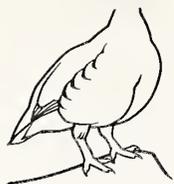


TOS 104



# British Birds

July 2013 • Vol. 106 • 363–426

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Scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2004–07:  
non-passerines

Flight heights of Marsh Harriers



# British Birds

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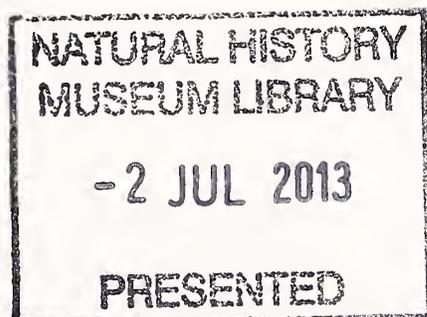
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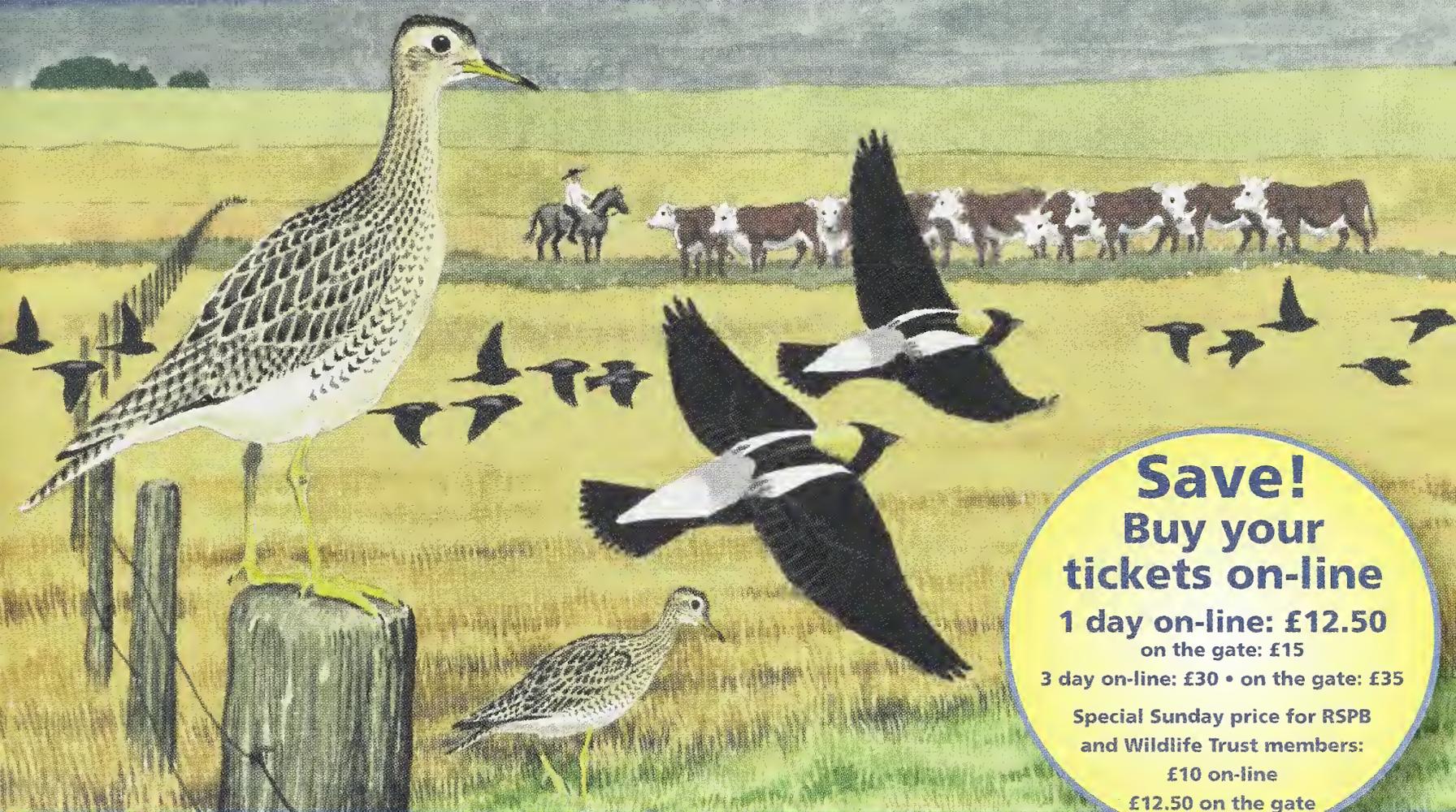
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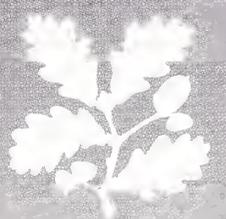




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# British Birds

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At long last, this issue marks the return of the Scarce Migrants report. Part 1 contains the non-passerines of a four-year block, 2004–07, the first such report since 2006. I am well aware, given the comments of many readers, that this report has been sorely missed, so I am sure that this one will go down well. Part 2, the passerines, will follow next month.

In February 2001, in my first week as *BB* editor, it was spelt out to me in no uncertain terms that the monthly publishing schedule was sacrosanct – we were several weeks in arrears when I arrived and in the first couple of months it seemed impossible that we would ever catch up. We did, eventually, albeit over the course of a rocky year or so, but the lesson was well learnt. The other annual reports that have long been at the heart of *BB* – BBRC and RBBP – are no different: once you get behind it is extraordinarily hard to catch up. Ask any county bird report editor with a backlog to deal with and he will tell you the same. So, Pete Fraser (who in his own words is ‘retiring from bird recording’): we salute you for persevering.

Another multi-year report (again in two parts) will appear in early 2014, under the stewardship of Steve White and Chris Kehoe. Since there will be rather a lot of scarce migrants in the next 12 months, we have made extra pages available for these four reports at no extra cost to subscribers. This signals our commitment to the scarce migrants ‘project’ but also to the monthly diversity that we aim to bring to *BB* wherever possible. Nonetheless, I think that most birders will enjoy these reports. The pages have been a challenge to fit together, with a sometimes complex jigsaw of graphs, tables and photos for the various species, but the result is a lively mix of illustration and information. Some of the nation’s best-loved rare birds are here, even if species such as Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Pallas’s Warbler and Little Bunting have long ceased to be national rarities in the strict sense. The fact that there is now, for many of these species, a full 50 years of decent-quality data means that we can begin to say something meaningful about trends, and ponder whether some of those species are set to return to the BBRC fold. But more of that inside.

*Roger Riddington*



**British Birds aims to:** ❖ provide an up-to-date magazine for everyone interested in the birds of the Western Palearctic; ❖ publish a range of material on behaviour, conservation, distribution, ecology, identification, movements, status and taxonomy as well as the latest ornithological news and book reviews; ❖ maintain its position as the journal of record; and ❖ interpret scientific research on birds in an easily accessible way.

## Why birders should tweet

Where did you first see the shocking news that Natural England had licensed the destruction of Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* nests and eggs at the request of a shooting estate? Maybe you read it in a newspaper the next day or came across it on a news website – or maybe you were instantly alerted to this breaking story by Twitter [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Twitter facilitates the rapid dissemination of information snippets – tweets – and is increasingly used as a campaign tool that can mobilise thousands of followers in minutes. The RSPB Twitter account [@natures\\_voice](https://twitter.com/natures_voice) has nearly 60,000 followers. It was a Freedom of Information request by the RSPB that uncovered the Buzzard scandal which was then publicised with a tweet containing a link to all the documentation on the RSPB website. And that short message (140 characters is the maximum length of a tweet) was then retweeted by many of those 60,000 followers to *their* followers, and so the story spread like ripples in a pond.

This is how news breaks in a world of social media where increasing numbers of people have mobile access to the internet on smartphones and wireless computers. Twitter is not just a forum for the inane utterances of celebrities or for advertising by corporations. It is a very useful medium for any organisation or individual who wants to get their message across. And that means that birders should be using it to publicise birds, birding and bird conservation. It's fun, sometimes flippant, often fierce – and it's free!

Signing up is simple and then you can start following some trusted Twitter accounts like the RSPB or the BTO [@\\_BTO](https://twitter.com/_BTO) or your local bird club/wildlife trust.

And, of course, you'll wish to follow [@britishbirds](https://twitter.com/britishbirds) to receive tweets whenever news items and features are added to the *British Birds* website [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk).

More than 8,300 people are following our Twitter feed. Please join in the conversation. Many individual birders use Twitter to share their sightings or photographs. So do some of our bird observatories, for example



Fig. 1. The BB Twitter page in late May 2013.

[@spurnbirdobs](https://twitter.com/spurnbirdobs), [@PortlandBirdObs](https://twitter.com/PortlandBirdObs) and [@FI\\_Obs](https://twitter.com/FI_Obs). Then there are the bird news services such as BirdGuides [@BirdGuides](https://twitter.com/BirdGuides), Rare Bird Alert [@RareBirdAlertUK](https://twitter.com/RareBirdAlertUK), Rare Bird Network [@rbnUK](https://twitter.com/rbnUK) and Rarevine [@Rarevine](https://twitter.com/Rarevine).

Two thoughtful and very readable bloggers on birds and wider conservation issues are Mark Avery [@MarkAvery](https://twitter.com/MarkAvery) and Charlie Moores [@charliemoores](https://twitter.com/charliemoores), who have much to say, not least about Twitter itself. I asked them both what Twitter can offer to a committed conservationist. Mark's answer was short and pithy: 'Twitter gets the messages out to a large number of people quickly. Not using it would be like not telling the BBC your news.'

Charlie commented: 'It's a very useful tool for spreading 'alert'-type messages about campaigns or events. My only slight concern is that we are talking only to each other at present – but the circle of contacts is growing ever wider. While some people might think Twitter has reached a peak of subscribers, in my opinion its usefulness is still being recognised and I think there will be a huge uptake of use over the near future. Twitter will become the single most useful tool available for the rapid dispersal of campaign information – until the next platform comes along of course!'

At a time when birds and wildlife have never faced a greater range of threats, we all have a responsibility to promote the conservation message with all the tools at our disposal. In the age of social media, this will include the occasional targeted Twitter 'storm'. [@NaturalEngland](https://twitter.com/NaturalEngland), you have been warned.

Adrian Pitches [@apitches](https://twitter.com/apitches)

# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## Natural England licenses Buzzard destruction by pheasant shoot

Following the revelation (see facing page) that Natural England – the Government’s *conservation* advisor – has issued licences for the destruction of Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* nests and the killing or capturing of adult birds, a coalition of 17 wildlife and countryside organisations has written to the Environment Secretary, Owen Paterson, to protest. They want reassurance that no further licences will be issued for the removal or destruction of birds of prey – or their nests – for the commercial interests of game shoots.

There was a public outcry last year when the Government announced a tender for a research proposal that would have allowed the removal of Buzzards near shoots. In the wake of this, the Government committed to working collaboratively with interested parties to find a new way forward. However, a Freedom of Information (FoI) request lodged with Natural England by the RSPB has now revealed that licences for the removal of Buzzards have been issued, including around release pens on a Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* shooting estate.

The coalition has expressed outrage that protected species should be removed from the countryside to protect a commercial non-native gamebird

and stated that it is vital that the Minister now issues a clear statement that licences will not be issued to kill a native bird of prey to safeguard commercial shoots. Gwyn Williams, of the RSPB, said: ‘We believe it is wrong that these licences have been issued, it is wrong that there has been no public scrutiny of these decisions and it is wrong that we heard of these decisions only after the nests had been destroyed.’

Paul Irving, of the Northern England Raptor Forum, added: ‘We have fundamental concerns with the idea of licensing the killing of a native bird of prey or the destruction of its eggs to protect an alien gamebird. These specific cases seem to show a scandalous disregard for Natural England’s own guidance. It’s clear there is a huge range of non-lethal alternatives which have clearly not been exhausted.’

Nigel Middleton, from the Hawk and Owl Trust, commented: ‘This is a step backwards. We’re in the twenty-first century and shooting estates must look hard at their management practices to ensure there is no negative effect on native biodiversity. They must move on from a Victorian mentality and find ways of managing their sport that does not require the destruction of birds of prey.’

## Natural England also under fire for gull cull on sporting estate

Meanwhile, a FoI request by the *Guardian* has revealed that Natural England has licensed the shooting, trapping and poisoning of tens of thousands of Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* on a moorland estate owned by the Duke of Westminster in Lancashire.

Natural England now admits that, since a review of Special Protection Areas in 2001, ‘confusion’ over the legal protection status of the species has allowed the culling to continue, despite its population crashing in recent years. The Lesser Black-backed Gull is amber-listed since 40% of the European population breeds in Britain – and half of those nest at fewer than ten colonies.

The 23,500-acre Abbeystead estate on the Bowland Fells is managed by the Grosvenor Estate, which hosts pheasant and grouse shoots. The estate was first allowed to cull the gulls in the

1970s on the grounds that droppings were polluting Abbeystead reservoir and the River Wyre catchment. The licence to cull was last renewed by NE in 1999. But a former Abbeystead gull surveyor told the *Guardian* that the culling has been



Robert Canis/FLPA

**230.** Adult Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*, Kent, June.

conducted, in part, to protect the 'economy of the shooting estates' since the gulls are known to eat grouse eggs. Until 2003, 4,000–10,000 birds a year were being poisoned on the estate, according to one NE document.

NE surveys of the Abbeystead Lesser Black-backs show that in 1998 the Bowland Fells recorded a peak population of 13,776 pairs. The surveys concluded that a baseline of 6,768 breeding pairs (the average population from 1983–87) should be maintained in Bowland, but that a 'loss of more than 25% is unacceptable'. However, in 2012, the NE survey showed that pairs had fallen to the lowest level since records began in 1980, with just over 1,000 nests with eggs at Abbeystead/Tarnbrook. It warned that the 'entire Bowland population is significantly below the level at the time of

SSSI notification and is considered in unfavourable and declining condition'. The survey also reported 'significant and widespread culling and disturbance measures' in the area in 2012.

In 2001 JNCC reviewed the UK's SPAs, sites classified in accordance with the EU Birds Directive. It concluded that, alongside Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* and Merlin *Falco columbarius*, the gull was now a 'qualifying species' within the Bowland SPA because it 'supported a population of European importance'. However, 12 years later the official SPA citation document for Bowland has still not been updated to reflect that the gull should be a qualifying species deserving of legal protection.

See [www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/may/23/conservation-agency-approved-cull-endangered-birds?INTCMP=SRCH](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2013/may/23/conservation-agency-approved-cull-endangered-birds?INTCMP=SRCH)

## Guard set up for more Little Bitterns in Somerset

Early June 2013 brought yet more news of rare herons breeding in Somerset, as the RSPB set up a guard on the nest of a pair of Little Bitterns *Ixobrychus minutus* at its Ham Wall reserve. The species first nested in Yorkshire in 1984, but it wasn't until 2010 that birds bred again, in the extensive reedbeds of this RSPB reserve. Since then breeding has been suspected, but this year birds are known to be nesting.

Steve Hughes, the reserve's site manager, said: 'The male has a very distinctive "barking" call and appears to be holding territory, and we've had glimpses of a female.' To protect the birds from disturbance and egg-collectors, RSPB staff and volunteers will be watching the site and access to some parts of the reserve has been restricted.

The RSPB's reserve at Ham Wall is part of a huge and ambitious plan to recreate a vast area of wetlands in the Brue Valley. Known as the Avalon Marshes, the project is being delivered by a coalition of wildlife organisations including RSPB, NE, Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Hawk and Owl Trust.

Tony Whitehead, also speaking for the RSPB, said: 'Having Little Bittern breeding at Ham Wall demonstrates the power of landscape-scale nature conservation. If you get the conditions right, the birds will turn up... Wetlands are under pressure the world over, not least from climate change. To be able to recreate this landscape in Somerset is of huge significance. We know that large, well-managed wetlands can act as beacons for colonising species, such as Little Bittern. They are crucial in helping these species adapt to our changing climate, as is being demonstrated in the Avalon Marshes.'

## Where do House Martins go in winter?

It is one of ornithology's greatest mysteries but also one that the BTO hopes to answer using tiny geolocators attached to some House Martins *Delichon urbicum* when they head south this autumn.

Numbers of House Martins breeding in the UK have fallen by two-thirds, leading to the species being amber-listed as a bird of conservation concern. Although we know a lot about the breeding ecology of the House Martin in Britain, once September comes and these hirundines head south for the winter, they disappear from our radar almost completely. It is not known where in Africa House Martins winter, or how precisely they get there. But BTO researchers plan to answer these questions by fitting birds with a tiny (shirt-button-sized) geolocator.

Weighing less than a gram, the device contains a clock, a calendar and a light sensor, together with enough memory to store all of the data collected; assuming the device can be retrieved, this information will then reveal the wintering areas, together with the location of possible stopover and refuelling sites, precise migration routes and the timing of the migration through Europe and Africa.

Paul Stancliffe, of the BTO, commented: 'I have long dreamed of being able to follow a bird like the House Martin on its migration from Britain to Africa, to get a glimpse of the places it is passing through and the places that it chooses to stay and rest for a while before continuing on its journey. It is very exciting to think that we are on the brink of new discoveries that should help these delightful birds and provide them with a more optimistic future.'

