to be quite high. "The fact that there are so many trees is an obvious reason why birds are more difficult to find...it's also the ease with which birds can move inland and away from the regular patches that birders cover. Birds are 'trapped' on islands until they make the effort to move on...". (I.J. Andrews pers. comm.). There is good logic in such comments and this certainly mirrors some of the findings of this study. "The factors affecting the numbers found are going to be complex and variable, but would include various aspects of the weather, tiredness of the birds and ease of finding them once they have arrived." (S.L. Rivers pers. comm.)

Most, but by no means all, modern day rarity hunters and those who study migration tend to spend some of the migration seasons on an island. The 'Scilly season' and more recently the number of observers who travel to Shetland in late September/early October show this. If, for example, you wish to find a River Warbler in the UK, you are likely to have to spend some of some autumns on an island. This trend over the last half century has probably deprived at least some headlands of the most productive rare bird finders at the prime time of year. More recently, however, this trend has, to some extent, been reversed. Experienced rarity finders who have spent decades of autumns on the Isles of Scilly or Shetland are bringing their skills and experience to their local headland once again. The best example of this is Spurn but it is by no means the only one. These changes in behaviour inevitability will bring changes in status of some rare and scare species on mainland UK. Mainland Fife's first Rustic Bunting may be just around the next hedge!

## Conclusions

We set about examining island effect and its role in rarity occurrence. We propose that island effect does exist as a phenomenon and that it is driven by a number of factors; the way migrant birds arrive and disperse, the way birds are concentrated and held on islands and the manner in which birders search for birds. However, it is evident from this study, that the effects are not the same across all species. In general terms, less detectable species are more likely to be encountered on islands while this effect is less obvious with more detectable, arboreal, species. Exceptions do occur and at least in part, are likely due to the pattern of bird occurrence and both the level and timing of observer coverage.

The mechanism for islands attracting birds and concentrating them is likely to be complex. It may in part be due to due to their position in relation to open sea and mainland and may affect different species in different ways. This will require further consideration to tease out the extent of its role in driving island effect but we are confident that the effect is substantial and this paper should be taken as a small step towards a better understanding of this.

In terms of improvements to recording migrant birds at both sites, the Isle of May would further benefit from more consistent whole-island coverage, with more effort to search plateaus and other areas away from traps and bushes. While dedicated Fife Ness observers would gain interesting new records by committing to the hard effort of regularly and consistently working field margins more. The return of a consistent ringing operation at Fife Ness would also bring benefits.

## Acknowledgements

This paper is made possible by the efforts of many observers; wardens, seabird workers, and 'low lighters' on the Isle of May and in particular we thank Ian Darling, Iain English and Mark Newell, two generations of observers at Fife Ness, in particular Chris and Anne-Marie Smout, Will Cresswell, Rab Shand and Dougie Dickson and the last six mainland Fife bird recorders: Ian Cumming, Dougie Dickson, Davy Ogilvie, Rab Shand, Malcolm Ware and Graham Sparshott.

Data is sourced from published records within Fife and Isle of May Bird Reports. Mapping is produced under an ArcGIS user license from ESRI.

Of great significance is the contribution of Jim Cobb to ringing and migration studies at Fife Ness. Without Jim's ringing efforts over 50 years on 'The Patch' and his development of vegetation there from a bare rock pile, there would be many fewer rare migrants located.

We thank our own inspirational co-observers on the May particularly the long servers: Julian, Mark and Jeremy Osborne, Keith Morton, Brian Minshull, Chris Rollie, John Swallow, Bex Outram and John Nadin. Our work has always been inspired by those who went before us!

We dedicate this paper to our dear friend, the late Jonathan M.A. Osborne.

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**Plate 125.** Black-winged Stilt, Foulden, Borders, 29 August 2019. © *Dennis Morrison*

# Black-winged Stilts in Scotland during 2019

C. HARTLEY, R. DREW & D. PARNABY

## Greenlaw Farm Pond, Foulden, 29 August 2019 - second record for Borders

Greenlaw Farm Pond is a shallow water body of less than a hectare in extent, located due south of a currently unoccupied farm steading on the edge of Foulden in the Borders. The pond is situated within a low-lying pastoral landscape some 3 km to the north of the River Tweed, which forms the boundary between Scotland and England. Access to the pond is via the farm steading, which is also the normal point from which to view the pond without disturbing any wildfowl and waders that may be present. The distance between this viewing point and the far side of the pond is no more than 180 m. Viewing around mid-day can be a problem on account of the position of the sun, which tends to back-light birds depending on their precise location around the pond.

**Plate 126.** Black-winged Stilt, Foulden, Borders, 29 August 2019. © *David Graham*

I arrived at Greenlaw Farm Pond soon after 10:35 hrs, several minutes after Richard, who had already moved carefully forward towards the pond following a tall hedge in order to photograph something. A quick scan of the pond started my pulse racing for, in addition to some 600 relatively common wildfowl, waders and gulls, a single Black-winged Stilt stood out from the rest as it fed along the muddy margins on the far side of the pond, making short darts in order to pick up insects. It was now clear what Richard was photographing. The identification was immediately obvious on account of the bird's extremely long legs (which enabled it to tower above a much more robustly built female Ruff), with a dull reddish tinge, its long, fine straight blackish bill, its dusky grey crown, hindneck and ear coverts, its solid dark brown (not black) mantle, scapulars and tertials (with the mantle slightly lighter than the wings) and its white tail, rump, belly, breast and throat.

When Richard returned back along the hedge, we discussed the age and sex of the bird. We were aware that a juvenile Black-winged Stint had been seen the previous day at Filey in North Yorkshire. Whilst the chances were high that this was the same bird, the lighting conditions were such that, despite the use of telescopes and Richard's photographs, we couldn't see any pale fringes to the feathers on the mantle, scapulars and tertials, nor could we make out a white trailing edge when the bird momentarily stretched its wings. We were therefore undecided as to whether this was an adult female in moult or a first-calendar-year bird.

During the 90 minutes or so that we were there, Richard put out news of the bird. This had attracted a few other birders by the time we left, whilst others were known to have visited during the remainder of the day. A request was put out for photographs in the hope of resolving the issue of age and sex. One came in that was conclusive. A shot of the stilt with open wings taken by Dennis Morrison (Plate 125) confirmed that this was indeed a first-calendar-year bird and almost certainly the same bird that had been seen at Filey the previous day.

A visit to Greenlaw Farm Pond early the next morning indicated that the bird had flown, leaving behind an adult male Ruddy Shelduck (presumed 'escape' although not bearing any rings), some 300 Greylag Geese, 40 Teal, two Ruffs and a Green Sandpiper, all of which had been present the previous day. There were no sightings elsewhere of the bird that day, although it was probably not far away, as it was almost certainly the bird which turned up at Druridge Pools and Cresswell Pond, Northumberland on 31 August, relocated to Idle Valley Nature Reserve, Nottinghamshire during 1–7 September and possibly to Berkshire from mid-September to early October (per BirdGuides) before presumably heading for its wintering grounds in southern Spain/North Africa, having made its passing acquaintance with Scotland.

We were unaware at the time, but this is the second record of an individual of this species in the Borders, the first being at Miller's Moss and Coldingham Moss on 26 May 1986. It is the 12th record for Scotland and only the fourth occurrence of an individual on autumn passage in Scotland.

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## Fair Isle, North Haven, 9 October 2019 - the first record for Fair Isle

Very strong southerly winds with some heavy spells of rain on 9 October didn't feel especially conducive for finding much (although the previous days had seen some reasonable arrivals of migrants) and indeed, the morning had been largely unproductive.

**Plate 127.** Black-winged Stilt, Fair Isle, 9 October 2019. © *Steve Arlow*

**Plate 128.** Black-winged Stilt, Fair Isle, 9 October 2019. *© Steve Arlow*

It was just after 14:00 hrs when Stewart Thomson of Quoy arrived at the Schoolhouse (the temporary home of FIBO whilst the Observatory is being rebuilt) with the startling opening line 'You'll have seen the stilt?'. A slight moment of blank staring followed before Stewart explained there was a Black-winged Stilt on the North Haven beach and we all rushed into the car (in my mind, I have a memory of Stewart being whirled around like a cartoon character as we ran past him, but I don't think that actually happened!). We picked up a few people, started putting the news out and in a couple of minutes were at the Haven, where there was indeed a Black-winged Stilt stood on the beach! Another good bird found by the ornithologically knowledgeable residents of Fair Isle.

A small crowd consisting of Observatory staff and volunteers, a few interested islanders and all the visiting birders gathered and were joined by one Shetland birder (who acted fast to get to Tingwall for the afternoon schedule and, in the 12 minutes the plane was on the runway, got a lift down to the Haven, ticked the stilt and got back in time to fly out again!) and Grace and Freyja (the Obs' kids) who were let out of school a wee bit early due to the importance of the situation!

The identification was straightforward, it was a very leggy wader, with a blackish mantle tinted with brown, and white underparts with dusky markings around the head. The eyes appeared dark, the fine bill was black and the legs were dull pink. In flight, it showed a white rump and white trailing edge to the wing (the latter feature confirming the age as a 1cy bird).

It was presumed to be newly arrived, as the Haven has been checked as part of census earlier that morning and other visitors had been there at around 12:20 hrs. It spent most of its time sat on the short, sandy beach of North Haven (the only sand on the Isle), occasionally stretching or looking around. It flew off for a while during mid afternoon, although it had returned to the beach at around 18:00 hrs, by which time the tide was up and the bird was occasionally feeding at the edge of the rocks, whilst struggling slightly in the wind and waves to keep its balance. There was no sign of the bird in the Haven, or any of the Isle's other wetland areas, the following day or subsequently.