## Last Northern Bald Ibis in Syria?

Despite the current crisis in Syria, the International Advisory Group for Northern Bald Ibis (IAGNBI) has continued work in the field, and reported the sad news that only one Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* has returned to the breeding site at Palmyra. The returning female 'Zenobia' was last year paired to 'Odeinat', the last male, which was fitted with a small satellite tag that stopped transmitting in southern Saudi Arabia in July 2012 ([www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/northernbaldibis](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/tracking/northernbaldibis)). Subsequently, four birds were seen briefly in January this year at the usual Ethiopian highland wintering site, but it now seems clear that only one of these birds has returned to the breeding area.

This looks ominously like it may be the end for the relict eastern population of the species, having

been rediscovered in 2002 when there were three breeding pairs. Despite huge efforts, the colony has dwindled to just one pair in the past two years and now it seems to be just the one bird. This comes at a time when co-ordinated efforts to protect the ibis are strengthening. Indeed, the new International Working Group held its first meeting in Jazan, Saudi Arabia in November 2012 ([www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/other\\_related\\_meetings/nbi\\_iwg/meeting1/nbi\\_iwg\\_1.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/other_related_meetings/nbi_iwg/meeting1/nbi_iwg_1.htm)).

The only other wild population, in Morocco, has remained relatively stable over the past 20 years despite growing development pressures. This population comprises just over 100 breeding pairs at only two colonies (<http://northernbaldibis.blogspot.com.es/p/about-nbi-projet.html>).

## Lydd airport decision prompts legal challenge

In late May, the RSPB announced that it had issued a legal challenge to the Government's decision to allow the expansion of Lydd Airport in Kent. The proposals – which will damage the nearby protected wildlife area of Dungeness – were given the go ahead in April (see *Brit. Birds* 106: 302).

Chris Corrigan, RSPB South East Regional Director, said: 'Dungeness is one of the most important wildlife sites in the world; it is protected at global, European and UK levels. It is home to species found hardly anywhere else in the UK. It is also a crossroads for migrating birds stopping off on their epic global journeys.'

'The RSPB has been protecting birds and the wildlife of Dungeness for over a century – our commitment to the area is deep and profound. Over recent years, our concerns about the impact of expanding nearby Lydd Airport led to the need to argue our case at a Public Inquiry. The inspector found in favour of the Airport's proposals – and his report was completely endorsed in the Secretaries of State for Communities and Local Government and for Transport's decision. We are profoundly concerned about this decision as it seems perverse.'

'After careful consideration we have now issued a legal challenge to the Secretary of State's decision. The stakes are too high to risk the future of one of our best and most important places for nature without testing the basis for this decision, which we consider to be flawed.'

## Record Quail year in 2011

It has emerged that there were phenomenal numbers of Common Quails *Coturnix coturnix* in the UK in 2011. The annual RBBP report, to be published in *BB* in September 2013, will show that 2011 was the biggest Quail year on record with a total more than twice that in 2009 (when there were 832 calling birds) and even greater than the previous record of 1,655, set in 1989.

## BB grant to the New Forest Woodcock Group

A *BB* Grant of £1,000 has been awarded to the New Forest Woodcock Group to learn more about the movements of this enigmatic species. The Group consists of both professional and amateur ornithologists who, in their spare time, study Woodcocks *Scolopax rusticola* in the New Forest, concentrating on ecology, distribution and behaviour. The money will go towards radio transmitters or isotope analyses, so as to learn more about the local habitat use and geographical origin of the New Forest birds.

## In praise of... Twitter

Non-birders probably think that all birds tweet. Indeed, social media tool Twitter chose the logo of a perky blue bird (Bluebird?) for its 'tweeting' service. Twitter is another digital enhancement to our hobby and its fast and (occasionally) furious flow of information and comment is worth tapping into. Where better to start than @britishbirds?

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# Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2004–2007

## Part I: non-passerines

Peter A. Fraser

**Abstract** This report presents data on scarce migrant birds in Britain between 2004 and 2007. Sixteen of the 17 species removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005 are included here for the first time (Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* was treated in this report from 1995 to 1998), while ‘Black Brant’ *Branta bernicla nigricans* also makes its first appearance here. Some species appeared in record numbers during this four-year period, while others fared poorly. The long-term trends for several species, in particular waders and several passerines that breed in Europe, show a gradual decline, whereas Nearctic waterfowl and waders, together with passerines from Siberia, are generally increasing. Species doing particularly well included Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*, which posted totals ranking highest, third-equal, seventh and eighth highest since 1958, while good years for Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* all seem to fully justify the decision to remove these species from the BBRC list. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* remains the most numerous species in this report, with over 3,500 individuals recorded in the review period, and the highest, second- and fifth-highest totals ever; other passerines doing well included Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides* and Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, two more of the species removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005. At the opposite end of the scale, some species fared especially poorly. In particular, there were no records of Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* in 2007, the first such statistic for any species in this report in its current format. Numbers of Ferruginous Ducks, Red-footed Falcons *Falco vespertinus*, Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* and Rustic Buntings *Emberiza rustica* also fell, taking these species back within the parameters of national rarities, while the Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* is also approaching this level. Many species in this report have now been monitored for 40–50 years, making this a robust and valuable dataset for investigating long-term changes in populations, distribution and movements. Assessment by county or regional committees ensures the rigour of the data; 96% of the records presented here have been assessed and published in the relevant bird reports.

## Introduction

This is the tenth report on scarce migrant birds in Britain and covers the years 2004 to 2007. Since the last report, that for 2003 (Fraser & Rogers 2006), the number of species included has increased markedly as a consequence of the removal of 17 species from the BBRC list at the end of 2005 (Fraser *et al.* 2007).

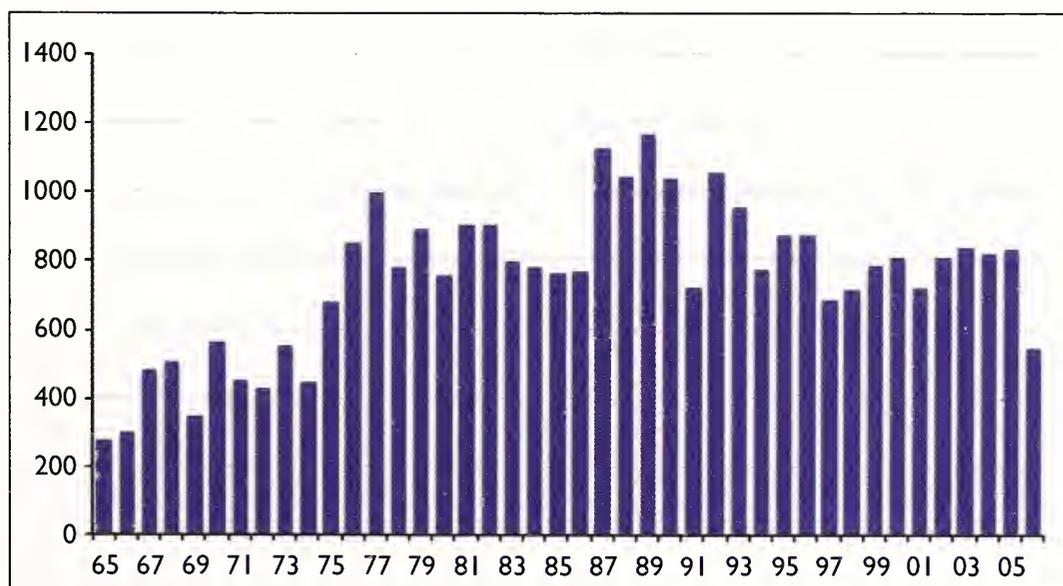
Given that, for some of the species treated here, this report marks a half-century of data, a brief history of the origins of the report may be appropriate. BBRC was formed in 1958 to collate and publish records of rare birds in Britain. It quickly became evident that some species, including Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* and Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, were occurring in much greater numbers than originally thought, and they were dropped from the list of species considered early in the 1960s. Other species removed at an early stage included Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*, which now feature in the reports of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. The Scarce Migrants project evolved from the need to continue to monitor species that were treated initially as national rarities by BBRC.

Based on an earlier series of papers published in *BB*, *Scarce Migrant Birds in Britain and Ireland*, covering the period from 1958 to 1967, was published by Sharrock (1974). That book included records of all former BBRC species, plus selected other scarce migrants (including Red-breasted Flycatcher

*Ficedula parva* and Hoopoe *Upupa epops*) and some of the more frequent rarities then being assessed by BBRC (including White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* and Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*). Sadly, Tim Sharrock's records of non-BBRC species for this period had been lost by the time the Scarce Migrants project began, although simplified paper records for many species were maintained by Nick Dymond and Chris Harbard from 1968 onwards.

During the 1970s, the popularity of birding in general, and rarities in particular, grew spectacularly, and the number of records submitted to BBRC threatened to engulf that committee. During the 1960s there had only occasionally been more than 500 accepted records published in the BBRC annual report but by 1977 that figure reached 1,000 for the first time (fig. 1). BBRC's first statistician, Dave Britton, proposed criteria for potential removal of species from the list of national rarities: a species would be removed if the annual mean of new individuals over a ten-year period exceeded 15 and that species occurred in at least nine out of those ten years (to avoid losing rare irruptive species). As a consequence, several species were removed from the BBRC list after the 1982 report and it seemed very likely that more would follow.

During this period, I began to enter BBRC records into an early database and it seemed logical to extend this dataset to include former BBRC species, with records extracted from county bird reports as well as the earlier data from Dymond and Harbard. During the



**Fig. 1.** The number of accepted records published in BBRC annual reports for the period 1965 to 2006.

late 1980s the dataset was migrated to a relational database management system on a new-fangled PC (a Sirius at Bristol City Museum). Some of the data for scarce migrants were included in *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Dymond *et al.* 1989, covering the period 1958–85), and periodic analyses of sample groups or

species were published by Fraser & Ryan (*Brit. Birds* 85: 631–635; 87: 605–612; 88: 478–484).

Plans for an all-inclusive Scarce Migrants report finally came to fruition in 1997, the first report covering the year 1995 (*Brit. Birds* 90: 413–439). Some additional species incorporated in the database from 1986 onwards were included, such as Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* (abandoned by BBRC during the 1960s owing to the problem with escaped birds), Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*, Red-necked Phalaropus *Phalaropus lobatus* and Grey Phalaropes *P. fulicarius*, Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Red-backed *Lanius collurio* and Great Grey Shrikes *L. excubitor*. Initially, an attempt was made to collate records of many other species including Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Little Stint *C. minuta*, Glaucous *Larus hyperboreus* and Iceland Gulls *L. glaucoides*, Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris* and Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*. Recording these species in the same manner as rarities proved difficult, however, and helped to define a ‘scarce migrant’ for the purposes of these reports: commoner than a national rarity yet sufficiently rare and transient (the latter is important) to enable individuals to be recorded with an arrival and departure date from a site. This definition has inevitably been broken on occasions, for example during the Yellow-browed Warbler invasions since 2000, but overall the criteria have proved to be pretty effective and workable.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, more species moved from national rarity to scarce migrant status, culminating in a second great cull of species from the BBRC list at the end of 2005. During that time I became increasingly involved with BBRC, initially helping to transform the committee from a paper-based organisation to a computer-based one, and then assisting the late (great) Mike Rogers in the BBRC secretarial role during his final years. As a consequence, the Scarce Migrants project took a back seat. In 2007, Nigel Hudson took on the role of BBRC secretary, at which point work on the Scarce Migrants Report recommenced, culminating in this report.

In recent years the impact of new technology on the scarce migrants project has

been dramatic, not least with the removal of the ‘barriers to entry’ to publishing bird records. Websites, blogs and the rapid dissemination of information about rare and scarce birds has compromised the hegemony of the county-based system of bird recording. Historically, the county recorder was the gatekeeper of all submissions of records deemed to require peer review, whether of rarities by BBRC, rare breeding birds by RBBP or scarce migrants and local rarities. Traditionally, information flowed from birders to local panel and from local panel to national panel; at the end of that process, the collated information flowed back in the form of a published report. Nowadays, information flows in many directions, almost instantaneously; birders quickly move on to the next good bird and keeping track of a blizzard of data in a multitude of formats has become a massive challenge. In response to rising expectations, there are now some exceptional county bird reports produced in Britain. The flip side to that is the increasingly arduous workload placed on county volunteers – compilers and editors, as well as county recorders – which some counties have been unable to cope with.

Today, many records of scarce migrants go straight to one or other of the various national bird information services and in some/many cases there may be no formal submission to the relevant county. There has been a consequent shift in the review process, from being peer-based, local and democratic (via a county’s birding organisation of which the observer is hopefully a member), to a remote and self-appointed process, which may lack the rigour (or at least the local knowledge) of the system it has replaced. For this reason the records published in the Scarce Migrants Report have always come from published county reports or directly from county recorders. However, the supply of information from some counties has occasionally stalled, for the reasons outlined above. Another factor that has had an impact on this report is that 30 years ago a greater proportion of county reports were published within 15 months of the end of the recording year than is now the case – or at least that is my impression. There are around seven recording areas for which records for this

report have been entirely taken from internet-based information services, plus another 12 recording areas for which the records for some years are taken from internet-based sources. Nonetheless, the amount of records involved is relatively small; some 96% of the records published here have been assessed and published in the relevant bird reports. This is a long-winded way of explaining the timing of this report! It covers the period 2004–07 and over 17,900 records have contributed to it. Those species removed from the BBRC list after the 2005 annual report are included for the years 2006 and 2007. Consequently, it is more of a summary than previous reports, in which many individual records could be mentioned explicitly.

In part 1 of this report, which covers the non-passerines, there are some interesting trends, notably the consistently good showing by Nearctic wildfowl and shorebirds. For example, Green-winged Teals *Anas carolinensis* appeared in good numbers each year, with 2004 being the best on record. The two best years on record for American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* were 2006, with 25 birds, and 2007, with 33. Other Nearctic waders, including White-rumped *C. fuscicollis*, Buff-breasted *C. subruficollis* and Pectoral Sand-

pipers, all had good to excellent years during 2004–07. Numbers of Grey Phalaropes (possibly of Nearctic origin) held up well and included 411 in 2005, the second-best year to date. Fortunes of waders from Arctic Europe were more mixed, with a mediocre set of figures for Red-necked Phalarope *P. lobatus* in particular. The same would be true of Temminck's Stint *C. temminckii* had it not been for an impressive 309 in 2004, the best year on record. Great White Egret *Ardea alba* was treated as a scarce migrant from 2006 (the fourth-best year on record) and followed that with the best year ever, in 2007. Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, with 19 records in 2006 and 18 in 2007, also justified its removal from the BBRC list. Other species fared less well, notably Ferruginous Duck, Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* and Spotted Crake.

Many passerines (see part 2, in the next issue) showed a stable or downward trend, with a few notable exceptions such as Yellow-browed Warbler. European breeding populations of some species are known to be declining, for example Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* and Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, and this is clearly reflected in their status in Britain. In some cases this may eventually result in their reinstatement as national rarities.

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### Systematic list of records

Interpretation of the statistics used and quoted in the species accounts should take into consideration the following points:

- Increasing numbers of well-equipped observers must, to some extent, be responsible for the increase in numbers of certain species.
- Known breeding individuals (of such species as Common Crane *Grus grus* and Red-necked Phalarope) have been excluded from this report.
- Individuals remaining from one year to the next (e.g. overwintering Ring-necked Ducks *Aythya collaris*) have been counted only in their year of arrival.
- Returning individuals (e.g. Ring-billed Gulls *Larus delawarensis*) have, where possible, been counted only in their year of arrival, unless stated otherwise.
- Known escapes from captivity (e.g. some Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* and White Storks *Ciconia ciconia*) have been excluded.
- Statistics for some species are incomplete, in part because data were unavailable from some counties.

‘Black Brant’ *Branta bernicla nigricans*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
184	3 (14)	1 (22=)	2002/24/1      2004/22/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
0
1968–77
<1
1978–87
2
1988–97
3
1998–2007
13

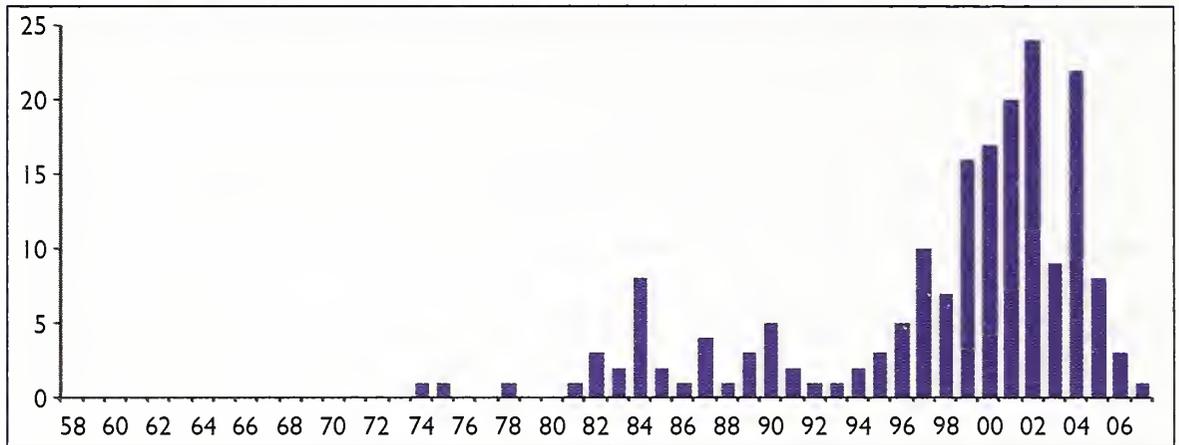


Fig. 2. Annual totals of ‘Black Brants’ in Britain, 1958–2007.

Iain Leach



231. Adult Black Brant, Cley, Norfolk, November 2006.

‘Black Brant’ was removed from the BBRC list on 1st July 2005 and appears here for the first time. Of all the species included in this report, it is perhaps the most difficult to monitor (in terms of proving a national total). It occurs annually in flocks of the dark-bellied race of Brent Goose *B. b. bernicla*, in all coastal counties from Lincolnshire to Dorset, and most of these counties report multiple individuals. Almost all are returning adults, which remain faithful to the same area, but some are more mobile, moving with carrier flocks between counties. Furthermore,

Black Brants regularly winter in the Netherlands and France, and movements of Brent Geese may temporarily bring continental birds to British coasts. For the period under review the estimated total number of wintering birds in each county is shown in the table below.

County	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Lincolnshire	4	4	2
Norfolk	7	6	4
Suffolk	1	1	2
Essex	2	6	2
Kent	2	2	1
Sussex	1	2	2
Hampshire	6	5	2
Isle of Wight	1	1	1
Dorset	2	4	2
Devon	0	0	1
Total	26	31	19

While Black Brant is not a national rarity in terms of the number of records each year, it is only first-winters that we can be reasonably sure are new arrivals – and hence the number of birds accepted as new each year is very small (fig. 2). Why are so few first-winters being found in Brent Goose flocks in Britain? Perhaps Black Brant really is a true vagrant, with just one or two new records per year?

In the data presented here, all adults are treated as returning birds unless stated otherwise in county reports. The only first-winter reported in the period was at Yantlett Creek, Kent, on 6th–22nd January 2006. The adult in

Devon was the third record for that county and is assumed to be a new arrival (although it could just as easily be one of the south-coast wintering birds relocating temporarily to a new site).

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
433	18 (9)	9 (20=)	21 (4=)	11 (16=)	2000/31/1      1998/27/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
1
1968–77
4
1978–87
7
1988–97
13
1998–2007
19

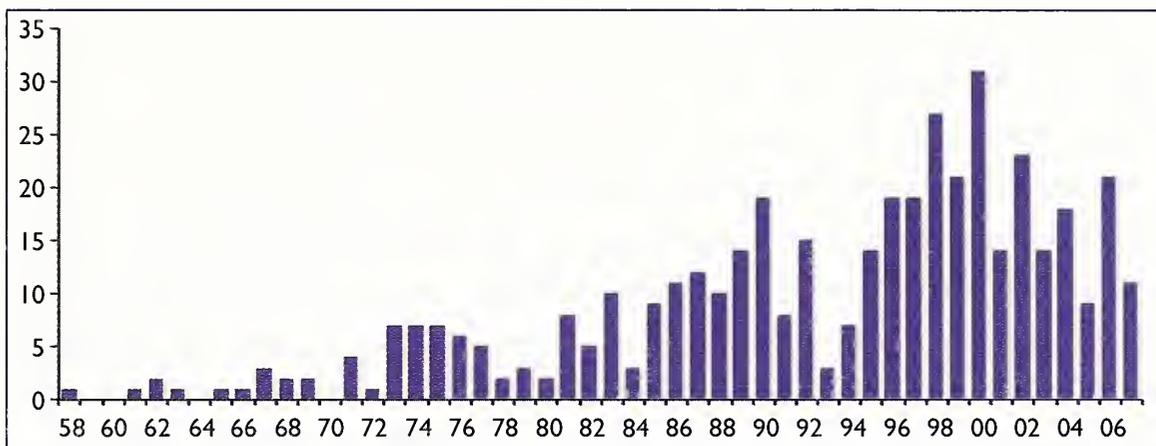


Fig. 3. Annual totals of American Wigeons in Britain, 1958–2007.

The 21 (presumed) newly arrived individuals in 2006 are notable, and this year ranks as the joint fourth-best since 1958, but otherwise the data suggest an overall decline since the peak years of 1998 and 2000 (fig. 3).

As with other wildfowl, the potential for hybridisation and movements between sites creates potential problems when analysing records. For example, a drake paired with a female Eurasian Wigeon *A. penelope* on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, on 24th–28th April 2006 was assumed to be the same as a similar pairing seen on Foula, Shetland, on 6th–14th May that year. In general, it is more difficult to judge whether individual birds have moved between recording areas when species are assessed locally rather than nationally. Another drake was seen mating with a female wigeon sp. at Loch of Tingwall, Shetland, in June 2005.

Records were widely distributed throughout Britain, with the exception of southern and southeast England (fig. 4). The highest county totals were five in Orkney and Cornwall, and four in Highland. New individuals appeared in every month of the year except July and, although there was no obvious peak, January, February and November (in that order) were the best months for arrivals.

This species remains common in North America with a broadly stable population of around 2.4 million birds. The approximate number of birds taken by hunters ([www.flyways.us/regulations-and-harvest/harvest-trends](http://www.flyways.us/regulations-and-harvest/harvest-trends)) shows a pattern with some similarities to that shown in fig. 3, at least in the last 20 years.

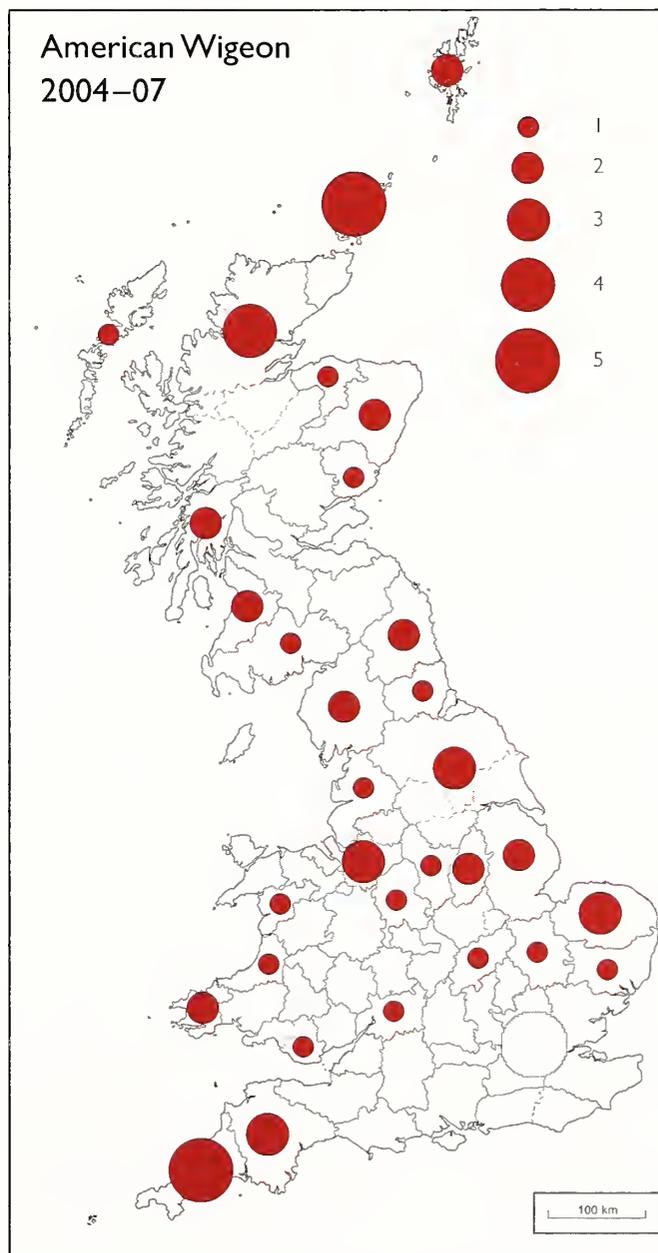


Fig. 4. Distribution of presumed newly arrived American Wigeons in Britain, 2004–07.

Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
804	60 (1)	48 (3=)	21 (4=)	35 (8)	2002/59/2    1999/48/3=

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67 <2
1968–77 4
1978–87 12
1988–97 20
1998–2007 43

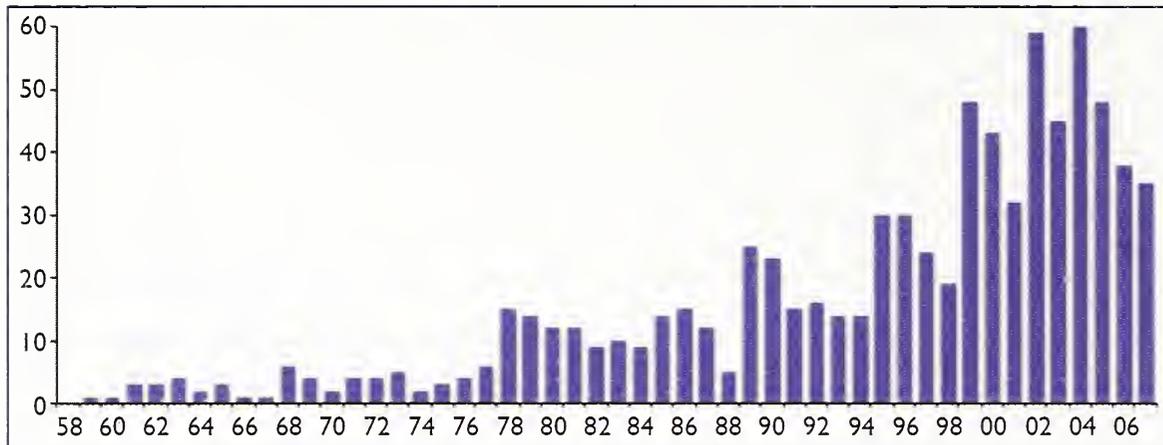


Fig. 5. Annual totals of Green-winged Teals in Britain, 1958–2007.

Establishing how many new Green-winged Teals arrive in any one year is very difficult; this is a long-lived species, which is prone to move between sites at different times of year. As with American Wigeon, it seems that many females are surely being overlooked, so the numbers presented here should reflect the very minimum number of arrivals. Fig. 5 shows that the last decade has been exceptional for Green-winged Teals, however.

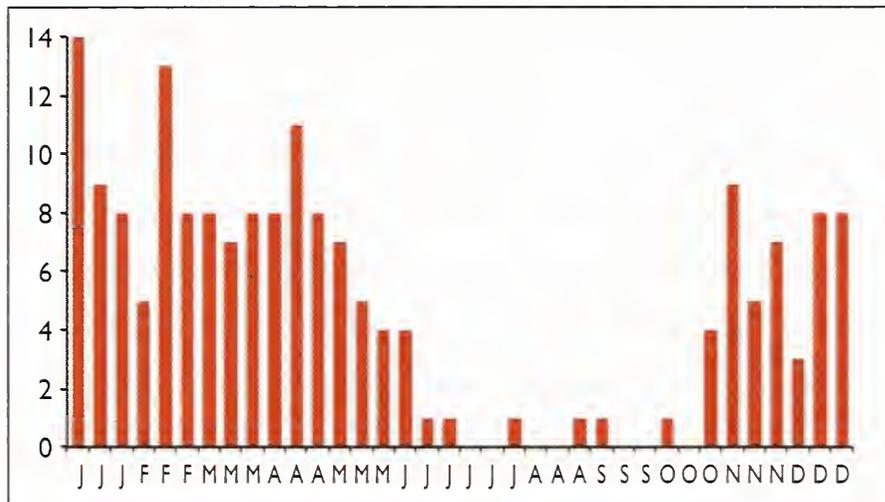


Fig. 6. Arrival dates of Green-winged Teals in Britain, 2004–07, by ten-day period.

Green-winged Teals can now be expected at coastal and inland sites throughout Britain. During

the review period, 12 were found in the Outer Hebrides, 11 in both Lancashire & N Merseyside and Norfolk, and ten in Northumberland. The data show relatively few being found before late autumn, and then a rather even distribution of arrivals from mid-winter through until April/May (fig. 6).

Steve Young/Birdwatch



232. Male Green-winged Teal, Marshside RSPB, Lancs & N Merseyside, March 2007.

Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
617	27 (8)	36 (4)	29 (5)	22 (11)	2001/52/1      2002/42/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
<1
1968–77
4
1978–87
14
1988–97
12
1998–2007
31

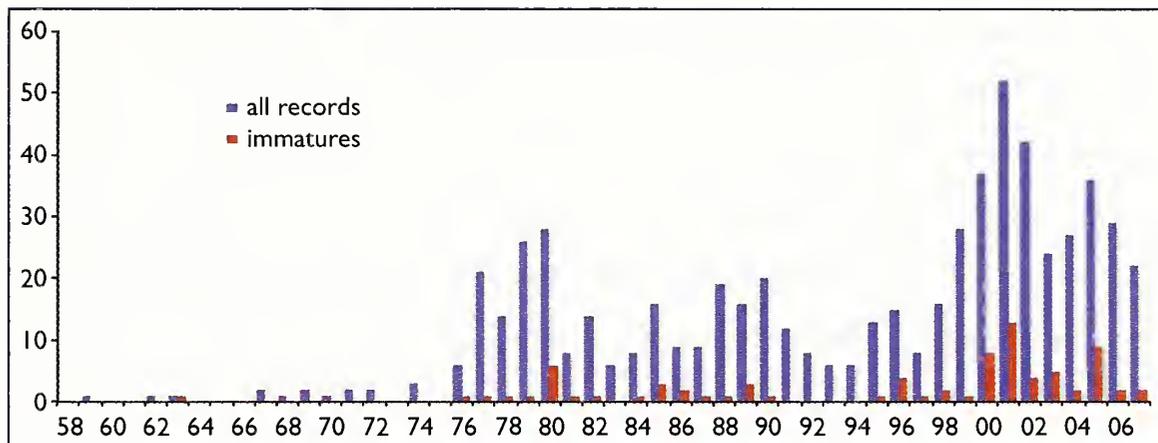


Fig. 7. Annual totals of Ring-necked Ducks in Britain, 1958–2007.

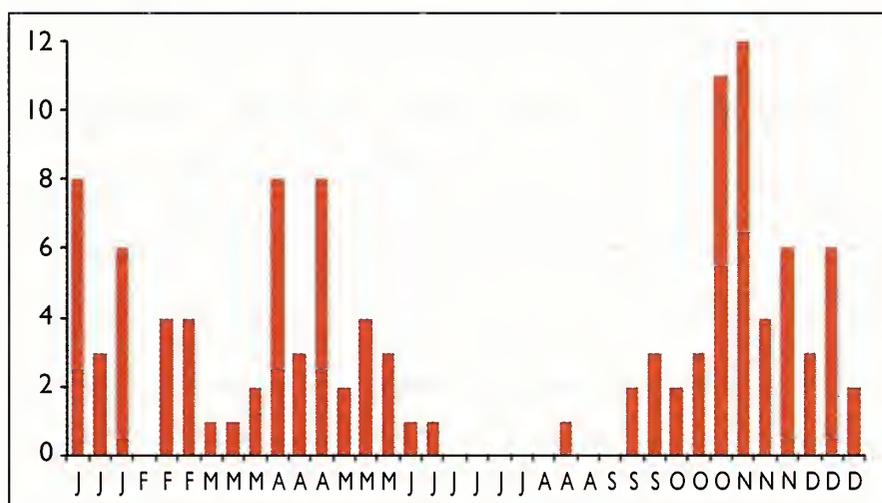


Fig. 8. Arrival dates of Ring-necked Ducks in Britain, 2004–07, by ten-day period.

Themes already introduced – the difficulty of differentiating new arrivals and mobile long-stayers and the potential problem of hybrids – are neatly encapsulated by a drake Ring-necked Duck on Tiree, Argyll, on 20th April 2004; it may (or may not) have been the same individual that appeared on South Uist, Outer Hebrides, nine days later and subsequently summered there (when it paired with a female Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*). Another drake, at Vane Farm,

Perth & Kinross, paired with a female Common Pochard *A. ferina* in June 2006.

Nonetheless, the peak annual totals for presumed newly arrived Ring-necked Ducks correspond reasonably well with the totals for young birds (variously reported as immature, first-winter or juvenile), which gives confidence that the data are showing real patterns – see fig. 7. Nine young birds were recorded in 2005, the second-highest annual total after the 13 in 2001.

Records were widely scattered, with more coming from the Outer Hebrides (11), Somerset and Cornwall (nine each) than other recording areas. A distinct peak of arrivals was evident in late October and early November (fig. 8), with subsidiary peaks at the beginning of January (possibly associated with a burst of enthusiasm for New Year listing?), and again in April.