A first for both Fair Isle and Shetland, it was in many ways unexpected, and it certainly looked somewhat out of place (especially arriving in October when birders' thoughts are generally very much more focussed on Siberian passerines). Perhaps it was not such an outrageous addition to the list as first thought though; an article in the *FIBO 2015 Annual Report* listed it as one of the four commonest BBRC species not on the Fair Isle List and stated 'perhaps [it] will follow Glossy Ibis and Great White Egret and make the journey north from a southern wetland' (we're still waiting for the seemingly more likely Blue-winged Teal and probably less likely Nutcracker and Penduline Tit though).

As an increasingly recorded breeding species in the UK (it ceased to be considered by the BBRC from the end of 2016 and the RBBP shows a total of six pairs nesting at five sites in southern England in 2017), it seems inevitable that the 11 Scottish records prior to this individual will be added to increasingly regularly over the coming years; indeed the Fair Isle bird was preceded by one in Argyll in April 2019. There was also a record at Foulden, Borders on 29 August 2019, however it seems likely that this and the Fair Isle individual may actually be the same bird. A search of the BirdGuides database shows Black-winged Stilt records from Filey (North Yorkshire) on 28 August, Foulden on 29 August, Northumberland on 31 August, Nottinghamshire on 1–7 September, Berkshire from 11 September to 8 October and Fair Isle on 9 October. All the sightings were of juveniles and the coincidence

of dates suggests that one wide-ranging bird may be responsible for this run of records (although there was also a juvenile in Somerset on 21–26 September and a fly-over reported in the West Midlands on the 29th). Images do not show any conclusive features to link all the sightings (although the pattern of pale tips to the coverts appears similar on the Fair Isle and Nottinghamshire bird at least), but nor are there any obvious differences.

It is also worth noting the relative rarity of autumn Black-winged Stilts in the UK (around 80% of UK records are found between April and June), with the previous September record listed on BirdGuides occurring in 2014* and the last October arrival being in 2012, making a new October arrival the day after another bird had disappeared seem even less likely. Scottish records are therefore somewhat unusual with four in spring, two in summer and now four in autumn (plus two undated records).

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*one reported at Cley on 3 September 2017 is not in the BB Scarce Migrants report for that year (*British Birds* 112: 457–458) so was presumably not accepted.

## Black-winged Stilt status in Scotland

*Black-winged Stilt breeds in small numbers in numerous separated wetlands within NW Europe and has recently become an annual breeder in England, presumably as a consequence of higher summer temperatures due to 'climate change'. However, the main part of its summer range is from Portugal east through the Mediterranean and southern and SE Europe and Turkey into SW and Central Russia. Other resident populations are found in NW Africa, Central & Southern Africa, the Middle East, India, Asia and most of Australasia. The European population is migratory and winters in southern Spain, and across Northern Africa.*

*A total of 529 accepted individuals were recorded in Britain to the end of 2016, with just ten records (11 birds) in Scotland. Due to the large increase in numbers in Britain in recent decades the species was no longer considered to be a BBRC description species from the end of 2016. Historically, Black-winged Stilt first bred in Britain in 1945, with three pairs in Nottinghamshire raising four young. Further attempts occurred in Cambridgeshire in 1983, Norfolk in 1987 and Cheshire in 1993 (Brown & Grice 2005). In recent years, breeding attempts have been annual in small numbers in southern Britain, though success has been limited in many cases through losses to ground predators. In 2017, 59 birds arrived in spring and six pairs nested with four pairs raising a total of 13 young; two nests were lost to predators and at least six other pairs formed but did not breed (Holling* et al. *2019).*

*The previous Scottish records are spread geographically from Dumfries & Galloway (pre-1684 & 17 October 1920), and north to Clyde (1850 & 5 October 1958), Borders (26 May 1986), the Isle of May (30 April to 4 May 2012), Argyll (16–18 April 2019) and the Outer Hebrides (two on South Uist on 5 July 1990) to NE Scotland (14 October to 3 November 1984), and Sutherland (20 & 27 April 1953).*

*The first two Scottish records do not have details of day or month when found, but the others are spread from April to October, with four in spring, two in summer and three in autumn. This differs from the pattern of records elsewhere in Britain where almost 80% of birds have been found from April to June.*

*The Foulden bird is only the 12th individual to be found in Scotland. Unusually, it was a first-winter bird, possibly a British-hatched bird, and was presumably the same bird seen at Filey Dams NR, Yorkshire on 28 August, and at Druridge Pools, Northumberland on 31 August. The majority (over 80%) of occurrences in Britain since 1950 have been from SW England, SE England and East Anglia, with fewer than 10% noted north of a line from the Mersey to the Humber.*

## References

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**Plate 129.** Collared Flycatcher, Isle of May, 8 September 2019. © *Jessie Bell*

# Collared Flycatcher, Isle of May, 8 September 2019 – the first island record

D.A. BELL

All year we had been looking forward to our visit to the Isle of May: our last had been in 2012, and we had not seen the big changes to the Low Light facilities or the new Scottish Natural Heritage Visitor Centre. The weather forecast for the coming week put a damper on our optimism as it suggested SW winds for the whole period. We had been on the island before in constant westerlies so didn't feel the prospect was good for many birds, but thought it would still be a good opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the island and be with good friends.

Sunday 8 September 2019 was a beautiful day on the island. The early autumn sunlight in almost cloudless skies, combined with light winds and good visibility to make everything feel warm and very pleasant. A few migrants appeared in the morning including Merlin, Pied Flycatcher, Meadow Pipit, Willow Warbler and Goldcrest. In the prevailing weather conditions, most birds were passing over the island or staying for no more than an a few hours before moving on. We thought the lush cover close to the Heligoland traps would prove to be attractive to hungry migrants so we targeted

these areas and tried to maintain a regular watch for new birds. Butterflies were abundant, mostly found around stands of flowering Ragwort with 400 Red Admirals and 300 Painted Ladies recorded that day.

In the early afternoon our party, Duncan and Jessie Bell, AJ 'Gus' and Trish Gramauskas and Richard Charles, made their way back to the Observatory for some light refreshment. All were optimistic as the light W 1 wind in the morning had changed to SE 1 and the forecast was for the wind to stay in that direction another two days. AJG returned later than the others having taken the Haven Road route back to the Observatory. He had seen a black and white flycatcher on the walls around the Main Light, albeit briefly, and noted it as being flighty and unsettled.

At 15:00 hrs, after a quick cuppa, AJG & DAB set off to try and relocate the bird and, on peering over the Top Trap garden wall, we noticed two birds, the flycatcher and a Garden Warbler, in bushes near the mouth of the Heligoland trap. Carefully we entered the garden and chivvied the two birds into the trap. They were soon making their way towards the catching box. The sight of a small black passerine covered with white flashes and markings on its head, wings and tail looked unusual and very exciting. Both birds were bagged and taken back to the Low Light for processing.

**Plate 130.** Collared Flycatcher, Isle of May, 8 September 2019. © *Jessie Bell*

**Plate 131.** Collared Flycatcher, Isle of May, 8 September 2019. © *Jessie Bell*

What had we just caught? It did not have the feel of a Pied! Must be a Collared or a Semi-collared? Was this a first for the Isle of May? It was in fresh plumage, and we consulted Lars Svensson's *'Identification Guide to European Passerines'* (Svensson 1992) which confirmed that adult black and white *Ficedula* flycatchers have a complete moult in summer and young birds a partial summer moult. It had unworn black wings and tail, its head, mantle and scapulars were in winter plumage, a mid-brown colour, but with the odd black feather. There was no sign of feather pins to suggest active body moult. We also examined the plate of an adult male Collared Flycatcher's wing on page 15 of *'Moult and Aging of European Passerines* (Jenni & Winkler 1994) and this proved to be very similar to the bird in the hand. We discounted Semi-collared due to the very large white forehead patch, the extent of white at the base of the primaries, and the extensively black tail with very narrow white outer edges to the outermost feathers.

We had just trapped a Collared Flycatcher - a first for the Isle of May!

We consulted many photographs published in volumes of *Birding World* and *British Birds* available in the Observatory library in an effort to find an adult in autumn plumage, but without success. Since leaving the island, we did find a record of the Sumburgh Head bird on Shetland on 21 September 2015 which looked to be in similar plumage.

## Description of the bird in the hand

Primaries and tail feathers fresh and unworn. No obvious active body moult. Primaries, primary coverts, alula, carpal coverts all black. Primaries P2–10 and secondaries S1–6, all with white bases projecting beyond primary coverts and greater coverts. Distance between longest primary covert and tip of white primary base 12.5mm. Tail black with broad rounded tips. Outer tail feathers R4–6 with white outer webs, most on R6 and least on R4. R5 and R6 had white patches (windows) on inner web. Tertials T7–T9 blackish grey, tips narrowly edged white. No shaft notch at base. T7 and T8 outer shafts white. Greater coverts 1–10, blackish grey but outer 3 black. Bill and legs black. Eye dark. Large white forehead patch (width not measured). Crown, lores, cheeks and ear coverts mid-brown, slightly paler than mantle, with a small number of black feathers mixed in. Nape colour greyish, concealing full white collar below which was obvious when feathers blown. Mantle and scapulars mid-brown. Upper rump grey/diffused white, more white below feather tips when feathers blown. Upper tail coverts greyish-brown tips but black below. Inner lesser coverts and median coverts grey-brown with some black admixed. Chin white, throat and upper breast with creamy brown wash. Belly and flanks white.

Once processed, we went to alert SNH staff in Fluke Street, eventually we found Bex Outram, with a party of day visitors, conducting a tour of the Main Light. The bird was photographed then released back into the Top Trap garden, and remained near the Lighthouse building until dark, showing well at times. It was not found the following day.