Kit Day

233. Male Ring-necked Duck, Swadlincote, Derbyshire, April 2007.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
272	9 (16=)	10 (13=)	9 (16=)	6 (21)	1987/27/1      1986/20/2

Annual means 1986–2007
1986–90 15
1991–95 9
1996–2000 14
2001–07 11

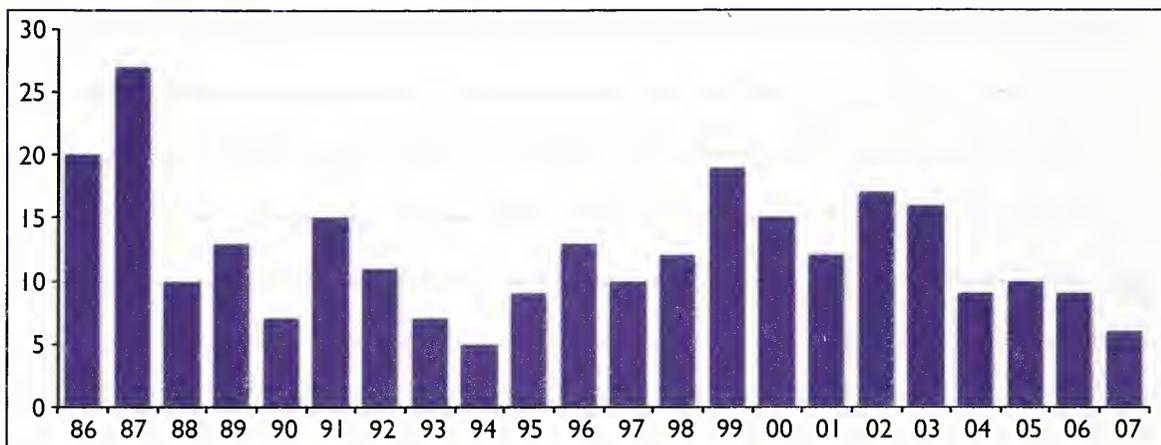
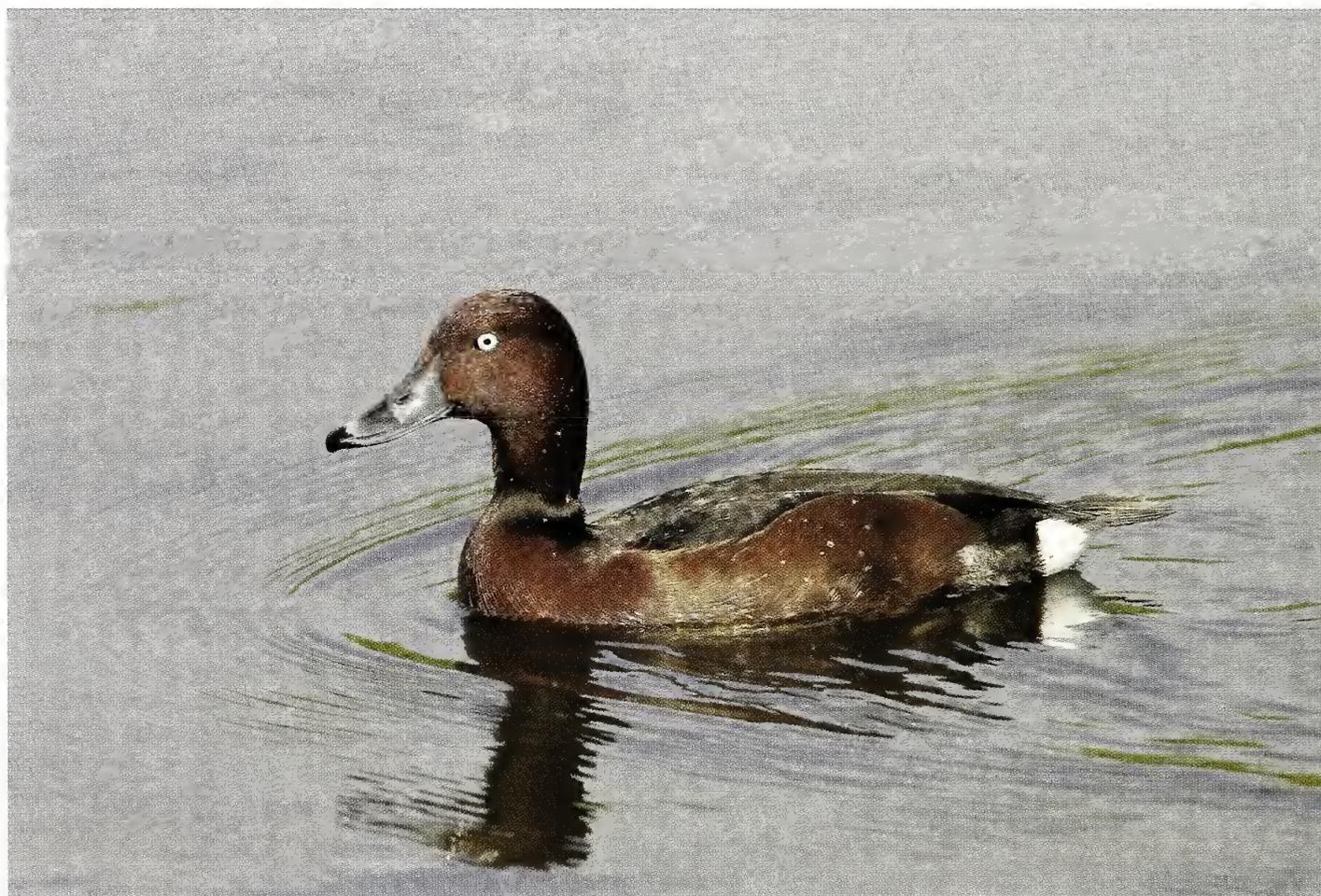


Fig. 9. Annual totals of Ferruginous Ducks in Britain, 1986–2007.

Ferruginous Duck was considered by BBRC until 1968, and then again between 1999 and 2005. The problems associated with rare wildfowl referred to in the three previous accounts – longevity, movements, hybrids, escapes – are all relevant to this species, which lies on the cusp between national rarity and scarce migrant.

The data for 2004–07 do not include known escaped birds in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire (2007), Norfolk (two in 2007), Staffordshire and Lancashire (2006) and Sussex (2006). Also not included are the birds involved in the long series of records in Avon, at Chew Valley Lake and other sites, which culminated in possible breeding in 2006 (Davis & Vinicombe 2011). The single record included from Avon is a young male, first seen in October 2006, which could possibly have been the offspring of the pair already present.



Kit Day

234. Male Ferruginous Duck, Hornchurch, Essex, April 2007.

Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
482	19 (7=)	19 (7=)	19 (7=)	19 (7=)	2003/30/1      1999/26/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67 <2
1968–77 4
1978–87 9
1988–97 14
1998–2007 19

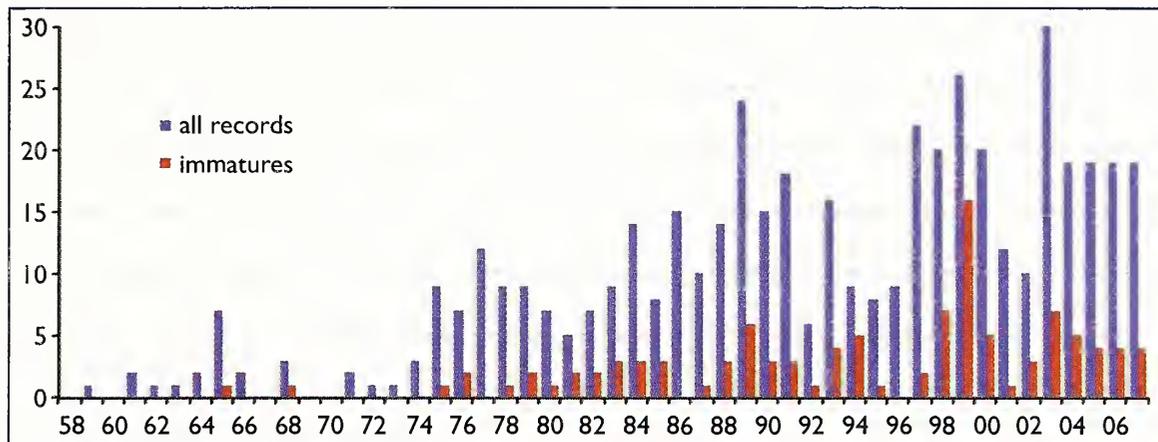


Fig. 10. Annual totals of Surf Scoters in Britain, 1958–2007.

For this species, it is estimated that returning birds make up at least half the total recorded in Britain in any given year. Many are long-lived and remain loyal to traditional wintering sites, making some birds easy to categorise. But their association with Common Scoters *M. nigra* means that they can switch wintering sites if their affinity to a particular host flock changes. Perhaps a better indication of new arrivals is the number of young birds (variably reported as first-winter, first-summer, immature or subadult); during 2004–07, a total of 17 young birds arrived in Britain (fig. 10).

The distribution of all newly arrived birds in the review period is shown in fig. 11, which shows that most were at traditional locations in northern Scotland. In autumn 2006, no fewer than five males and at least one female were present along the Moray & Nairn coast.

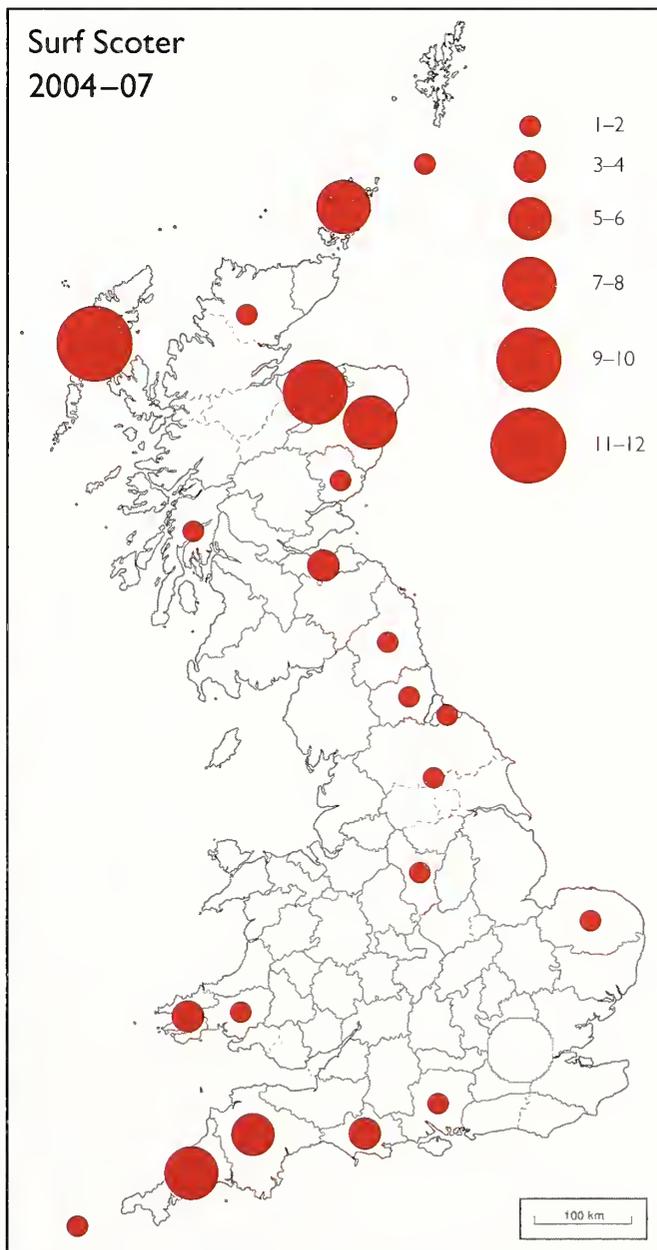


Fig. 11. Distribution of presumed newly arrived Surf Scoters in Britain, 2004–07.



Mark Breaks

235. Female Surf Scoter, Fair Isle, 21st–25th May 2007, the first for Fair Isle.

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
24,261	108 (17)	1,052 (8)	161 (14)	88 (20)	1998/5,116/1    1999/2,295/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
16
1968–77
14
1978–87
381
1988–97
721
1998–2007
1,294

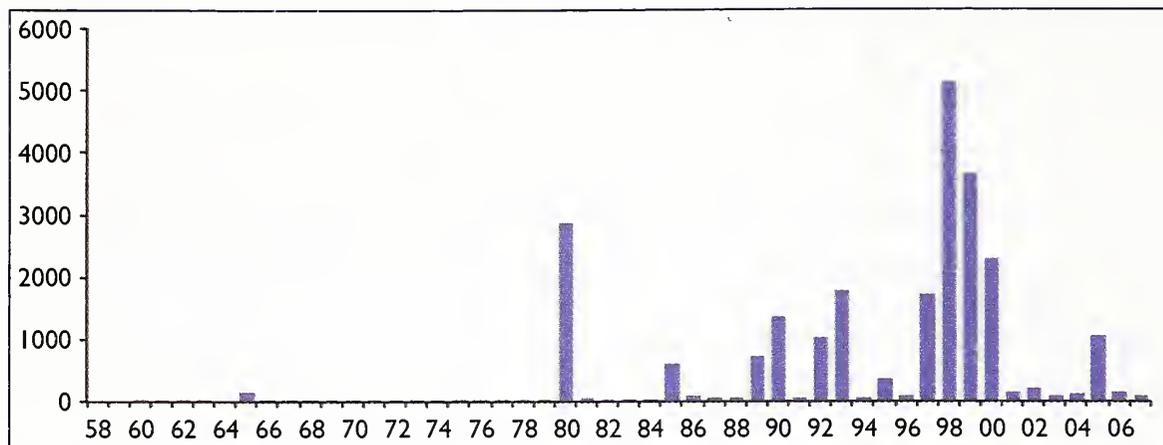


Fig. 12. Annual totals of Cory's Shearwaters in Britain, 1958–2007.

There have been several years since 1980 when exceptionally high numbers of Cory's Shearwaters have been recorded, notably the four consecutive years from 1997 to 2000 (see fig. 12). Annual totals during 2004–07 were less noteworthy, and only in 2005 exceeded 1,000, which has now become the *de facto* benchmark figure of a 'Cory's year'.

As usual the majority were seen off Cornwall (719 during the four years under review), followed by Devon (399) and Scilly (90), with a further 111 seen from pelagic trips in sea area Sole. This species is now recorded regularly almost all round the British coast, although it remains a rarity in Scotland, especially away from the Forth Estuary and Orkney. In England, it is seen more frequently along North Sea coasts than from the central/eastern English Channel coast.

The above records do not differentiate between the two races of Cory's Shearwater – nominate *diomedea* and *C. d. borealis*. Since January 2013, BOURC and BB have treated these taxa as distinct species and both are on the British List, with Cory's Shearwater becoming *C. borealis*, and what was the nominate form now becoming Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea*. Scopoli's Shearwater is extremely rare in Britain but of course it is possible that some have passed unnoticed among the much larger numbers of the commoner Cory's reported here.

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
540	71 (2=)	44 (4)	1988/103/1    1987/71/2=

Wilson's Storm-petrel was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005 in the light of regular sightings from pelagics off Scilly (*Brit. Birds* 100: 25–26). Fig. 13 shows that numbers have increased since the late 1990s, although it is less clear to what extent multiple sightings of the same individual on different days might have swelled the totals. For example, some well-photographed individuals with distinctive moult patterns have been recorded on more than one day. For most birds, it is impossible to differentiate individuals and all daily counts are taken to be new birds unless there is clear evidence to the contrary.

All bar three of the 115 birds recorded in 2006 and 2007 were seen on pelagic trips off Scilly, mostly up to 20 km south of the islands. The remaining three were seen from Hartlepool Headland, Cleveland, on 7th September 2006; St Ives, Cornwall, on 1st October 2006; and Pendeen Watch, Cornwall, on 4th November 2006. Most land-based observations have been made later in

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67 <1
1968–77 <1
1978–87 9
1988–97 14
1998–2007 32

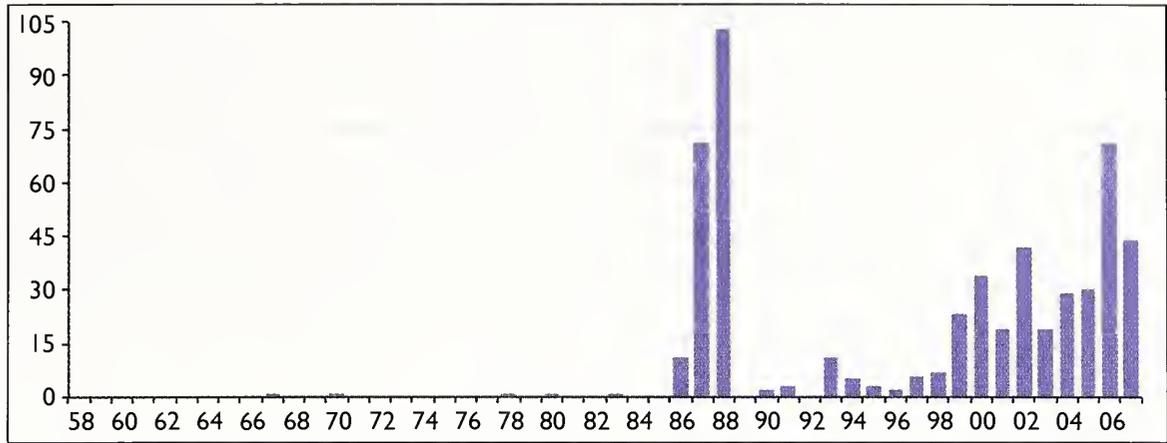


Fig. 13. Annual totals of Wilson's Storm-petrels in Britain, 1958–2007.

the year than those at sea. Of 23 records in September or later between 1958 and 2007, 17 were from headlands, whereas during the summer months (June to August) just three were seen from land.

### Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
519	11 (15)	12 (13=)	37 (3)	13 (10=)	1990/61/1      1987/53/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67 2
1968–77 6
1978–87 13
1988–97 17
1998–2007 14

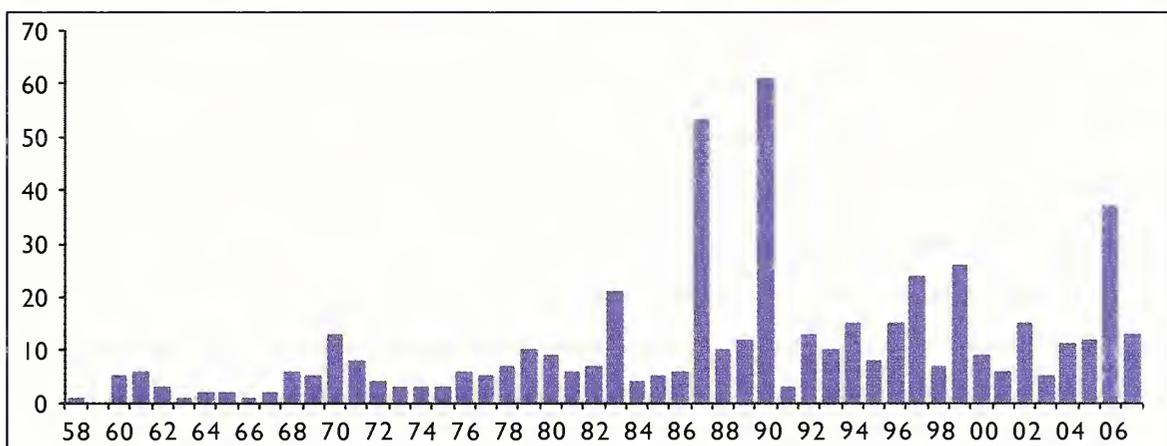


Fig. 14. Annual totals of Night Herons in Britain, 1958–2007.

The annual total of Night Herons in Britain has exceeded 15 in only six years since 1958 (fig. 14), so the influx of 37 birds in 2006 was notable, and the third-best total on record. In that year, the majority were in southwest England, with nine in both Cornwall and Scilly and five in Devon. Some made it farther north, including two in Scotland (at Port Logan, Dumfries & Galloway, on 13th March, and Bridge of Allan, Upper Forth, on 21st May). The first of the 2006 influx was at Polperro, Cornwall, on 3rd March, followed by no fewer than 16 between 13th and 19th March, including all the Scilly birds (the last of which was seen on 1st April). More typically, spring arrivals are spread more evenly from March to early June.



Kit Day

236. Night Heron, Seaton, Devon, March 2006.

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
425	33 (4)	91 (1)	2003/52/2      2002/51/3

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
0
1968–77
<1
1978–87
2
1988–97
6
1998–2007
34

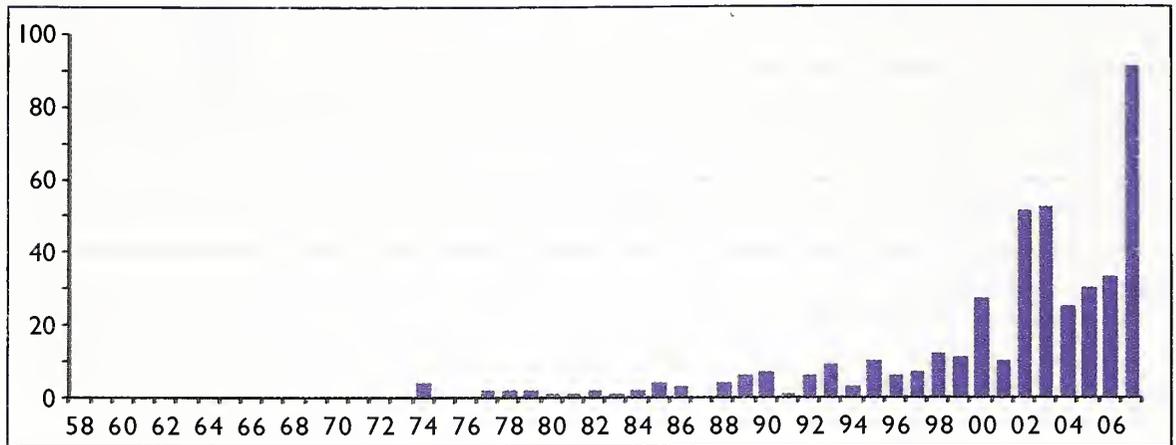


Fig. 15. Annual totals of Great White Egrets in Britain, 1958–2007.

The increase in records of the Great White Egret in Britain since the early 1990s has been remarkable, matching the species’ spread north and west across Europe (Anderson *et al.* 2013; Holt 2013; fig. 15). Even when Great White Egret was a great rarity, it was still difficult for BBRC to judge the annual totals of this highly mobile species accurately. Without a national body to collate records (it was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005), it is almost impossible to track movements between recording areas and estimate the number of individuals. Based on county reports, 91 individuals were recorded in 2007, but this is surely an overestimate.

Records in 2006 and 2007 were widely scattered across England, with a few in Wales and Scotland. There were 18 in Norfolk and ten in Suffolk, but inland counties were also well-represented (see fig. 16). There have been several British records of birds colour-ringed at Lac de Grand Lieu, Loire-Atlantique, France, and one ringed there on 2nd June 2007 was seen at Marston Meysey, Wiltshire, on 10th–22nd August 2007. New birds arrived in every month of the year during 2006–07, although there were few new arrivals during the first three months of the year and a peak between late September and mid October (8, 12 and 15 birds in the three ten-day periods from 20th September to 20th October).

It has been suspected that individuals of the North American race *A. a. egretta* may occasionally reach Britain in late autumn. Although there are currently no formally accepted records, observers should be aware of this possibility and not dismiss any Great White Egret that appears to be slightly ‘unusual’.

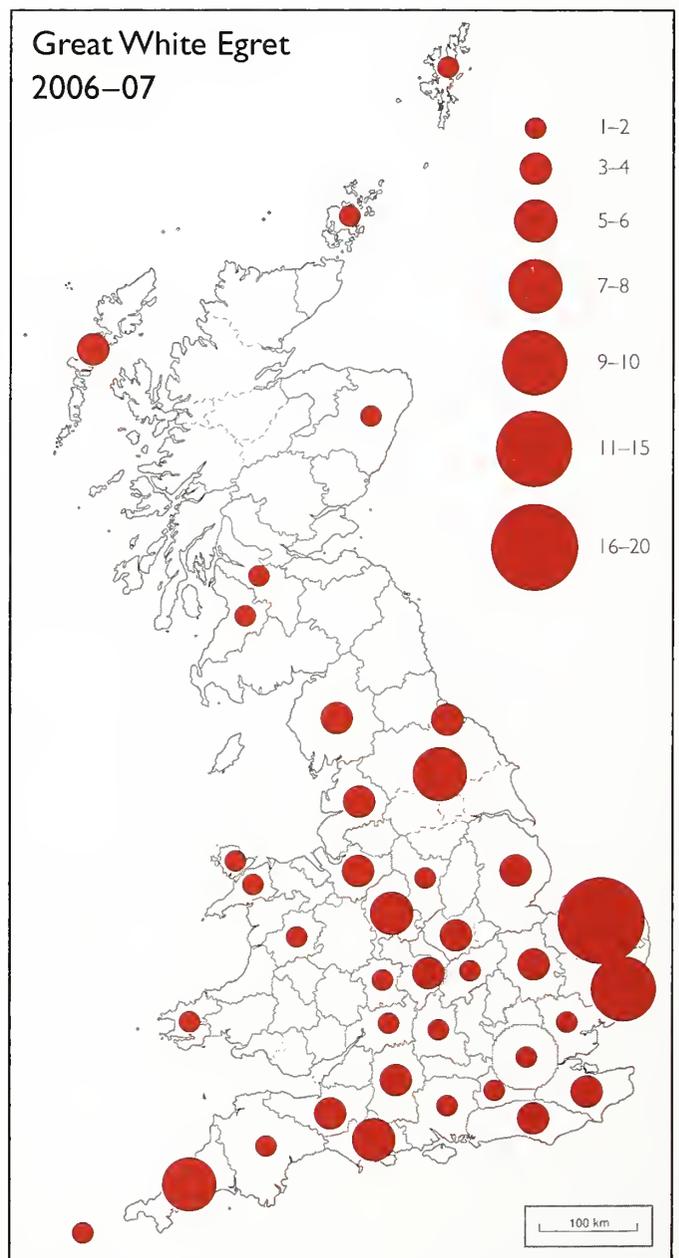


Fig. 16. Distribution of Great White Egrets in Britain, 2006–07.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
852	16 (27=)	22 (14=)	32 (2=)	19 (20=)	1987/35/1      1999/32/2=

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
5
1968–77
19
1978–87
21
1988–97
19
1998–2007
22

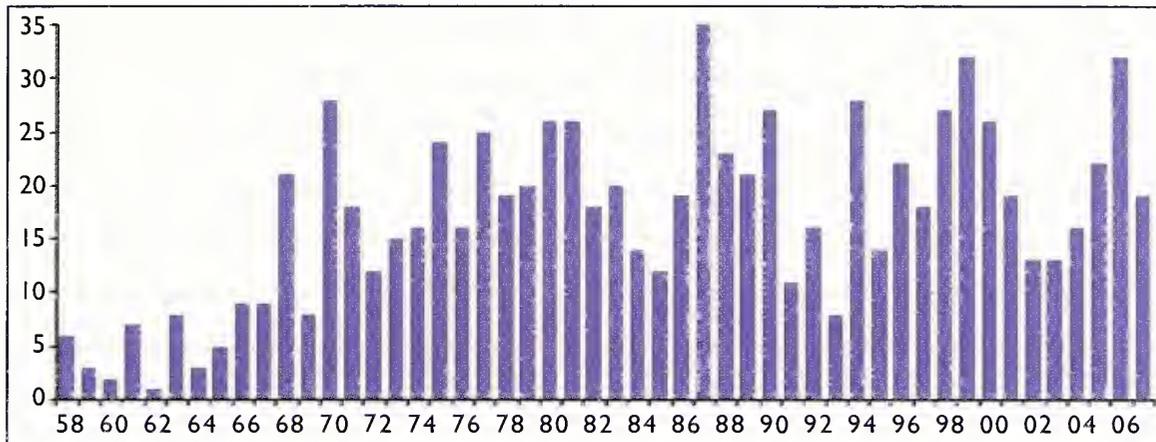


Fig. 17. Annual totals of Purple Herons in Britain, 1958–2007.

During the four decades prior to 2007, annual totals of Purple Herons varied rather little (fig. 17). During the review period, there were three unremarkable years but the total of 32 birds in 2006 is the equal-second highest (and coincided with a particularly good year for Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax*; see above).

Typically, the vast majority appeared to the south and east of a line between the Severn and the Humber (fig. 18). The most favoured county was Norfolk with 15, followed by Cornwall with nine and Suffolk with seven. The only Scottish record was a bird at Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, on 3rd June 2004 – only the 18th in Scotland during the 50 years since 1958 (compared with 852 in Britain as a whole).

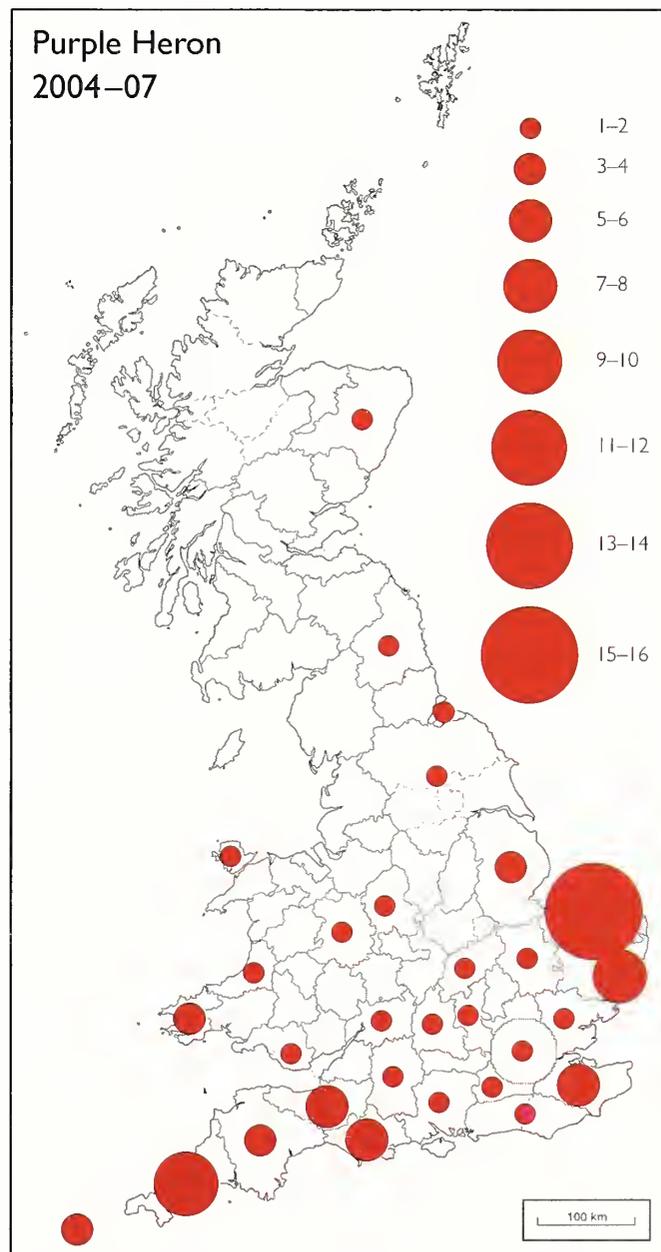
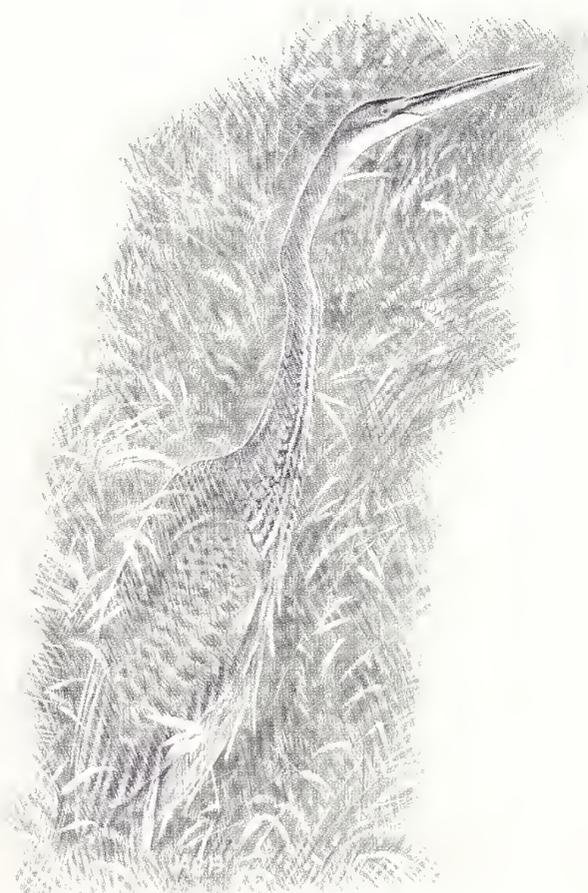


Fig. 18. Distribution of Purple Herons in Britain, 2004–07.

Jack Ashton-Booth



White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
897	77 (1)	67 (2)	36 (8)	16 (20=)	2002/64/3      1998/56/4

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
2
1968–77
13
1978–87
15
1988–97
17
1998–2007
43

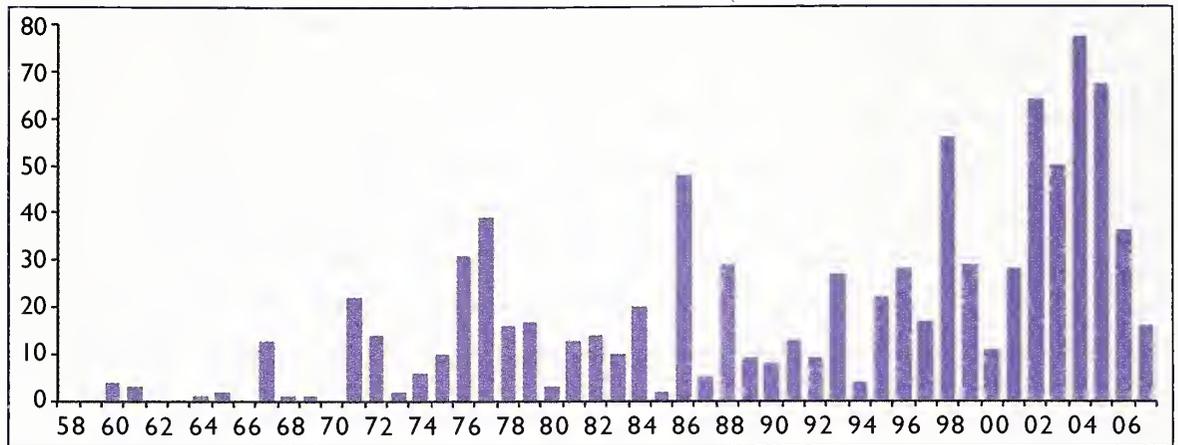


Fig. 19. Annual totals of White Storks in Britain, 1958–2007.

Like Great White Egret, this is a conspicuous and mobile species and it is likely that there is some duplication of records here. In general, if circumstantial evidence suggests that an individual has been seen elsewhere, the records are assumed to refer to the same bird. Escaped birds, especially from Harewood in Yorkshire, add to the difficulty of establishing annual totals. In addition, the reintroduction programmes in many European countries, including France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Switzerland and Sweden, are likely to account for some of the British sightings, although most of these birds wear an alpha-numeric colour ring. Given the interest in this species, many genuinely wild birds are also likely to be colour-ringed. A well-publicised nesting attempt at Horbury, Yorkshire, in 2004 involved a free-flying male from Belgium and a rehabilitated colour-ringed female from France (where c. 3,500 have been colour-ringed since 2001); this pair wandered widely around England before settling in Yorkshire.