The wind had increased to SE 2–3 by 16:00 hrs and the next push of the top trap produced a first-winter Common Rosefinch. What a great day it had been on the Isle of May!

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**Plate 132.** Collared Flycatcher, Isle of May, 8 September 2019. © *Gus Gramauskas*

## Collared Flycatcher status in Scotland

*This is a Western Palearctic species with a breeding range from NE France, S Germany, and upland Italy eastwards through C & SE Europe, and the Swedish islands of Gotland & Oland, and Lithuania to Ukraine and European Russia to the SW Ural Mountains. The entire population is migratory, wintering in E & C Africa south from Lake Victoria/Tanzania to Zimbabwe and Mozambique.*

*There have been 48 records of Collared Flycatcher in Britain to the end of 2018, with 31 (65%) of those in Scotland. There were 16 in Scotland to the end of 2004 (details in Forrester & Andrews, 2007), forming 59% of the British total. The 15 records since then (71% of 2005–18 total) are:*

*2006: Shetland, adult male, Brow Marsh, Mainland, 9–10 May*
*2008: Orkney, female, North Ronaldsay, 24 May*
*2009: Fife, 2nd-year male, Denburn, Crail, 16–19 May*
*2010: Outer Hebrides, adult male, Garrynahine, Lewis, 1 June*
*2011: Fair Isle, 2nd-year male, 30 April to 5 May*
*Shetland, male, Manse, Foula, 14 May*
*2013: Shetland, 2nd-year male, Skaw, Whalsay, 10–16 May*
*Fair Isle, female, 9 June (DNA-confirmed)*
*Highland, 2nd-year male, Raffin, Stoer, 12 June*
*2014: Borders, adult male, St. Abb's Head, 28–30 April*
*Argyll, adult male, Carnan Mor, Tiree, 27 May*
*Fair Isle, 2nd-year male, 28–29 May*
*2015: Shetland, adult male, Sumburgh, Mainland, 21 September*
*2016: Fair Isle, adult female, 23 May*
*2018: Caithness, 2nd-year male, Camster, 9 May*

*The pattern of Scottish records shows a strong bias to spring with find dates between 28 April and 12 June, with just two in autumn - Sumburgh Head on 21 September 2015 and a first-winter on Fair Isle on 8 October 1986. The other British records have all been found between 28 April and 20 June with the exception of a first-year (DNA-confirmed) at Spurn, Yorkshire on 30 August to 1 September. Most records conform to the idea of being spring overshoots of the normal breeding range. The Isle of May record is unusual in that it falls outside previous record periods, with the 2015 Sumburgh record the closest in terms of plumage condition.*

*Geographically, the Scottish records show a strong bias to the Northern Isles with 11 on Shetland, seven on Fair Isle and four on Orkney. Elsewhere there are two from the Outer Hebrides (1992, 2010), and singles from Caithness (2018), Highland (2013), NE Scotland (1999), Angus & Dundee (1997), Fife (2009), Borders (2014), and Argyll (2014). The other records in Britain are mostly from southern England, with singles on the Isles of Scilly, Dorset, Sussex, Kent, Essex and Suffolk and four in Norfolk, plus two in Yorkshire and singles in Northumberland, Bardsey, Gwynedd, and Cumbria. There has been one record in Ireland - a female on Tory Island, Co. Donegal on 29 May 2012.*

## References

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**Plate 133.** Western Bonelli's Warbler, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 12 September 2019. © *Bruce Taylor*

# Western Bonelli's Warbler, Barra, 12–19 September 2019 – first record for the Outer Hebrides

M. OKSIEN

There are many dwellings on Barra that stand alone and have gardens that provide shelter and feeding amongst the more open moorland landscape. Aros Cottage has one of the more mature, if now somewhat overgrown, gardens. Its northern edge from the roadside to the rear of the garden has become a dense stand of shrubs interlaced with Ash, willows and brambles. To the rear and lower level there is a dense boggy thicket of willows and brambles with a few Rowan trees and a stand of Alder in the bog beyond. On the rise above this, there is a well-established stand of conifer trees. A small, mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland forms the southern boundary of the garden.

Since my arrival on the island on 6 September, I adopted a regular morning jaunt to bird the area from our accommodation at Croft 183 north to Northbay House at Morghan, sometimes on foot, other times by van. That morning, I opted for wheels and drove up to Loch na Obe. After checking the gardens and surrounds of Northbay House and Loch na Obe Cottage to little avail, I drove back to Aros.

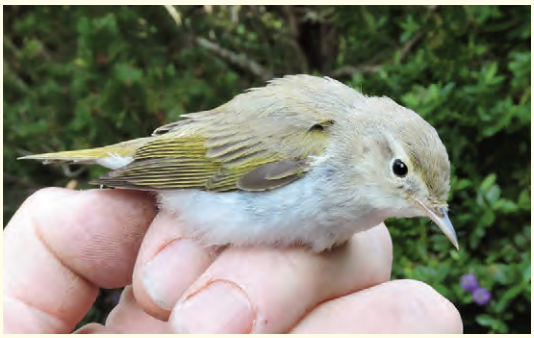
With the kind permission of the property owner the garden has been an annual ringing site for me over the past dozen or more years. Having cleared, strimmed and set up the net rides and pathways previously, I strolled leisurely around the northern edge and back of the garden noting the usual resident birds. On entering the back of the southern boundary woodland, I immediately became aware of an unfamiliar, agitated call of bird in the tops of the pines directly above me. Looking up, I could see the pale greyish white underparts of a small *Phylloscopus*-type warbler flitting around in the canopy.

Its agitation seemed to be a clear response to a Wheatear perched on the top of the adjacent pine. After a minute or two the bird flitted through the canopy into the tops of the nearby willows, and whilst the foliage was rather more dense there it allowed for brief side on views and I was able to discern a bright greenish-yellow wing panel and plain greyish upperparts and my suspicions turned immediately to that of Bonelli's warbler sp. Whilst I tried to gain a better vantage position, the bird disappeared from view.

I phoned Bruce Taylor and informed him of my sighting and he quickly arrived on site with his wife, Kathy. I explained the circumstances of the sighting and call whereupon Bruce used an app on his phone to play the calls of Western and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers, from which I was able to confirm what I had heard was indeed Western. Bruce had previous experience of Western Bonelli's Warbler vocalisations from time spent regularly in the mid-1990s in the Correze region of France where the species breeds. He instantly recognised the call when it next obliged: transcribing the call as being a disyllabic, upwardly inflected 'hoo-eee', stronger sounding than a Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff.

After a short while the bird reappeared from the north side of the garden, and with good views Bruce was able to confirm my earlier identification.

The bird was caught and ringed during a ringing visit on 15 September; during the processing a couple of feathers were dropped and collected. These were later analysed and also confirmed the identification to be that of Western Bonelli's Warbler.



**Plates 134–135.** Western Bonelli's Warbler, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 12 September 2019. © *Bruce Taylor*

## Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Professor Martin Collinson for kindly analysing the DNA extracted from the collected feathers: *"Thom's away so I get to do the reporting back on your Bonelli's Warbler from Balnabodach, Barra, 15/09/19 (our ref PBo20). As suspected its mtDNA matches Western Bonelli's P. bonelli (611/612 bp) and is very divergent from P. orientalis (>8% different, 50 bp) and all other taxa." Best wishes, Martin*

*Mark Oksien, Inverkeithing, Fife.*
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## Western Bonelli's Warbler status in Scotland

*Bonelli's Warbler was formerly considered to form a single (polytypic) species with Eastern & Western subspecies, but following closer studies (DNA, vocalisations, etc.) it was split, with each form elevated to full species status by the BOURC) in 1997. Western Bonelli's Warbler breeds in the Western Palearctic from northernmost NW Africa and the Iberian Peninsula eastwards through central Europe and the Mediterranean to Austria, Slovenia Croatia and Italy. It is entirely migratory and winters in sub-Saharan Africa from Senegal and Guinea eastwards into Chad. Eastern Bonelli's Warbler (now* P. orientalis*) has a breeding range extending from Bosnia & Herzogovina eastwards to the SW corner of the Black Sea and Turkey to northern Iraq and Iran. The entire population is migratory and winters from easternmost Chad through southern Sudan to the Red Sea.*

*There have been 151 accepted records of Western Bonelli's Warbler in Britain to the end of 2018, with 28 of these in Scotland:*

*2017: Borders, first-winter, St Abb's Head, 19–24 September*
*Fair Isle, first-winter, Lower Stoneybreck, 17 September*
*2015: Shetland, one, Burrafirth, Unst, 15–18 September*
*Shetland, first-winter, Sumburgh Head, Mainland, 14–18 September **

*2013: Shetland, first-winter, Marrister, Whalsay, 29 September to 18 October*
*Orkney, one, Burray, 23 September to 17 October*
*Shetland, first-winter, Virkie, Mainland, 8–19 September*
*2012: Fair Isle, one, Hjukni Geo, 17–18 September*
*Orkney, one, Holland House, North Ronaldsay, 1–30 July*
*2011: Shetland, first-winter, Houbie, Fetlar, 12 September*
*Shetland, first-winter, Gulberwick, Mainland, 9–11 August*
*2010: Shetland, one, Seafield, Lerwick, Mainland 11–15 October*
*presumed same, Helendale, Lerwick, 29 October to 1 November*
*2010: Shetland, first-winter, Creadyknowe, Whalsay, 9–15 September*
*2009: Shetland, first-winter, Ellister, Maywick, Mainland, 10–17 October*
*2008: Shetland, first-winter, Lunna, Vidlin, Mainland, 27 September*
*2006: Borders, first-winter, St Abb's Head, 24–26 September*
*Argyll, one, Balephuil, Tiree, 8 September*
*2005: Fair Isle, one, 10 September*

*Ten earlier records from 1961–2004 are listed in full in Forrester* et al. *2007.*

*There are a further 82 records of Bonelli's warbler sp. in Britain not assigned to either (Eastern/Western) species. These are birds not heard to call, or whose biometrics were not definitive. Fifteen of these were in Scotland, and in addition to those listed to the end of 2004 in BS3 (Forrester* et al. *2007) there have been two further undifferentiated records in Scotland:*

*2010: Orkney, first-year, North Ronaldsay, trapped & ringed, 10–11 September*
*2006: Shetland, first-winter, Baltasound, Unst, 13–18 October*

*There are only eight accepted records of Eastern Bonelli's Warbler in Britain to the end of 2018, with two of those in Scotland (1998 & 2014). It seems likely that the great majority of the undifferentiated records were also of the Western species.*

*The 'definite Western' Scottish records show a strong bias to the Northern Isles, (89%) with only the two at St Abb's Head (2006 & 2017) and the bird on Tiree in 2006 recorded away from there. The 15 undifferentiated BW records in Scotland show a very similar pattern (87%), with eight on Shetland, four on Orkney, and one on Fair Isle, plus other singles in NE Scotland in 1980 and on Islay, Argyll in 1976.*

*The 28 definite Scottish records show a strong peak in autumn (89%), with find dates from 9 August to 29 October, and just two in spring - North Ronaldsay, Orkney on 11–13 May 1994 and at Scatness, Mainland, Shetland on 13 May 2003, while the Orkney 2012 bird was found on 1 July. The 15 undifferentiated ones are similar with autumn find dates (80%) from 22 August to 13 October, and three records in spring from 17–25 May. There have been no further spring records since 2003. The spring records almost certainly relate to northbound migrants which have overshot the normal breeding areas. All birds in autumn which were aged (13/28 & 4/15) were first-year birds (except for an undifferentiated bird at Exnaboe, Mainland Shetland on 11–15 October 1992 which was aged as an adult). This strongly supports the idea that these are dispersing young birds which have travelled north instead of south - effectively 'reverse migrants', probably with a defective inbuilt compass.*

*Though many individuals are only seen on the day they were found, the majority are present for several days, with the longest stays being 30 days - the July bird on North Ronaldsay in 2012; 25 days - Burray, Orkney in 2013, and 20 days - Whalsay, Shetland in 2013.*

*Elsewhere in Britain the majority of Western Bonelli's Warbler records are in autumn (84%) between early August and early November, with a geographical spread towards the SW, especially Scilly, the south coast of England, and the well-watched counties of Norfolk and Yorkshire.*

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# Rufous-tailed Robin, Fetlar, 6 October 2019 – the second record for Shetland

A. TONGUE

Sunday 6 October 2019 was one of a succession of blowy easterly days during our autumn visit to Shetland. After a short stop on the mainland (during which time we chanced upon a Barred Warbler and an Olive-backed Pipit), John Sweeney, George White, Iain McDonald and I were four days into a week and a half's stay on Fetlar. Our spell on the island had so far produced an American Golden Plover, a Pallas's Warbler, some interesting redpolls and a regular supply of Yellow-browed Warblers. However, a spike in the arrival of regular passerine migrants that afternoon, as well as news of a Red-flanked Bluetail (mainland) and an Isabelline Wheatear (Out Skerries) elsewhere on Shetland gave us a strong feeling that something big could be lurking on Fetlar. Despite this, I paid little thought to a message earlier in the week from James Hanlon asking us to call him if we found anything so rare as a Siberian Blue Robin or Rufous-tailed Robin...

We were into the final hour of daylight and had returned to our base at Houbie. John said that he would go to check the Feal plantation, a small vegetated area containing a deciduous thicket next to a patch of conifers in the Feal Burn and I volunteered to stake out our garden at the Lodge, which contained several sycamores and bushes. For some reason - neither of us can quite recall why - the opposite happened, with John opting to visit the garden and me heading for the plantation instead. The plantation is a short walk from Fetlar's Interpretive Centre and on reaching it I stopped and scanned the deciduous thicket. A Yellow-browed Warbler was on the outside of the thicket with an apparently newly-arrived European Robin actively feeding not far away. I climbed over the barbed wire fence to head into the deciduous thicket itself with the hope that at least a Red-breasted Flycatcher would be sheltering inside. No birds were initially apparent once I was inside. I moved through the thicket. I then stopped, turned around and scanned the 'cover' I had just walked through.

My attention was caught by a small warm-toned chat with a blotchy/smoky breast pattern perched at about shoulder height. All that was mainly visible initially was the birds head and breast and my first thought was that it was a Thrush Nightingale. This bird appeared to be foraging in close association with the European Robin, which I thought was unusual given that Robins rarely tolerate other similar-sized birds around them and in retrospect I tentatively suspect it may have been the case that the Robin accommodated this bird given its superficial resemblance to a juvenile of that species. Both birds immediately descended to near-ground level and at a distance from me of approximately just 3 feet (0.9 m.). I was completely stunned by what I saw: the bird had a conspicuous pale eye-ring, a large black eye and before the eye both a hint of an eye-stripe and a very restricted supercilium (i.e. both before the eye only) and some hint of malar/lateral throat markings which were vaguely reminiscent of a Bluethroat, though lacking the complete eye-stripe, supercilium and central throat pattern of that species. The breast appeared blotchy at first, but on closer study was delicately scalloped as a result of smoky grey-brown edgings to the paler centres of the breast feathers. The remiges and tail stood out by being considerably warmer in tone than the mantle/scapulars, the latter being similar in tone to the European Robin. The remiges and tail were a warm chestnut-rufous, reminiscent of Hermit Thrush (the tail colour also reminiscent of Common or Thrush Nightingale).

I'd had extensive recent experience of Hermit Thrush and other *Catharus/Hylocichla* species (i.e. Grey-cheeked Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Veery and Wood Thrush) following visits to Ontario and Quebec (Canada) during

July–September 2017, September–December 2018 and May 2019. I'd also seen Grey-cheeked Thrush in the UK, one on Scilly in the early 1990s plus another I found on Fair Isle in 2013. The bird was clearly not a *Catharus*: it appeared fractionally smaller than the Robin, the bill was all-dark and fine and the tail was short. The primary projection also appeared relatively short. Also, unlike Hermit Thrush, the warm tones in the remiges and tail lacked the slight 'toffee' tone which I associate with Hermit Thrush when viewed at close range, being slightly warmer, i.e., slightly more red/rufous. Furthermore (and also eliminating Grey-cheeked Thrush and Wood Thrush), the bird lacked the usual blackish spotting on the underparts of that species and also lacked the black/dark markings in the primary coverts/tertials/primaries which I have noticed in Hermit Thrush when viewed at close range. The belly and flanks appeared dirty off-white. I would describe the general coloration of the bird as having the 'front half' similar to a Thrush Nightingale, though with considerably more pronounced scalloping on the breast, and the 'rear half' similar to a Hermit Thrush. The bird was clearly an Old World chat, Veery could be eliminated due to the ground colour of the breast lacking the buffy/yellow tones and the mantle/scapulars lacking the bright rufous tones of that species, as well as due to tail and wing length being shorter than in that species. The bird was clearly not a Nightingale, being proportionately shorter tailed, slightly too well-marked about the face and too scalloped on the breast for Thrush Nightingale in particular.

Behaviourally, the most striking feature was that the bird raised its tail to an angle of approximately 45° and lowered it with a 'shivering' action (the latter action reminiscent of a Common Redstart). At this moment I immediately suspected either Siberian Blue Robin or Rufous-tailed Robin, neither of which species I had prior experience. At that moment I tried to phone John but I had no signal in the plantation. The bird continued foraging and I carefully made my way slowly out of the plantation and to a higher elevation where I could get a phone signal. I have never birded with a camera (this situation is now likely to change!) and so I regret I was not able to capture an image of the bird. After telling John in rather heated tones that I had either a Siberian Blue Robin or Rufous-tailed Robin I was able to obtain an internet connection, allowing me to 'Google' both species. Siberian Blue Robin was clearly incorrect - images showed it to be rather more 'hefty', particularly in terms of the bill and the plumage was not right (especially given that my bird had noticeably warmer toned remiges and tail and a delicate smoky, scalloped breast pattern). I then looked at images of Rufous-tailed Robin - this was it. The legs of the bird were not observed (I was admittedly too distracted by the bird's plumage and tail raising/shivering) and the bird was not heard to call.

The duration of my observation of the bird was probably no more than three minutes. I waited above the plantation for John to arrive (not wanting to disturb the bird), which he did after approximately 10 minutes. I advised John to go and sit quietly on the edge of the deciduous thicket in the hope that the bird would reappear (the bird had seemed relatively confiding), while I checked the neighbouring conifer patch. To my eternal frustration there was no further sign of the bird. This species is well-known for its ability to sit motionless for extended periods but daylight was rapidly disappearing. At that moment I didn't know what to feel. I'd just been up close and personal with an absolute monster Sibe but no-one else had seen it. Part of me wished I'd never seen it. What if John had done the plantation and me the garden, as we'd originally planned? The atmosphere in our cottage that night was somewhat strained. We put the news out that night and several birders arrived the next day, but again, as has so far been the case with vagrants of this species in the UK, there was again no further sign. The stress of the whole episode was not exactly the antidote to the anxiety of submitting a PhD that I had hoped for on a birding trip!

The record was thankfully accepted by BBRC (despite my lack of photographic evidence and failure to note the leg colour/structure) as the fourth for Britain and Ireland and sixth for the Western Palearctic. Any advice as to what camera I should buy would be greatly appreciated!