With these caveats in mind, it is still clear that the period 2000–05 saw a substantial increase in the number of White Storks arriving in Britain (fig. 19). It seems reasonable to assume that this change mirrors the increase in the west European population since 1990 (BirdLife International 2004).

During 2004–07, this species was widely recorded in Britain, though with an overall bias to the south and east. The top county was Kent, with 22 records, twice as many as Sussex, which was second with 11. Two birds, at least one of which had been colour-ringed in France, were tracked from The Fleet, Dorset, on 30th August 2004, west to West Penwith in Cornwall on 31st, where they roosted overnight. They were seen on St Martin’s, Scilly, by 12.30 pm on 1st September, before returning to Cornwall that afternoon, after which they were ‘lost’.

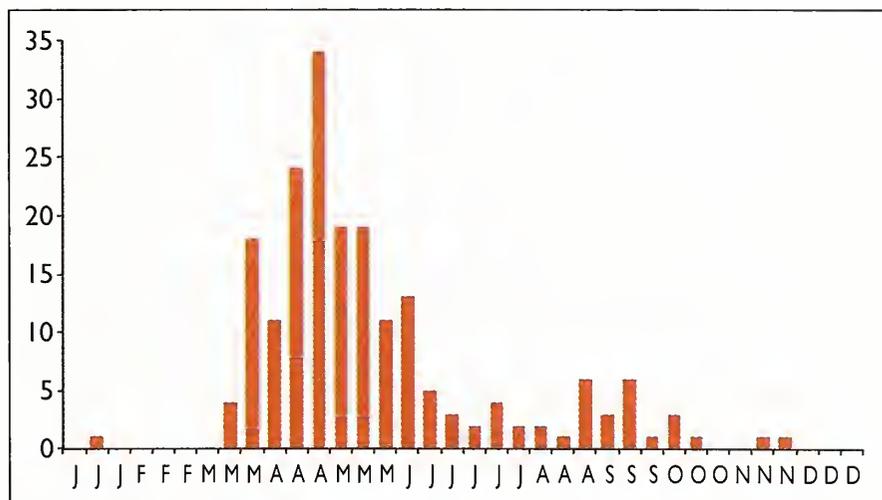


Fig. 20. Records of presumed newly arrived White Storks in Britain by ten-day period, 1958–2007.

The data show mid to late April as the peak time for arrivals in the UK, consistent with spring overshooting (fig. 20). Birds returning to west European breeding sites cross the Strait of Gibraltar and so might be more likely to arrive on the south coast of England, as opposed to east European birds, which travel via the Middle East before heading

northwest across the continent.

After leaving their breeding areas, White Storks have traditionally migrated to Africa, but in recent years many have begun to overwinter in Spain and Portugal; for example, the numbers remaining in Spain increased from an estimated 7,500 in 1995 to some 32,000 in 2004 ([www.iberianature.com](http://www.iberianature.com)). In the same period, White Storks that winter in Africa have been returning to Portugal increasingly earlier, and the majority are now arriving over a month earlier than they did in the 1980s (for example, see [www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/stork-tracking](http://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/stork-tracking)). Perhaps these changes in wintering behaviour are related to an increase in British occurrences?

### Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
4,871	159 (10)	173 (6)	195 (4=)	111 (13)	2000/2,188/1    1999/203/2

Annual means 1986–2007
1986–90 64
1991–95 118
1996–2000 554
2001–07 171

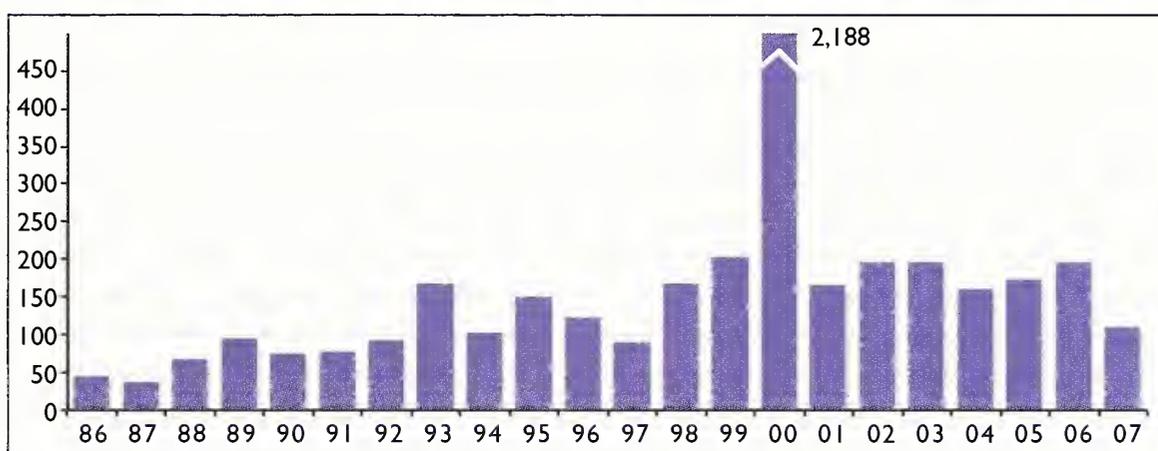


Fig. 21. Annual totals of Honey-buzzards in Britain, 1986–2007.

There were no outstanding years during 2004–07, but the species was recorded in nearly every recording area in England, and around half of all Welsh and Scottish ones. Kent, with 120 birds, was the top county, followed by Norfolk with 83. Several records were generated from birds carrying satellite-tracking tags, for example two sibling juveniles that roosted at Corselaw Forest and Mainshill Wood, Clyde, some ten days apart in September 2006. There was a clear peak in spring records during May, and autumn migrants in late August and September; claims of this species outside these periods should be well supported.

### Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
393	19 (3=)	18 (6)	1994/32/1    2003/24/2

The Black Kite was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005 and this was followed by good years in both 2006 and 2007. Most records were along the south coast (including Scilly), and the eastern half of England south of the Humber; seven in Kent and four in Norfolk were the top county totals. In 2006, a Black Kite paired with a Red Kite *M. milvus* in northern Scotland and fledged two young (Holling *et al.* 2009). One in Yorkshire and one other in Scotland (Hirsel, Borders, on 8th May 2007) were the only records north of the Humber, and there was none in Wales. The ‘Black-eared Kite’ *Milvus migrans lineatus* found in Lincolnshire on 2nd November 2006, and which subsequently spent the winter of 2006/07 in Lincolnshire and Norfolk, is still under consideration with BBRC and is included here for completeness.

Annual means 1958–2007
<u>1958–67</u> <1
<u>1968–77</u> 2
<u>1978–87</u> 8
<u>1988–97</u> 16
<u>1998–2007</u> 14

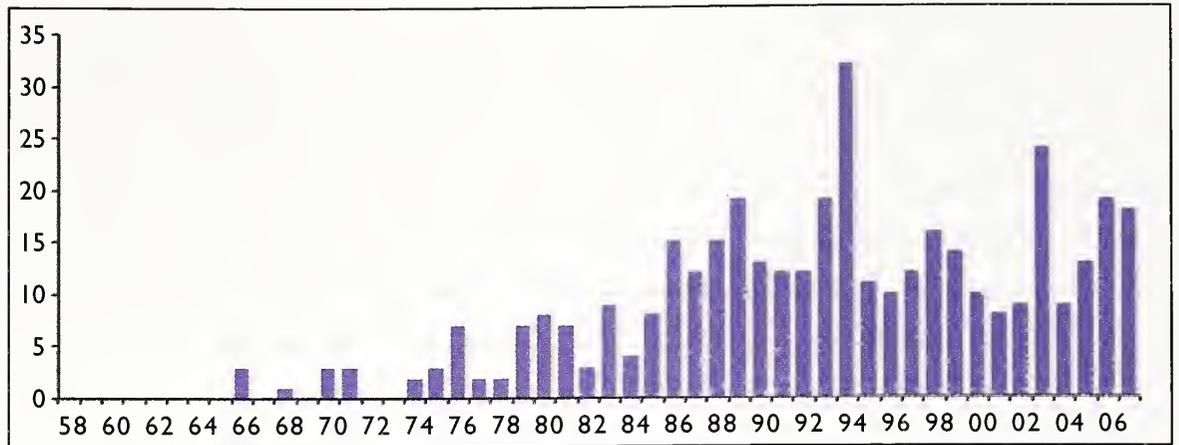


Fig. 22. Annual totals of Black Kites in Britain during 1958–2007.

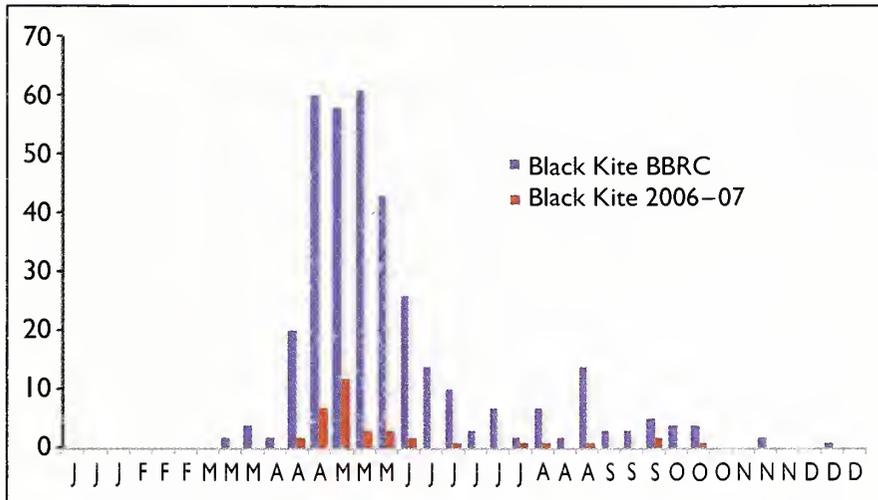


Fig. 23. Records of Black Kites in Britain during 1958–2005 (blue) and 2006–07 (red), by ten-day period.

When Black Kite records were assessed by BBRC, the species was notorious for having one of the lowest acceptance-to-submission ratios of any species. Fig. 23 shows that the pattern of arrivals in 2006 and 2007 is comparable with those from the earlier period, which suggests that county committees are applying similar criteria to BBRC when assessing records.

### Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
1,235	65 (6)	47 (10)	26 (18)	37 (13)	1994/255/1    1998/111/2

Annual means 1986–2007
<u>1986–90</u> 43
<u>1991–95</u> 86
<u>1996–2000</u> 60
<u>2001–07</u> 42

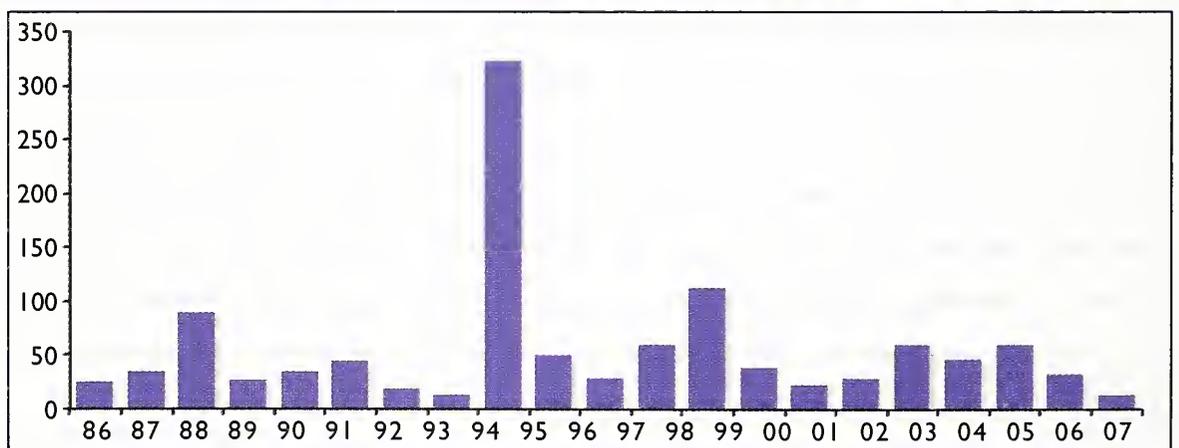


Fig. 24. Annual winter totals of Rough-legged Buzzards in Britain, 1986/87–2006/07.

Traditionally, data for Rough-legged Buzzard have been presented for winter periods rather than by calendar-year. Here, annual totals are given in the tables above, while the totals for each winter are shown in fig. 24. There were no major influxes during the review period, and winter 2006/07 was an exceptionally poor one for this species.

Only four counties recorded ten or more new individuals during 2004–07. Norfolk, with 79, was well ahead of any other county, followed by Suffolk (15) and Kent and Lincolnshire (both with ten) (fig. 25).

New arrivals peaked in mid to late October, with a less conspicuous spring peak in late April and early May. The mix of wintering and passage birds makes it difficult to decide whether some records relate to new arrivals or not, although many wintering Rough-legs are watched daily, so departure dates are often reasonably accurate. However, tracking birds on the move is rarely possible, so in most cases each record is treated as a new bird.

Jim Lawrence



237. First-summer male Red-footed Falcon, Stewartby, Bedfordshire, June 2006.

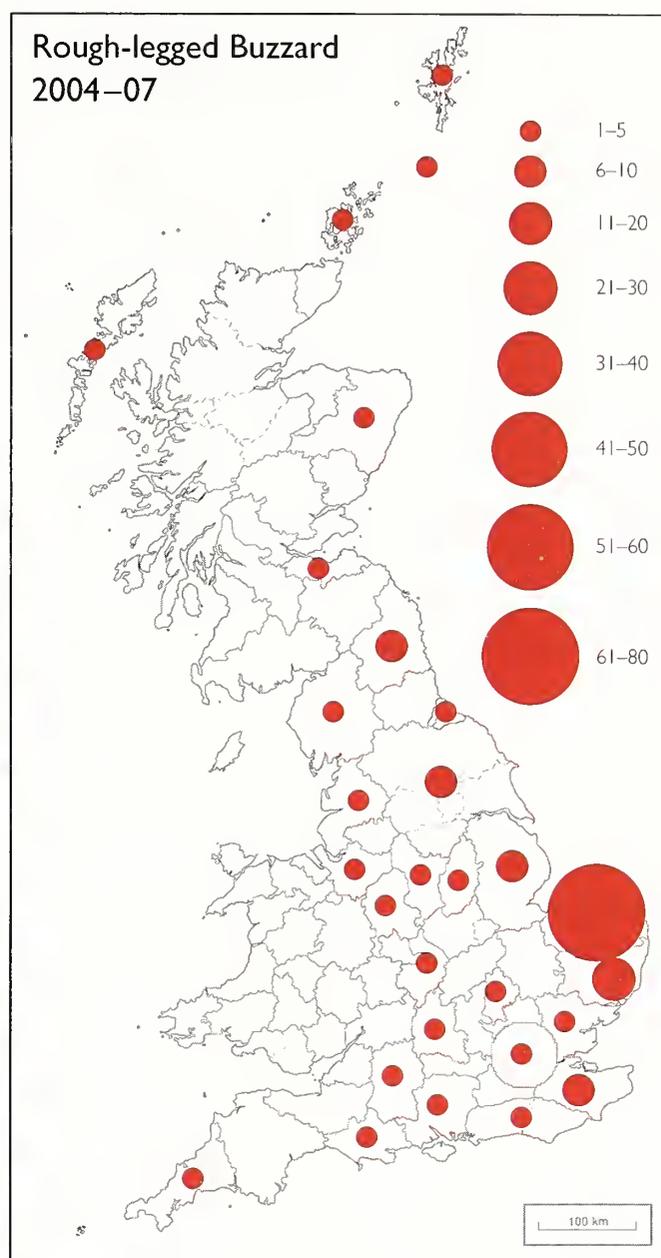


Fig. 25. Rough-legged Buzzards in Britain, 2004–07.

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
713	11 (23=)	8 (32=)	1992/125/1    1973/42/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
6
1968–77
13
1978–87
13
1988–97
27
1998–2007
14

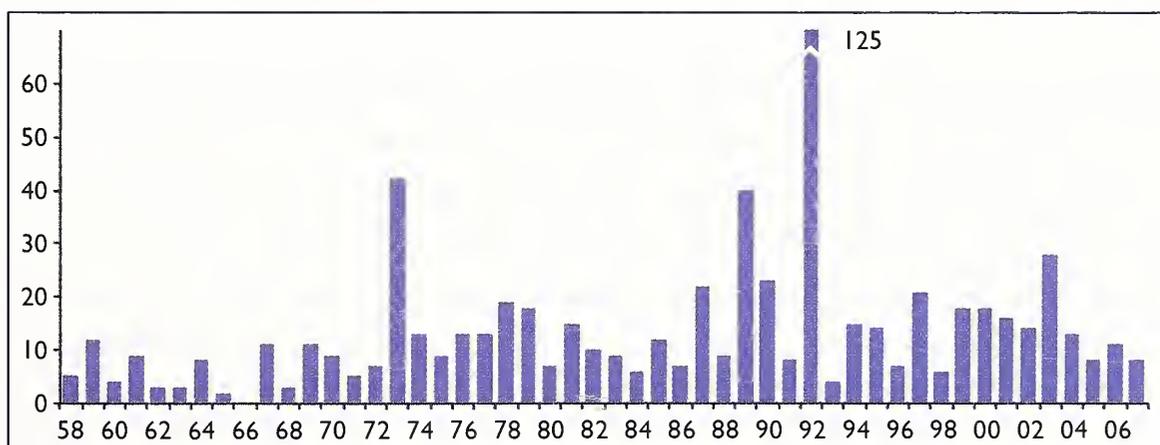


Fig. 26. Annual totals of Red-footed Falcons in Britain, 1958–2007.