*Andrew Tongue*
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**Plate 136.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Callernish, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 16 October 2019. © *Steve Duffield*

# Yellow-rumped Warbler, Callernish, North Uist, 15–16 October 2019 – the third Outer Hebrides record

B. RABBITTS

Callernish House, situated on a headland on the north coast of North Uist overlooking the island of Vallay and the Sound of Harris, is the home of Earl Granville and family. The house stands in extensive grounds planted with a wide variety of trees and plants. Over the years much of this area has become impenetrable. On the seaward side is a large walled garden, once cultivated, but now covered in Ground Elder. Also, within the garden are old fruit cages and many trees and shrubs including an extensive area of Rosa rugosa. Undoubtedly one of the most scenically blessed areas of North Uist (nearby, however, on the south side of Beinn Scolpaig the Western Isles Council have plans for a spaceport that if built will certainly not add to the charm of the area). With few birders resident on North Uist, the Callernish area, perhaps not surprisingly, is very under-watched. Records in previous years have included scarce visitors such as Richard's Pipit and Citrine Wagtail but no really outstanding rarity. However, this changed on 15 October 2019.

After birding at Loch Paible on 15th, I had to go to Tigharry to pick up a tyre that had been repaired. Normally from here I would have headed to the nearby Balranald RSPB Reserve, but was put off by the strong SSE wind. As luck would have it, I plumped for Callernish, but I was thinking that conditions would make it difficult for getting good views of passerines in the gardens. On arrival in the late morning I started my usual circuit and had recorded hardly anything of interest, apart from a few Redwings and redpolls, before I entered the walled garden, which offered a bit more shelter from the wind. The first birds I encountered were two resplendent Peacocks. As I was admiring these, I was surprised to hear a distinctive hard 'chick' call that immediately brought back memories of a Blackpoll Warbler in a Lochmaddy garden two years previously (*Scottish Birds* 38: 84–85). This bird just materialised in a tree in front of me as soon as I used my Audubon Bird Call device (just out of interest I was looking through some back issues of *BirdWatch* magazine recently when I

came across an identical scenario of a bird so attracted on the Isles of Scilly in October 2007). Anyway, back to the Callernish bird. I was certain that I was dealing with an American wood-warbler, but which one, and I was disappointed when there was no response to my Bird Call device. I soon got some brief views, however, and could see two buffy-white wing bars, a whitish throat, a noticeable white eye-ring, streaks on breast and flanks, and large white patches on the undersides of its tail. I grabbed my camera but the bird was extremely active and soon moved to the other end of the garden. On the whole it was not a brightly-plumaged bird, and the penny only dropped when, after several minutes, it returned to the original tree where I had first glimpsed it, and before flying off revealed its bright yellow rump. There was no phone coverage in the garden so I left to put the news out (my contact list is not as extensive as perhaps it should be and this led to some criticism later) and also to sort out access which was readily granted. After perhaps three-quarters of an hour Keith Dawson arrived, and a bit later Roger Auger, but despite spending some time searching the bird was not seen again that day.

There are differing views as to which English name to use for this bird. I initially circulated it as 'Yellow-rumped Warbler', but much later amended this to 'Myrtle Warbler', as after 45 years of being lumped, in 2011, the species had been split by IOC to become Myrtle Warbler *Setophaga coronata* and Audubon's Warbler *Setophaga auduboni* once more (Brelsford & Irwin 2009). However, the BOU's British List (which the SOC's Scottish List follows) retained the vernacular name Yellow-rumped Warbler rather than using the IOC's preference for Myrtle Warbler.

The following day was much better weather-wise with no wind. Steve Duffield was first on site and had obtained some photos before others arrived. The bird was seen in other parts of the garden but the assemblage of only seven birders had to wait several hours before the bird flew back into trees in the walled garden. Many photos were obtained and once again it was rarely still and rather hyperactive, occasionally flycatching from upper branches. It was windy again on the 17th and the bird was not seen despite a good search.

**Plate 137.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Callernish, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 16 October 2019. © *Brian Rabbitts*

Despite rather scant coverage of North Uist gardens, they have certainly come up trumps in recent years with both Blackpoll and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Also, perhaps worth mentioning again was a record of a White-throated Sparrow in 2016 and in the same garden as the Blackpoll Warbler that narrowly failed to make the grade with BBRC (7:3).

There have been two previous records of Yellow-rumped Warbler for the Outer Hebrides: the first in 1982 was the second record for Scotland and the other was found on South Uist by Andrew Stevenson in 1999, almost to the same day as the Callernish bird. The South Uist bird was a first-calendar-year male with noticeable yellow patches at sides of its breast.

***Brian Rabbitts, North Uist.***
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**Plate 138.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Callernish, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 16 October 2019. © *Steve Duffield*

**Plate 139.** Yellow-rumped Warbler, Callernish, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, 16 October 2019. © *Steve Duffield*

## Yellow-rumped Warbler status in Scotland

*This Nearctic species has variously been regarded as a single species 'Yellow-rumped Warbler' or, as currently, as two species, Yellow-rumped Warbler (or Myrtle Warbler) and its western counterpart Audubon's Warbler. Yellow-rumped Warbler breeds from Alaska SE through Canada to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, and in the USA from the Great Lakes to the northern Appalachian Mountains and New England. The entire population is migratory and winters from the NE of the USA south to SE USA and eastern Kansas, into eastern Central America and the Caribbean.*

*There have been 22 accepted records (21 birds) of Yellow-rumped Warbler in Britain to the end of 2018, with nine (eight birds) of these in Scotland:*

*1977: Fair Isle, male, 18 May*
*1982: Outer Hebrides, one, Newton Plantation, North Uist, 22–23 October*
*1995: Orkney, first-year, North Ronaldsay, 13 October*
*1999: Fair Isle, second-year male, 3–5 June*
*1999: Outer Hebrides, one, Grogarry, South Uist, 17 October*
*2003: Orkney one, Evie, Mainland, 31 October to 6 November*
*2014: Orkney, female, North Ronaldsay, 6 May*
*2014: Shetland, female, Haroldswick, Unst, 7–8 May (same as Orkney)*
*2014: Shetland, one, Virkie, Mainland, 29 September, presumed same, Grutness, Mainland, 30 September to 1 October*

*The geographic spread of the Scottish records is restricted to the Northern Isles and Outer Hebrides as would be expected for a Nearctic passerine vagrant, and closely matches the bias of records elsewhere in Britain, where all are from SW England or Wales except for two on the Isle of Man (1976 and 1985) and one in County Durham (2014). There are 17 records in Ireland (to the end of 2017), all from W and SW counties - 11 in Cork, four in Galway and singles from Clare and Kerry.*

*The Scottish records group into two distinct peaks for find dates, with four (three birds) in spring between 6 May and 3 June and five in autumn between 29 September and 31 October. This is quite similar to the situation elsewhere in Britain, where one was found on the Calf of Man, Isle of Man on 30 May 1985, and one on Skokholm, Pembrokeshire on 18 June 2017. There are two instances of over-wintering: a male present at Newton St Cyres, nr Exeter, Devon from 4 January to 10 February 1955 (1st British record), and a first-winter male at High Shincliffe, Co. Durham from 26 January to 16 February 2014. The autumn peak for non-Scottish records stretches from 4 October to 16 November, and all 17 Irish records have been found from 2 October to 2 November. The latter records perhaps suggest that birds arrive in autumn, with some remaining to overwinter (while others may filter into continental Europe and beyond?), and then birds move north again the following spring, rather than the records in spring (all) being birds overshooting their normal breeding areas in North America.*

*The majority of records have been seen for only one or two days, with only eleven with a stay of more than a week, with the longest being the first record in Devon in 1955 which was present for 38 days before it was found dead, and the Durham bird in 2014 which was seen for 22 days. The longest stay for a bird in Scotland is seven days.*

*The Callernish bird fits well within the previous patterns for autumn records.*

## Reference

**Brelsford, A. & Irwin, D.E. 2009.** Incipient speciation despite little assortative mating: the Yellow-rumped Warbler hybrid zone. *Evolution* 63: 3050–3060. (Proposed split to two species accepted by IOC in Nov 2011).

# Common Nighthawk, Portnacroish, 11 September 2019 – the first record for Argyll & second for Scotland

A. COOPER

I've been a birding since my childhood, for around 50 years now. In my early days, I used to do a bit of twitching, when stuff was reasonably close by, but these days, my birding is very much restricted to local patch and when we go away on holiday. I still get a buzz out of finding unusual birds on my local patch around Ambleside, though my best find to date has been an Iceland Gull. I must admit to checking the Rare Bird Alert website, most days. I always enjoy the latest uploaded photos and I like to see what is around, even though I never go chasing after anything. I particularly enjoy reading the finders accounts, but seemingly it is like the lottery, someone else always wins.

My partner, Jill, and I decided to spend a free week in Scotland doing some hill walking and cycling. On 11 September, we spent the day cycling some of the Caledonian Way. The night before had been very windy, with the tail end of Hurricane Dorian sweeping through overnight. It was still very windy when we set off south from Polanach, and when we reached Loch Creran at Dallachoilish, we were nearly blown off our bikes as the wind whistling up the loch. On the way back, we decided to head out on a quiet C road towards Port Appin.

As we approached Loch Laich, I looked across the salt marsh and immediately saw a bird being chased by a Hooded Crow. It was about 100 m away and was battling into a strong head wind. My first impression was of a small falcon, and I was thinking perhaps Merlin. I'd have been happy with that, as I hadn't seen one this year yet. By the time I had frantically taken my binoculars from my cycle pannier, the Hooded Crow had given up the chase. I couldn't quite believe what I was looking at, this was no Merlin. Definitely a nightjar sp., but equally definitely not a Nightjar. The most striking feature which I picked up straight away were the solid, elongated, oblong white wing bars situated about half way down the primaries. As the bird continued to battle the wind, heading away from me, it banked and I noticed the forked tail. I was stood routed to the spot, thinking... I'm looking at a Common Nighthawk. I'd seen them once before in Canada, and this was definitely what I was looking at. The bird continued into the wind and dropped out of sight around the corner. I had got a camera in my pannier, but it only had a wide-angle lens on, which meant, unfortunately I wasn't able to get any pics of the bird.

I had only recently changed mobile phone, and had uploaded the *Collins Field Guide* app onto it. I opened it up and went straight to Common Nighthawk, to confirm that was what I'd just been watching. Sadly, there was no phone signal, so I couldn't get the news out. I told Jill what I had just seen, but as a non-birder, she couldn't really share my elation and excitement. We pedalled up the road back to the car and drove till I got a phone signal. I phoned it in to RBA and when we got back to base, notified the county bird recorder. He did head up there the next day, but in the pouring rain, sadly didn't see the bird. To my knowledge, no one else connected with the bird, but the west coast of Scotland is a rather large and remote place for any bird to hide itself in. That night I celebrated with a few beers and thought, after 50 years birding, I've found my very own rarity. In all likelihood it won't happen again, but I'm just so happy that at least it happened the once.

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**Plate 140.** Brown Shrike, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 5 November 2019. © *Bruce Taylor*

# Brown Shrike, Barra, 3–5 November 2019 – the second Outer Hebrides record

B.A. TAYLOR

I love the late autumn on Barra. While September and October can sometimes be great for finding rare birds here, as the island's long list of megas affirms, there are times when the rarities don't arrive and it feels like there are more birders than birds. By the start of November though, things are slowing down, the peak migration period has passed, visiting birders have departed and we get a short period of more relaxed late autumn birding as the last pulses of migrants pass through before the winter storms begin their assault. My previous finds during this time have included Ring-necked Ducks, American Wigeon, American Golden Plover, Surf Scoter and Great White Egret. There are days when it feels like the next mega may be just around the corner. Sunday 3 November 2019 was one such day. A light easterly breeze had delivered some late migrants including a Yellow-browed Warbler and a couple of Waxwings and the day was feeling decidedly rare!

Arriving at Eoligarry mid-morning, I parked near the church and before I'd even shut the car door, I noticed a bird, perhaps 25 m away, drop down from a bush onto the ground before flying back up onto a branch. Raising my bins, it was quickly apparent that I was looking at a shrike with very brown upperparts and a long tail. Coincidentally, it was in exactly the same bush as my only previous Barra Red-backed Shrike a few years before. It's fair to say I panicked a bit, taking out my camera and phone and trying to use both at the same time. I succeeded in phoning the other two birders on the island, Ian Ricketts and my wife Kathy and told them to get to Eoligarry quickly, but my attempt at getting some record shots whilst using my phone was a total disaster and to make matters worse, I'd lost sight of the shrike whilst on the phone!

There was still no sign of the shrike as the three of us assembled at the churchyard. We edged closer to the clump I'd seen it in, but only a few thrushes flew out. We checked the 'American Redstart sycamores' behind the church but again drew a blank. We split up to search a wider area: Ian headed towards the 'Daurian Shrike garden', me towards the 'Kingbird garden', while Kathy remained by the church. Still nothing. Returning to the churchyard, I walked past the bushes where I'd first seen it, when it suddenly flew low past me, landing briefly on a fence before flying over the road into an isolated clump of conifers about 100 m away. Despite our best efforts over the next six hours, that was the last I saw of it that day. I put the news out that evening that I'd seen a 'shrike species, probably Red-backed though rarer species not eliminated'.

I returned to Eoligarry for dawn the next day before work and spent an hour searching for the shrike without success. At 13:30 hrs, Kathy and I set off for Eoligarry again. I wasn't optimistic about re-finding the shrike and was kicking myself for not getting a record shot. As we passed Morghan, three miles south of Eoligarry, we paused to have a quick look in a private garden that we have access to. I remember thinking as I parked how sweet it would be if the shrike had somehow found its way there. In the garden, Kathy checked the tiny orchard at the back and I did the trees at the front. Rounding a fuchsia hedge, I stopped in my tracks face to face with the shrike! Keeping my cool this time I hastily got a few shaky record shots before backing away and running round the house to drag Kathy over, seconds later. For a few minutes it showed well, actively feeding around the trees on the sheltered side of the garden. Ian arrived swiftly after my call, but like the previous day the bird had vanished. We had to be content with just one last glimpse of it exiting the garden half an hour later.

Up to this point I was still erring on the side of caution, leaning towards its being a Red-backed, but back home looking at my photos on the laptop I put my glasses on and studied it in detail. The rich brown, almost gingery-tinged upperparts looked okay for both Red-backed and Brown but the lack of any grey feathers favoured the latter. The barring on the upperparts was only really visible in good light and was far less coarse and extensive than I'd

**Plate 141.** Brown Shrike, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 4 November 2019. © *Bruce Taylor*

expect to see on Red-backed. The tail looked long and narrow, but could I see shorter outer tail feathers? Possibly, but I couldn't be 100% certain from my photos at this stage. Then I focused on the primary projection: it looked short, too short for Red-backed. And the tertials were dark centred; another pro-Brown Shrike feature. I posted my images on Twitter and the response came back overwhelmingly in favour of Brown Shrike.

After an early morning no-show, it was back in the same garden from late morning the next day and showed well on and off through the afternoon, often perched up high in the conifers on the sheltered side of the garden, but also hunting low down around clumps of brambles and shrubs, sometimes coming in very close to us. In flight the graduated tail was obvious. When perched the pale tips to the outer tail feathers were visible on the underside of the tail, reaching about two-thirds of the tail length.

Despite a thorough search on 6 November, it wasn't seen again, presumably having departed overnight. This is Barra's first record of Brown Shrike and the second for the Outer Hebrides, but with the species appearing increasingly frequently in Britain, we may not have too long to wait for the next one.

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**Plates 142–143.** Brown Shrike, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 5 November 2019. © *Bruce Taylor*

## Brown Shrike status in Scotland

*This Eastern Palearctic species breeds from Western Siberia east from 80°E to western Kamchatka and south through Mongolia, E & SE China, N & S Korea and Japan to northernmost Bhutan and Myanmar. It is almost entirely migratory, and winters from SE Pakistan, Central and South India eastwards to southernmost China, the SE coast of China and south through Malaysia to Indonesia east to Celebes and East Timor. Records in Britain and Europe are most likely to relate to the NW subspecies* Lanius c. cristatus *(but see the Irish record below).*

*There have been 25 accepted records of Brown Shrike in Britain to the end of 2018, with 14 of those in Scotland (and up to five more in 2019, subject to acceptance):*

*1985: Shetland, adult, Sumburgh, Mainland, 30 September to 2 October*
*2000: Fair Isle, first-year female, 21 October (trapped)*
*2004: Shetland, adult male, Skaw, Whalsay 19–24 September (trapped)*
*2008: Outer Hebrides, one, Claddach-vallay, North Uist, 18th and 23–24 November*
*2009: Shetland, first-year, Geosetter, Mainland, 11 October*
*2011: Argyll, first-year, Balephuil, Tiree, 22 October to 20 November*
*2013: Orkney, first-year, North Ronaldsay, 24–29 November*
*Shetland, first-year, Wester Quarff, Mainland, 27–30 September*
*NE Scotland, first-year, Kirkton of Slains, Collieston, 28–29 September*
*Fife, first-year, Balcomie, Fife Ness, 28 September*
*2016: Shetland, first-year, Bruray, Out Skerries, 27–30 September*
*Shetland, first-year, Aith, Mainland, 30 September*
*Orkney, first-year, Burness, Sanday, 5–6 October*
*Shetland, first-year, Kirkhouse Burn, Voe, Mainland, 6–8 October*
*2019: Shetland, adult, Out Skerries, 28 September*
*Fair Isle, first-year, 13 October*
*Shetland, adult female, Grutness, Mainland, 14–15 October*
*Orkney, first-year, found dead, North Ronaldsay, 15 October*
*Outer Hebrides, first-year, Eoligarry & Morghan, Barra, 3–5 November*

*The Scottish records are all in autumn, with find dates from 19 September to 24 November, and show a strong bias to the Northern Isles. The individuals in west Scotland probably made first landfall in the north before filtering down to where they were found. Interestingly the most recent records have occurred as multiple arrivals, and in 2019 this was also the case with five additional records in Scotland. There is an obvious increase in records in the last two decades, which probably reflects increased ID knowledge/awareness as well as increased vagrancy from the breeding areas.*

*Elsewhere in Britain, the pattern of records is largely similar, with the vast majority of birds found in autumn from 20 September to 7 November, but there are two spring records - a female at Sennen Cove, Cornwall on 20 May 2010, and one at Great Cowden, Yorkshire on 11 May 2019. There is one example of over-wintering, with a bird found at Staines, Surrey on 11 October 2009 lingering to 2 January 2010. Similarly, the single record in Ireland was an adult female at Berryfitter, Co. Kerry from 22 November to 10 December 1999, which was identified to the SE subspecies* L.c. lucionensis. *The British records outside Scotland are spread from SW England, and S and E England, with one on Scilly (2001, and another in 2019), four in Cornwall (2009, 2010, 2015 & 2018), three in Yorkshire (2008, 2010 & 2016 plus one in 2019) and singles in Surrey (2009), Hampshire (2013) and Norfolk (2018). Many of the English records may involve birds which have made landfall further north and continued south before being found, with the spring records possibly birds which have over-wintered before subsequent discovery.*

# SCOTTISH BIRD SIGHTINGS

## 1 January to 31 March 2020

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.