Following this species’ removal from the BBRC list at the end of 2005, the number of records in both 2006 and 2007 were distinctly unremarkable, with the ten-year total (to 2007) slipping back

below the 150 threshold. Typically, most (13 of the total 19) were seen in southern and eastern England; the records are given in full below.

## 2006

Bedfordshire Marston Vale, first-summer male, 10th–16th June.

Berkshire Moor Green Lakes, first-summer female, 15th–17th July.

Cambridgeshire Nene Washes, first-summer male, 6th–11th May.

Orkney Burgar Hill, immature male, 25th July.

Oxfordshire Otmoor, 15th July.

Pembrokeshire Bicton, male, 17th June.

Shetland Bakkasetter, female, 10th June, presumed same Fladdabister, 13th June. Collafirth, first-summer male, 12th June.

Suffolk Orfordness, first-summer male, 15th–18th August. Minsmere, first-summer female, 3rd–9th September.

Yorkshire Spurn, male, 11th June.

## 2007

Highland Tarbat Ness, 15th October; Bundalloch, Dornie, Skye & Lochalsh, adult female, 20th–27th October.

Isle of Wight Bembridge and Brading Marshes, 28th–29th July.

Kent Dungeness, first-summer male, 3rd–5th May. Sandwich Bay, adult female, 5th August.

Norfolk Sea Palling, female, 19th May.

Suffolk Landguard Point, first-summer female, 28th June.

Yorkshire Spurn, female, 11th June (a remarkable coincidence of dates with 2006).

## Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
1,325	54 (13)	63 (10)	37 (20)	38 (17=)	1995/119/1      1989/84/2

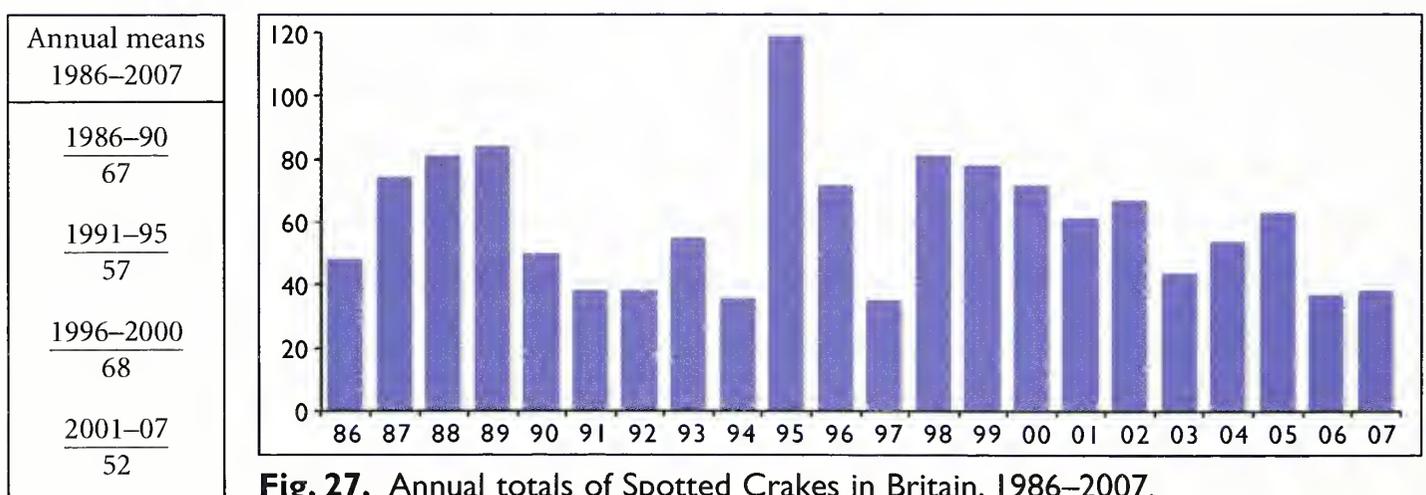


Fig. 27. Annual totals of Spotted Crakes in Britain, 1986–2007.

Spotted Crakes on migration are easily overlooked, so the numbers reported in any year probably do not reflect the true numbers occurring. On average, low water levels tend to encourage more birds to appear in open situations (leading to more records). During the review period, there were two rather average years (2004 and 2005) and two poor years (2006 and 2007; fig. 27).

Spring records accounted for 20% of the four-year total, and there is probably some overlap between these records and birds reported to the RBBP. In autumn, there was a distinct southerly bias to the records, with 35 birds (24% of the total) in Cornwall (21) and Scilly (14), 14 in Kent and also in Yorkshire. The widespread records from inland sites are unusual for a passage migrant and some might conceivably relate to British-bred birds rather than continental immigrants (fig. 28).

Gary Thoburn



238. Spotted Crake, Combe Hill, Gloucestershire, September 2007.

Mike Wallen



239. Common Crane, Cropredy, Oxfordshire, March 2007.

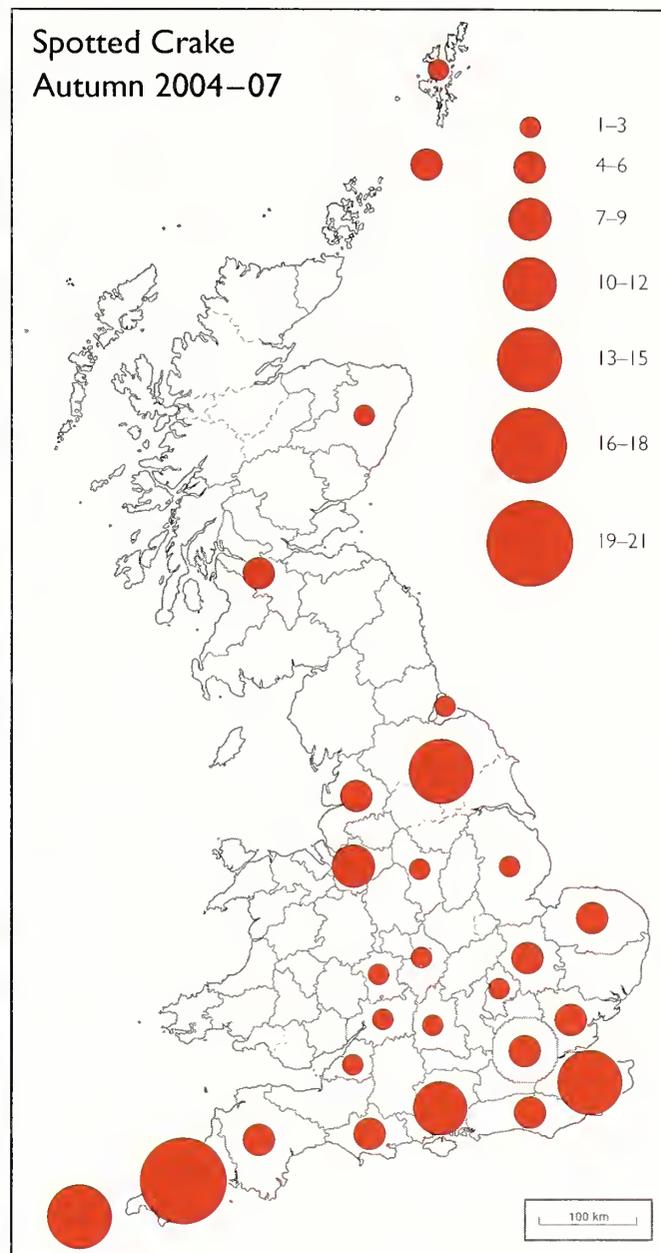


Fig. 28. Distribution of Spotted Crakes in Britain in autumn (August–November), 2004–07.

### Common Crane *Grus grus*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
2,904	82 (11)	43 (18=)	120 (5)	101 (8)	1963/685/1    2002/267/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
75
1968–77
12
1978–87
54
1988–97
36
1998–2007
113

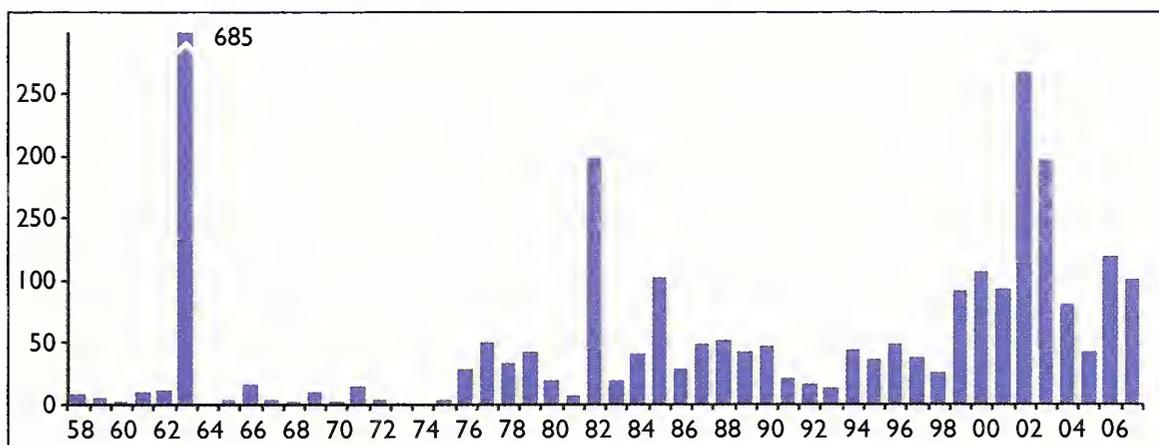
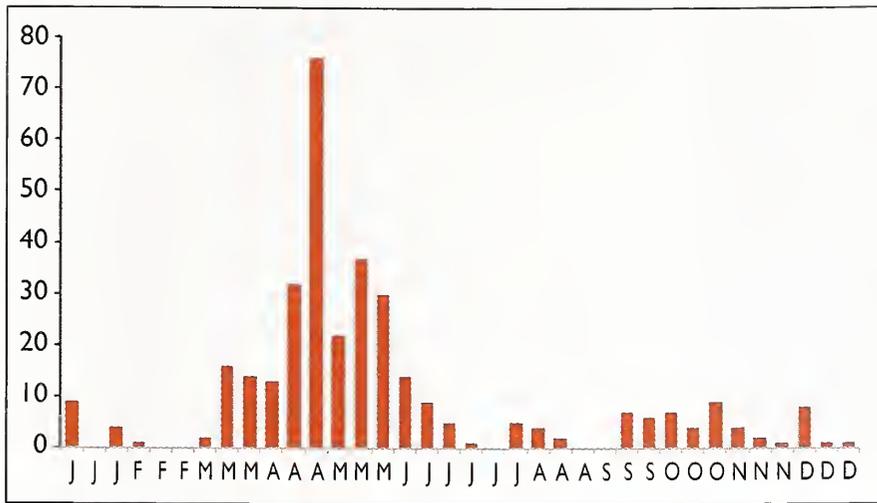


Fig. 29. Annual totals of Common Cranes in Britain, 1958–2007.

The Common Crane is another conspicuous and wide-ranging species, and the records listed here no doubt involve some degree of duplication. However, the fact that Cranes sometimes



**Fig. 30.** Presumed newly arrived Common Cranes in Britain during 2004–07, by ten-day period.

travel in small parties makes it a little easier to track at least some individuals. For example, a group of four, seen initially in Yorkshire on 7th January 2006, was thought to have moved north through Cleveland before crossing the Pennines to Haweswater, Cumbria, on 28th January. From there they moved south through Lancashire & N Merseyside to Shotwick, Flintshire, still on 28th, while on 29th January they appeared at Broseley, Shropshire,

after which the trail went cold.

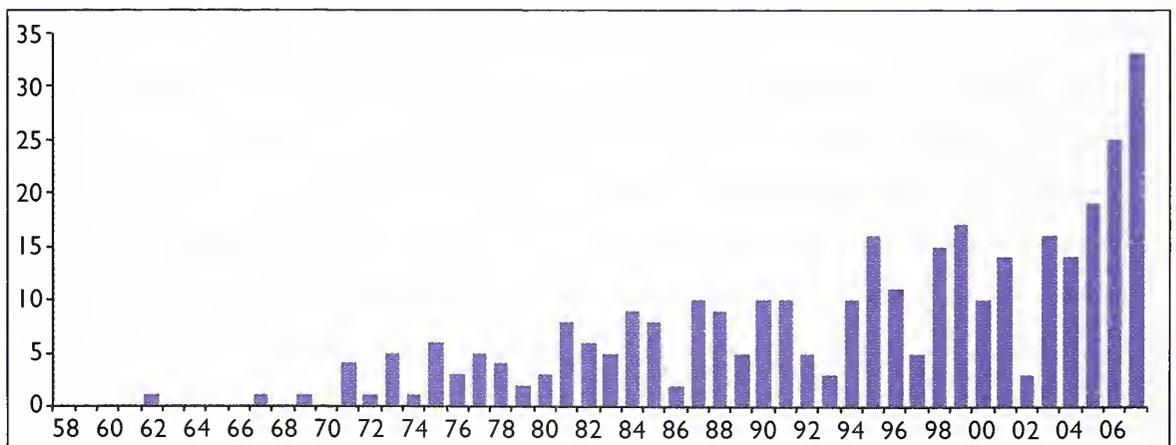
Common Cranes have been breeding in Britain for many years, with up to ten pairs nesting in the review period (see Holling *et al.* 2009). To try and eliminate wandering residents in Norfolk from the data presented here, only the more obvious migrants from that county have been included in this report. Following two bumper years, in 2002 and 2003, numbers were more modest in 2004–07, although 2006, with 120 records, was the fifth-best year on record and 2007, with 101, was the eighth-best (fig. 29). The influx of autumn 1963 remains unprecedented, however (Harber 1964).

The lion’s share of new arrivals were seen along the east coast, with Suffolk (53), Norfolk (50) and Yorkshire (42) the top three counties, but new birds were seen in almost all recording areas. The reintroduction programme planned for this species in southwest England will make it increasingly challenging to keep track of wandering individuals, and it might be difficult to maintain this species in the report. The pattern of arrival in 2004–07 shows a marked peak in late April, which fits well with the overall pattern since 1958 (fig. 30).

### American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
335	25 (2)	33 (1)	2005/19/3      1999/17/4

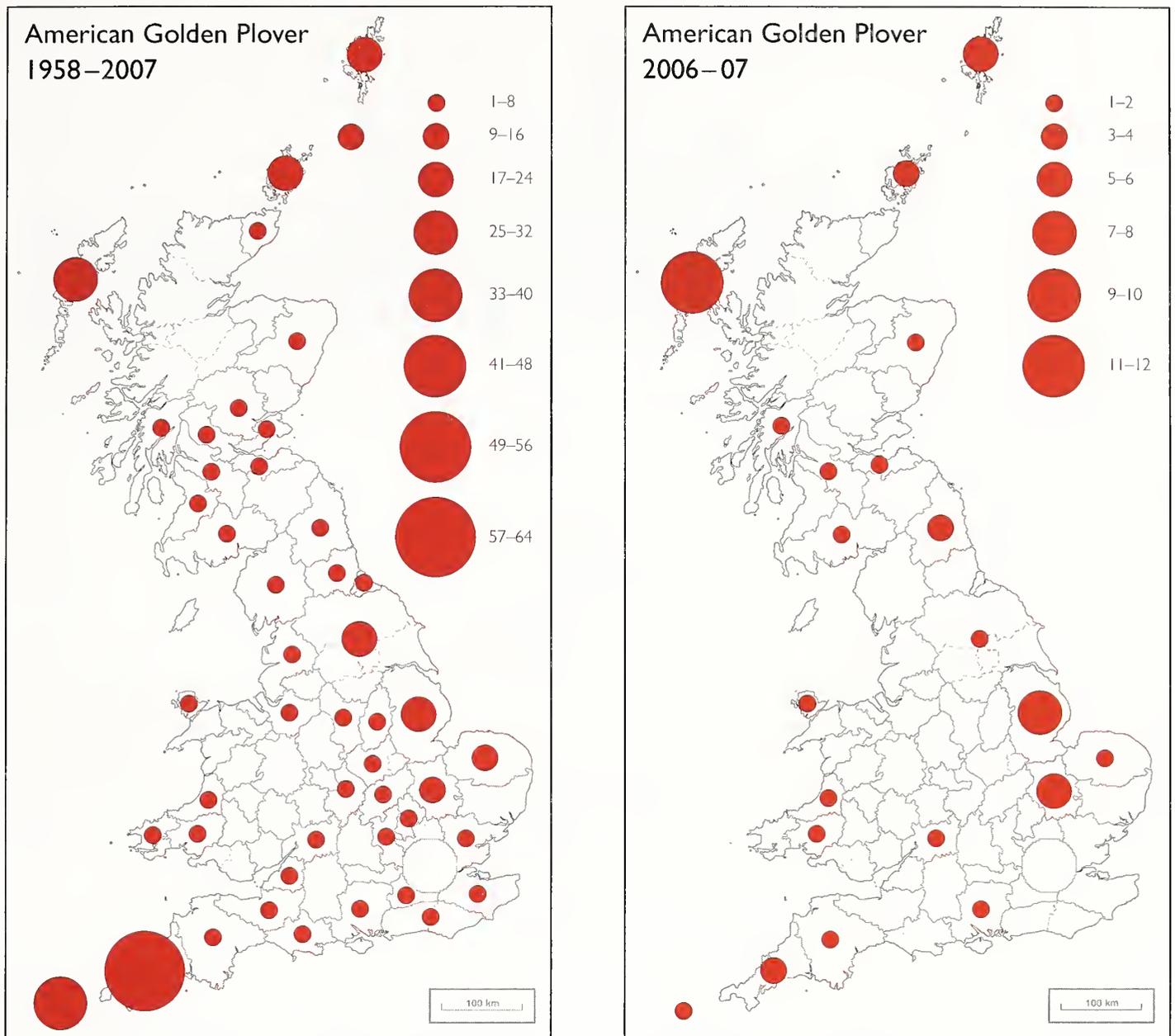
Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
<1
1968–77
3
1978–87
6
1988–97
9
1998–2007
16



**Fig. 31.** Annual totals of American Golden Plovers in Britain, 1958–2007.

This species made its final appearance in the BBRC report in 2005, a year which saw the highest annual total then recorded (19). That record was broken in 2006, when 25 were seen, and again in 2007, with 33. This continues a steady increase stretching back to the early 1970s (fig. 31).