Wildfowl and waterbirds formed the bulk of the sightings, plus good numbers of Glaucous/Iceland Gulls and Waxwings were reported. A Tengmalm's Owl on Shetland was surprisingly not the 2019 bird. Then coronavirus Covid-19 interfered with normality and we entered unprecedented times of restricted movement.

**'Grey-bellied Brant':** two adult birds showing characteristics of this, as yet undefined, form were still at Nairn beach (M&N) from December to 9 January, with one present again near Culloden/Castle Stuart (High) from 20 February to 8 March. **Canada Goose (vagrant forms) Todd's** (*B.c. interior*): one was still on Tiree (Arg) to 20 March; singles were near Alford (NES) on 26th and 30 January; at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) on 15 February, and on Foula (Shet) on 10 March. **Richardson's Cackling Goose** (*B.h. hutchinsii*): at least one was still on Islay (Arg) to 16 March; at least two were still at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) to 20 March; singles were on Oronsay (Arg) on 12 January; at Loch of Skene (NES) on 16–19th and 30 January, and 2nd and 10 February; at Howe of Alford (NES) from 19–30 January; at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) from 27 January to 1 February; at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH) from 26 February to 14 March, and near Culloden/Castle Stuart (High) on 6 March. **Snow Goose:** adult white-morphs were still on Shapinsay (Ork) from 2019 to 16 January, with two on 7 February, with one of these on Westray (Ork) on 13–16 January; at least one at Knockintorran/Balemore/Balranald/Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 2019 to 27 March; (a presumed escapee) near New Cumnock (Ayrs) from 2019 to 18 March; one was at Moyness, near Auldearn (High) on 4 January, and two near Wick (Caith) on 21 March. **Taiga Bean Goose:** the regular over-wintering flock at Slamannan (Clyde/UF) was still present from 2019, with higher counts of 148 on 1 January, 150 on 2nd, 144 on 18 January, and 130 on 2 February; two were at Rattray Head (NES) on 4 January. **Tundra Bean Goose:** singles were at Torness (Loth) from 19 January to 4 March; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 22 January, with two there on 17 February; at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 24 January, with presumed same at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) from 31 January to 7 February; at Loch of Skene (NES) on 28 January; at Birsay Links, Mainland (Ork) on 7 February, and one was at Blairduff, near Kemnay (NES) on 28 February. **Unidentified bean goose:** five flew past Musselburgh (Loth) on 12 January, and a probable Tundra Bean Goose flew over Castletown (Caith) on 17 March. **Bewick's Swan:** two were still at Loch of Clumlie, Boddam, Mainland (Shet) to 16 February, and one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 13–18 January. **Egyptian Goose:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 4–10 January. **Ruddy Shelduck:** one was still at Cramond/Dalmeny (Loth) from 2019 to 9 February; one still at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) to 18 March; two were at Clochkeil, near Machrihanish (Arg) on 9–26 January, with presumed same near Campbeltown (Arg) on 5 February.

**American Wigeon:** single drakes were still at Loch Insh (High) to 7 January; at Loch Watten (Caith) to 19 January; at Loch Eye (High) to 15 March, and at Fedderate Reservoir (NES) to 21 March. One was at Clachnaharry, near Inverness (High) on 5 February. **Black Duck:** the regular drake at Strontian (High) was present to 13 March at least. **Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were still on North Ronaldsay (Ork) throughout the period; on the River Wick, at Wick (Caith) to 3 January, and at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) to 17 March, with two there on 25 March. Singles were at Murton GPs (Angus) on 7–27 January; at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) from 9 January to 31 March; at Coot Loch, Benbecula (OH) from 18 January to 5 February; at Ardmhor, Barra (OH) from 26 January to 20 February; on the Eden Estuary, Guardbridge (Fife) from 30 January to 2 February; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 22 February; at Rescobie Loch (A&D) on 2 March, and at Loch of

Isbister, Mainland (Ork) on 6 March. **Ring-necked Duck:** a juvenile was still at Loch na Doirlin/Loch Tangusdale, Barra (OH) from 2019 to 19 March, and two drakes still at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree (Arg) to 23 March. Single adult drakes were at Mugdock Loch, Milngavie (Clyde) from 2 January to 17 February; at North Couston Quarry, Torphichen (Loth) on 5–11 January; at Loch Ospidale, near Dornoch (High) on 9 January, and at Linlithgow Loch (Loth) on 9 March. **Lesser Scaup:** a drake was at Loch Ryan, near Bishopburn/Stranraer (D&G) from 3 February to 20 March. **Steller's Eider:** a juvenile drake was still on Papa Westray (Ork) from 2019 throughout the period. **King Eider:** the regular drake was again off Nairn (M&N) from 2019 to 21 March, and one at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) from 9 January to 9 February. **Surf Scoter:** an adult drake was off Musselburgh/Fisherrow/Joppa (Loth) from 2019 throughout the period, with two there on 25 February and 22 March; a drake was again off Quanterness, Mainland (Ork) on 2 February; a first-winter female at Glenside, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 20 February; a drake off Embo (High) from 28 February to 17 March, with two there (one drake) on 18 March, three (two drakes) on 19–20th, five (two adult drakes, immature drake & two females) on 21st, six on 22nd, and three still on 26th, two on 29th and one on 31 March, and three drakes were again in Sound of Taransay, Harris on 21 March. **American White-winged Scoter:** the returning drake was off Fisherrow/Musselburgh (Loth) from 2019 to at least ther end of March. **Black Scoter:** a drake was again in Lunan Bay (A&D) from 2 January to 6 March.

**White-billed Diver:** one flew past Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 4 January; one flew past Mull Head, Papa Westray (Ork) on 25 January; singles were off Hunda, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 29 January; in South Nesting Bay, Mainland (Shet) on 2 February and 9–20 March; off South Wick/North Wick, Papa Westray from 9 February to 5 March; two in Scapa Flow (Ork) on 9 February; off Eoligarry, Barra (OH) on 20 February; one flew past Brora (High) on 19 March; one was off Portsoy (NES) on 21 March, with two on 22nd, and four off Cullen (M&N) on 22 March. **Pied-billed Grebe:** the returning bird was again at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) from 7 February to 20 March at least. **Spoonbill:** an adult flew south over Dempster Place, Dunfermline (Fife) on 30 March. **Bittern:** one was at Castle Loch NR/Mill Loch, Lochmaben (D&G) from 2019 to at least 24 February. **Great White Egret:** singles were at still at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) from 2019 to 6 March; at Foss, Loch Tummel (P&K) again on 17 January; near Vane Farm, Loch Leven (P&K) on 23 January; at Forfar Loch (A&D) from 24 January to 19 March, with two there on 25–28 January; at Castle Loch NR, Lochmaben (D&G) from 29 January to 18 March; at Auchenreoch Loch (D&G) from 12 February to 14 March; at Gordon (Bord) on 12 February, plus two were reported at Nigg Bay (High) and one nearby at Shandwick Mains (High) on 14 February. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was near Spey Bay/Nether Dallachy (M&N) on 3 March. **Crane:** two were present at Clousta, Mainland (Shet) from 2019 to 3 January; three flew east over Mersehead RSPB Reserve (D&G) on 22 March; three flew over Troup Head (NES) on 22 March, with presumed same briefly at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) that evening; one flew over Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 26 March. **Grey Phalarope:** singles were off Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 17 January, and one off Troup Head (NES) on 17 February.

**Mediterranean Gull:** remains much under-reported away from the Firth of Forth. **Ring-billed Gull:** an adult was at Strathclyde CP, near Motherwell (Clyde) on 4–29 January, and one at North Bay, South Uist (OH) on 11 January. **Glaucous Gull:** large numbers in January with about 300 noted, nearly 200 of those on Shetland alone, but others noted south to Lothian and Argyll, mostly ones and twos, but higher counts of 67 at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 25th and 56 there on 26th, and 12 flew past Lamba Ness, Unst on 24 January. In February, over 130 birds noted, from Shetland to

**Plate 144.** Mediterranean Gull, Buckhaven, Fife, 27 February 2020. © *John Nadin*

Lothian and Ayrshire, mostly ones and twos, but with eight at Skaw, Unst, (SHet) on 1st, six at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 1st, with five there on 18th, and six at Rubha Arnal/Balemore, North Uist (OH) on 13 February. About 100 individuals reported in March from Shetland to Lothian and Argyll, mostly ones and twos, but there were seven at Baleshare, North Uist on 12 March, with six there on 6th, and six at Rubha Arnal on 13th, with five there on 6 March. **Iceland Gull:** about 90 reported in January, predominantly in the north and west, but as far south as Lothian and Argyll, mostly ones and twos, but with three juveniles at Caldback, Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 10th, three at Loch Portree, Skye (High) on 30th, and three adults at Tiumpan Head, Lewis (OH) on 31 January. At least 90 in February, from Shetland to NE Scotland and Ayrshire, mostly ones and twos, but four at Rubha Arnal/Balemore, North Uist (OH) on 13th, three at Loch Portree on 2nd, and three juveniles at Uyeasound, Unst on 9 February. In March, over 70 were noted from Shetland to Borders and D&G, mostly ones and two, but with four again at Rubha Arnal on 13th, four at Bayfield, Portree, Skye on 19th, and three there on 18th, and three at Greens, near New Deer (NES) on 29 March. **'Kumlien's Gull':** a sub-adult was at Stornoway Harbour, Lewis (OH) on 7 March. **Yellow-legged Gull:** an adult was still at Loch Pooltiel, Skye (High) from 2019 to 22 February; a 2nd-winter was at Troon/Barassie (Ayrs) on 22 January, and a near-adult was at Bridgeton, Glasgow (Clyde) from 4 January to 5 February at least.

**Snowy Owl:** one was again at Ronas Hill, Mainland (Shet) on 25 February and 22 March; one on Eday (Ork) again from end February to 9 March. **Tengmalm's Owl:** amazingly one found at Kergord, Mainland (Shet) on 11 February proved to be a different individual (trapped 14th) to the 2019 Shetland bird. It was mostly seen at Lyndsay Lee Plantation to 23 February and 15–23 March, but also roosted at Lea Gardens, Tresta, Mainland (Shet) on 2–4th, 10–11th and 13th & 15 March (favoured site of 2019 bird). **Hoopoe:** Singles were at Rosehearty (NES) on 2 January; at Clynder, near Garelochhead (Arg) from 14 January to 23 February. **Gyrfalcon:** a white-morph bird was again at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 4 January, and a grey-morph bird noted at Birsay Moors/Rennibister, Mainland (Ork) on 22–23 March (present 13+ days).

**Great Grey Shrike:** one was still at Backwater Reservoir (A&D) from 2019 to 9 March; and singles were at Broubster (Caith) on 9 January, 25 February and 12 March; near Clatteringshaws Loch (D&G) on 5 February; at Rhynie (NES) on 13 February and 10 March; at Muir of Dinnet NNR (NES) on 14 February, and near Brawlbin/Loch Calder (Caith) on 14–20 March. **Waxwing:** large numbers still present from 2019: in January, up to 2,600 birds were noted, from Shetland to Lothian and Ayrshire, with higher counts of 100 at Montgomery Street, Edinburgh (Loth) on 4th, 250 at Parkhead, Glasgow (Clyde) on 5th, 180 at London Road, Glasgow on 10th, 100 in Dunblane (UF) on 14th and 350 at Clarence Gardens, Glasgow on 26 January. In February, reports reduced to about 1,170 birds from (Balintore) Highland to Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway, with higher counts of 127 at Riverside, Stirling (UF) on 4th, 100 Fountain Park, Edinburgh on 13th, and 100 at Vermont Street, Glasgow on 17 February. In March, numbers reduced further to about 850, noted from (Tain) Highland to Lothian and Ayrshire, with higher counts of 150 at North Anderson Drive, Aberdeen (NES) on 7th, 100 at Rosehill Drive, Aberdeen on 22nd, and 100 at Cults, Aberdeen on 29 March. **Shore Lark:** one was still at Dornoch Point (High) from 2019 to 11 January.

**'Black-bellied Dipper':** the colour-ringed female was still at the Kinness Burn, St Andrews (Fife) from 2019 to 17 January. **Water Pipit:** singles were still at Dornoch Point (High) from 2019 to 11 January; at Seamill (Ayrs) to 13 February, and at East Beach, Dunbar (Loth) to 14 March. There were singles at Skateraw (Loth) on 17th and 25 January; at Scoughall (Loth) on 6–12 February; at Caol, near Fort William (High) on 2 March; at Largo Bay (Fife) on 3 March, and at White Sands Bay (Loth) on 15 March. **Two-barred Crossbill:** four were still at Langass Wood, North Uist (OH) from 2019 to 15 January, and a male was at Rumster, near Lybster (High) on 10 January. **Lapland Bunting:** one was at Knockintorran, North Uist (OH) on 9 January; eight at The Shunan/Loch Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 16 February; and singles at Blackrock, Islay (Arg) on 9 March; at Stoer (High) on 22nd; at Ardvule Point, South Uist (OH) on 25th; at Forvie NNR (NES) on 26th, and at Harrapool, Skye (High) on 30 March. **Snow Bunting:** the high numbers from the major influx of autumn 2019 were still in evidence, with at least 1,050 in January, from Shetland to Lothian and Argyll, with higher counts of 300 at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 3rd, 120 at Dornoch (High) on 4th, with 180 there on 18th, 130 on 19th, and 167 on 22nd. In February, over 750 were reported from Shetland to Lothian and Ayrshire, with higher counts of 120 at Dornoch on 15th, and 300 on Hoy (Ork) on 18th. In March, about 500 reported from Shetland to Lothian and Ayrshire, with higher counts of 170 at Balranald RSPB Reserve on 5th, 50 nearby at Baleshare, North Uist on 8th, 33 at Evie, Mainland (Ork) on 9th, 60 at Baleshare on 17th and 50 still there on 28 March.

# Advice to contributors

**There is a basic division in *Scottish Birds* between papers and short notes that are peer-reviewed and articles, news and Club items that are not. This split in content is differentiated by fonts used and paper colour.**

The first part accepts manuscripts on the status, distribution and populations of birds in Scotland and, particularly, changes in these over time. Write-ups of census work find a natural home in this section, as do the culmination of research topics and updates to information in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Original work and observations are encouraged, but summary papers will be considered and key-note papers of a more general nature may occasionally be commissioned. Papers should be fully referenced as in any scientific work, and our house style should be followed. Articles of less than 700 words are generally considered as Short Notes, but are otherwise in the same format.

Authors should bear in mind that only a small proportion of the *Scottish Birds* readership are scientists and should aim to present their material concisely, interestingly and clearly. Unfamiliar technical terms and symbols should be avoided wherever possible and, if deemed essential, should be explained. Supporting statistics should be kept to a minimum. All papers and short notes are accepted on the understanding that they have not been offered for publication elsewhere and that they will be subject to editing. Papers will be acknowledged on receipt and are normally reviewed by at least two members of the editorial panel and, in most cases also by an independent referee. They will normally be published in order of acceptance of fully revised manuscripts.

*Scottish Birds* publishes obituaries of Club members and others who have contributed to Scottish ornithology. These are organised through Waterston House, where the Club Administrator will liaise with contributors. Book reviews are organised through the Club Librarian.

The second part of *Scottish Birds* welcomes informal as well as more serious contributions about any aspect of birds and their habitats in Scotland. It is not peer-reviewed, has minimal editing and contributions can be descriptive, anecdotal, controversial, humorous or quirky. They can report on surveys, express opinions, describe birds and places, look back into history, speculate as to the future and can represent organisations or be the work of private individuals. The documentation of rare and scarce birds in Scotland, plus a wide range of identification, site and species related information is lavishly illustrated by high quality colour photographs. We welcome photographs, maps, cartoons, and will accept basic graphs and tables when relevant. Meeting reports or field trip accounts are all welcome, but our main aim is to focus on Scottish birds in Scotland or abroad. We will occasionally include articles from other parts of the world and sometimes about other wildlife. In terms of length, we accept anything from short notes up to articles of c. 2,000 words. There are no strict guidelines as to format, but we would encourage contributors to follow our house style shown in the excerpts from a recent issue available on the *Scottish Birds* page of the SOC website (under About Us/Publications).

Please submit articles! We very much wish to encourage unsolicited contributions to this part of *Scottish Birds*. The editors spend much time requesting articles - a task that would be far less onerous if they are submitted freely from members and other readers. We wish to make it as easy as possible for contributors to send us material that reflects the enormous range of news, work and opinion relevant to Scotland's birds.

## Text, image and graphics formats

Contributions should preferably be submitted in electronic format either on disk or by email to mail@the-soc.org.uk, stating the type of word processing package used if not Microsoft Word or a generic 'rich text format'. Only short articles and letters can be accepted in printed or hand written form. No fees are paid.

Tables, maps and diagrams should be designed to fit either a single column or the full page width. Table and photograph captions should be self explanatory and should be able to stand alone from the text. Please include all captions after the text. For photographs please supply the locality and month/year taken, together with the name of the photographer.

Maps should preferably be provided in pdf format or as a high-resolution jpg/tiff file. Maps may be redrawn to maintain house style in which case the data used in their compilation may be requested. Charts should be provided with their accompanying data within a stand-alone spreadsheet so that house style can be applied. Photographs should be supplied as high-resolution jpg/tiff files with minimal or no cropping or enhancement. Please note that the submission of photographs assumes that permission is given for the Club to publish them in the journal in printed and electronic formats.

Reference should be made to past issues and *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) for guidance on style of presentation, use of capitals, form of references, etc. Please follow the BOU's latest *British List* for species names (their 'British vernacular name') and species order.

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# PhotoSPOT

**Plate 145.** Staying in Crail, I resolved to use my daily 'lockdown exercise' to get down to Fife Ness for some coast and sea photography. An option which greatly eased the frustration of confinement at migration time.

I started taking these outings to coincide with high tide, for scanning the roughly 200 strong wader flock, mostly Redshanks and Turnstones, which were coming to roost on the offshore rocks. I was ever hopeful that something unusual would turn up.

As more visits were made, I became aware that I was not the only interested observer of the flock. Around high tide, a Peregrine would alight close to the top of the radio tower, which is situated at the top of the headland and overlooks the rocks, and use it to launch attacks on the flock.

One day, as I was about to leave for home, the falcon arrived and I decided to try a few photographs of it perched on the tower. As I did so the bird took off and headed straight for the wader flock flying over my head as it went. From the wild burst of shots taken of the bird's launch most were blurred but to my great relief a few were sharp enough to edit.

On that particular occasion, the Peregrine was unsuccessful; the waders scattering wildly over the sea in what seemed to be a well-rehearsed escape routine. Subsequent finds of feathers at the bottom of the tower however revealed that their routine wasn't always successful.

**Equipment used:**
Canon 1DX mk2, 500 mm lens with 1.4x converter, Manual, ISO 250, 1/2000 sec, f5.6.

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