There have been more records in Cornwall than any other county since 1958, with 59 (18% of the total to 2007), but during 2006–07 the Outer Hebrides was the top recording area, with 12



**Fig. 32.** Distribution of American Golden Plovers in Britain during 1958–2007 (left) and 2006–07 (right).

(21% of the period total). Indeed, there were only four in Cornwall and Scilly in the two years; even more surprising was the concentration in some eastern counties, with eight in Lincolnshire and five in Cambridgeshire (see fig. 32).

All but one arrived in autumn, the exception being a bird at Cemlyn Bay, Anglesey, on 21st–22nd April 2006. The earliest in autumn was a bird on the Monach Isles, Outer Hebrides, on 14th July 2007, the latest was at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, from 28th November to 5th December 2007, and the majority of birds turned up in October.

### Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
648	24 (12=)	20 (19=)	21 (17=)	24 (12=)	1993/59/1      1991/42/2

The four years in the review period were fairly consistent (fig. 33). As usual, most records were in southern England, 24 of them (appropriately) in Kent, with Dorset (14) and Norfolk (10) being the only other counties to reach double figures. There were sightings in every month from March to November, with 29 of the 89 records in May.

The latest bird during the review period, one on South Uist, Outer Hebrides, from 10th November until 19th December 2007, was the first for the Outer Hebrides and only the second

Annual means 1986–2007
1986–90 30
1991–95 39
1996–2000 31
2001–07 21

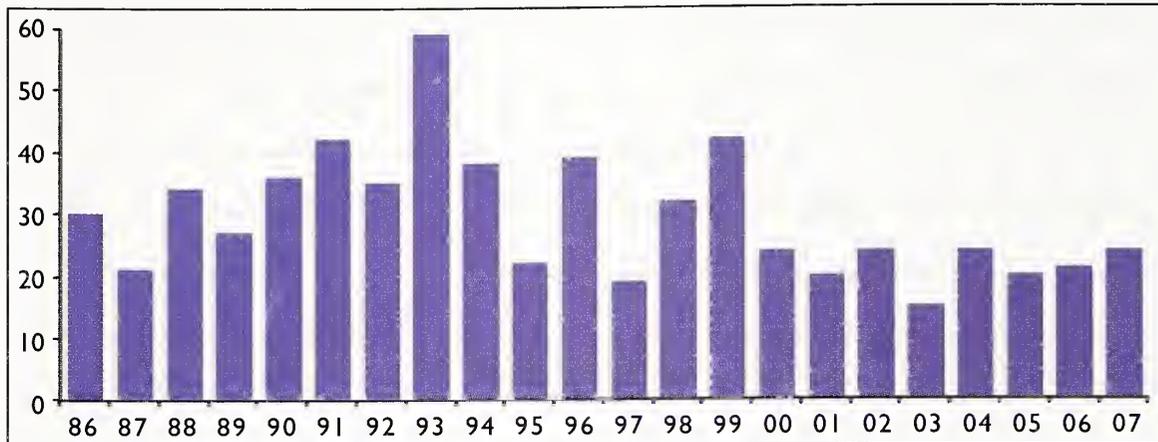


Fig. 33. Annual totals of Kentish Plovers in Britain, 1986–2007.



John Grist

Scottish record in autumn. It was found after many days of westerly weather and there was some speculation as to whether it might have originated in North America. Another Kentish Plover north of the border, a female in Shetland on 24th–27th April 2004, was only the second for Shetland and the 15th record for Scotland; and it was the only other bird north of Yorkshire during the review period.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Total 1968–2007	No. 2004 (rank/40)	No. 2005 (rank/40)	No. 2006 (rank/40)	No. 2007 (rank/40)	Other annual maxima 1968–2007 (year/number/rank)
3,856	309 (1)	100 (15=)	75 (30)	59 (34)	1987/176/2    2001/142/3

Annual means 1968–2007
1968–77 71
1978–87 97
1988–97 96
1998–2007 121

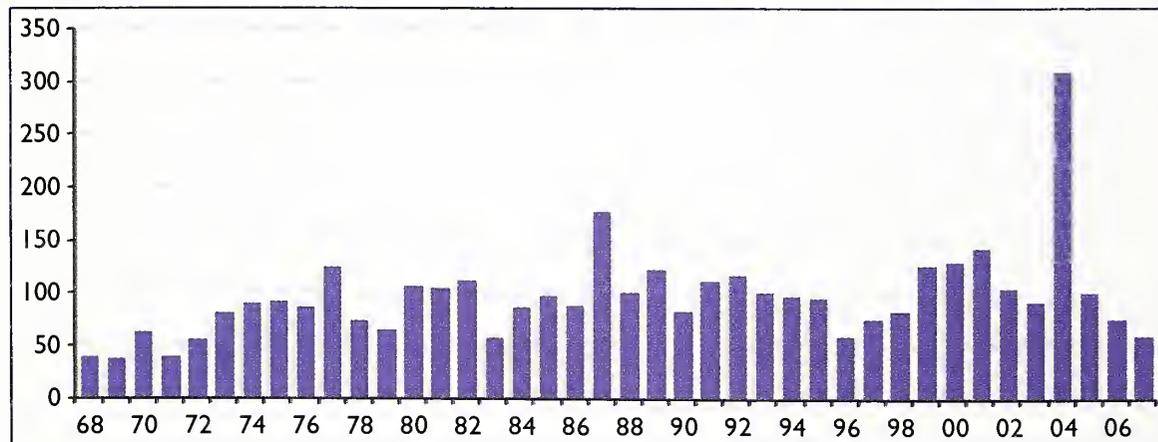
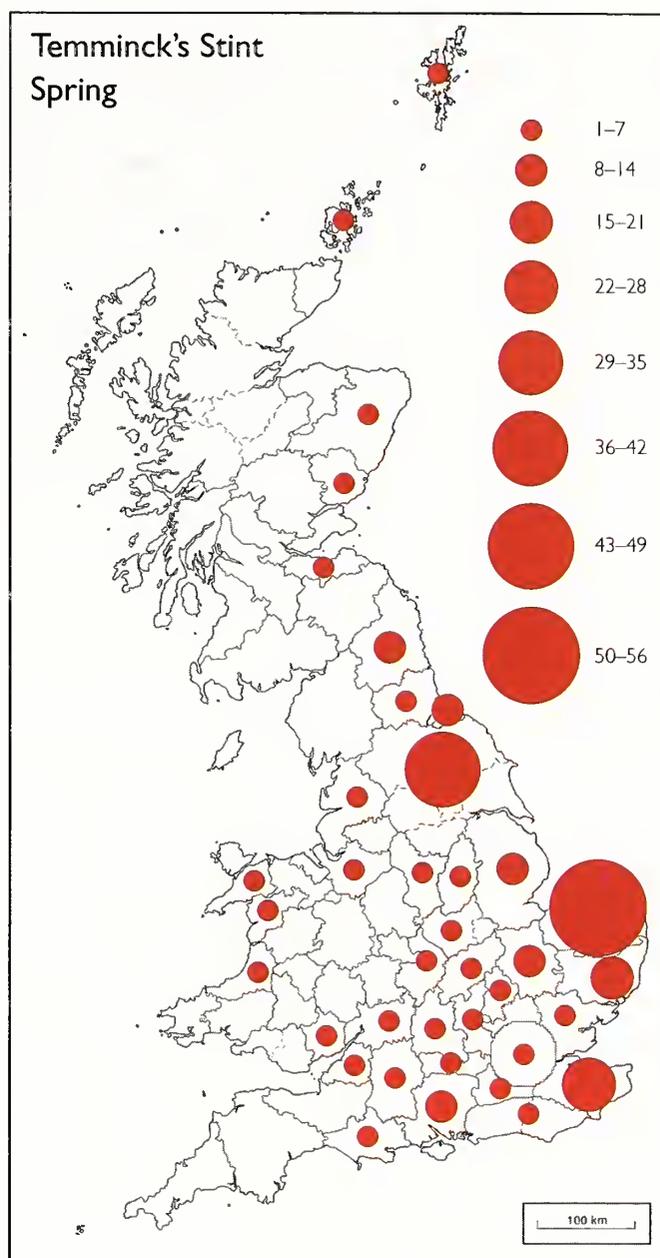


Fig. 34. Annual totals of Temminck's Stints in Britain, 1968–2007.

As fig. 34 shows, the years 2005–07 were unremarkable for Temminck’s Stints in Britain, but in contrast 2004 was exceptional, with some 309 birds reported (the previous record was the 176 in 1987). A major influx in spring 2004, with 257 recorded from April to June, accounted for the great majority of (83%) of the annual total. An impressive total of 53 was racked up in Norfolk, with Yorkshire being the next most productive county on 35, followed by Kent with 22 and Suffolk with 20.

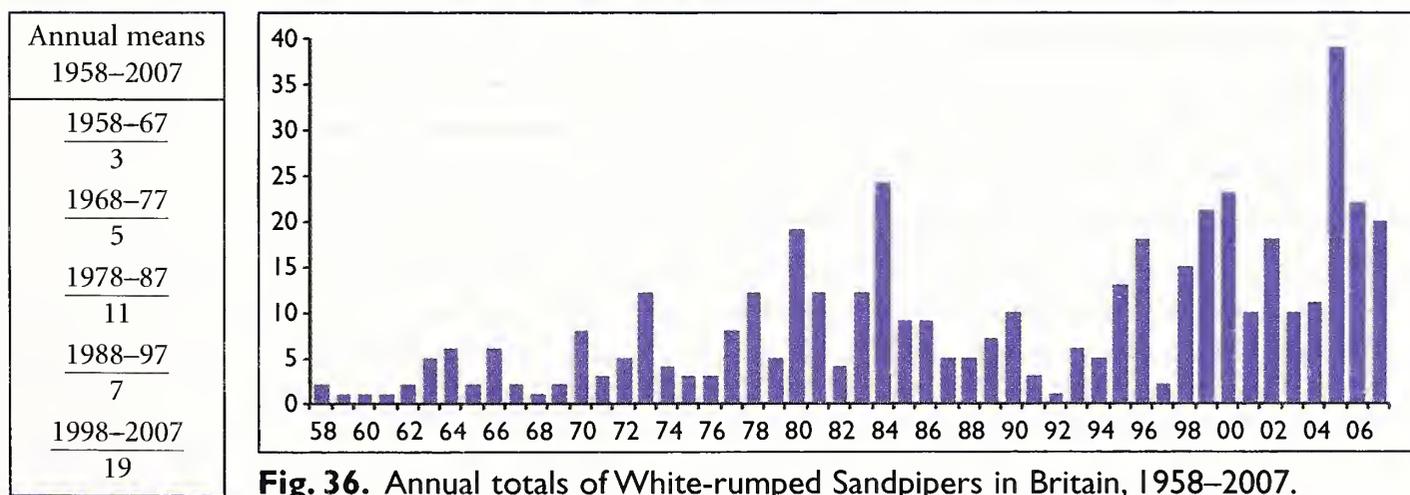
Fig. 35 shows that very few reached western Britain during the spring 2004 influx, with none in Devon, Cornwall and Scilly, none in western Scotland, and just four in Wales (Broadwater, Meirionnydd, 10th May; Conwy RSPB, Caernarfonshire, 15th May; and two at Ynys-hir, Ceredigion, on 17th May). The main arrival took place during 13th–22nd May, with more than ten new birds being found on all but one day in that period, including 35 on 15th May and 20+ new birds on 16th, 18th and 19th May.

**Fig. 35.** Distribution of Temminck’s Stints in Britain during spring (April–June) 2004.



White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
447	22 (4)	20 (6)	2005/39/1    1984/24/2



**Fig. 36.** Annual totals of White-rumped Sandpipers in Britain, 1958–2007.

This species’ final year as a BBRC rarity, 2005, was marked by a record-breaking 39 individuals. Good numbers arrived in the two subsequent years too: 2006 was the fourth-best year, with 22, and 2007 was the sixth-best year, with 20 (fig. 36). The distribution of birds in 2006–07 was strikingly biased to the east and north, with no fewer than 12 of the 42 birds in Norfolk, seven on Shetland/Fair Isle and three in Orkney.



240. Juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper, Salthouse, Norfolk, October 2006.

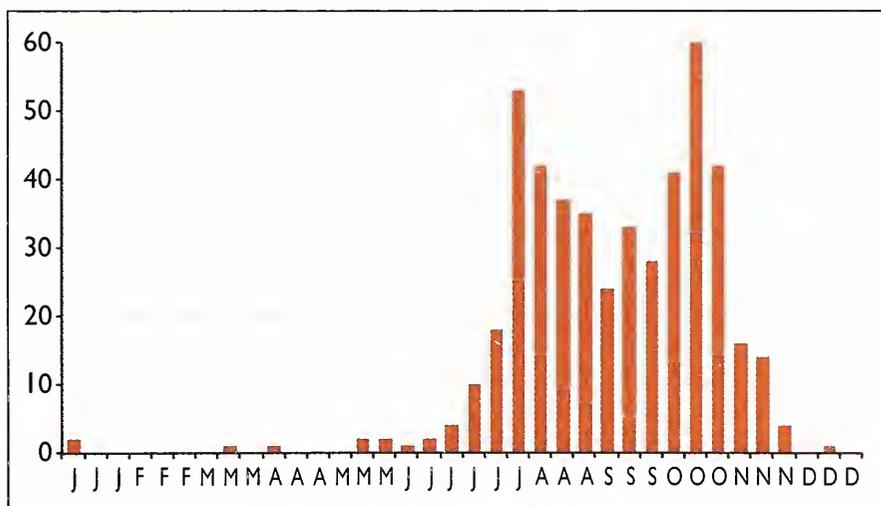
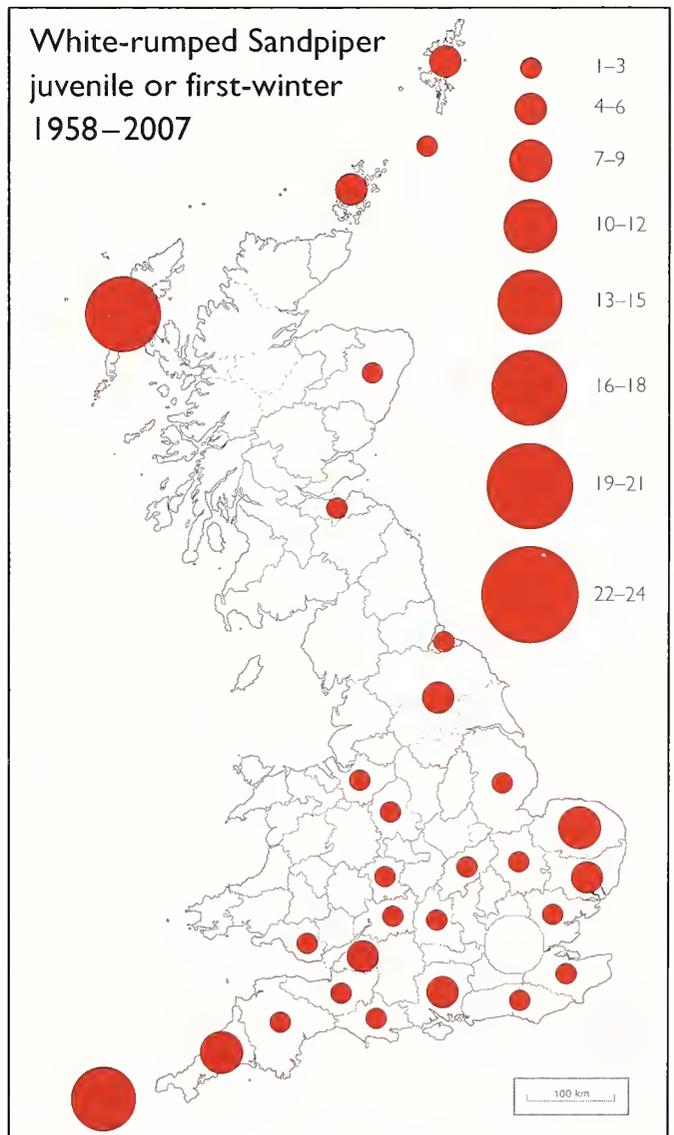
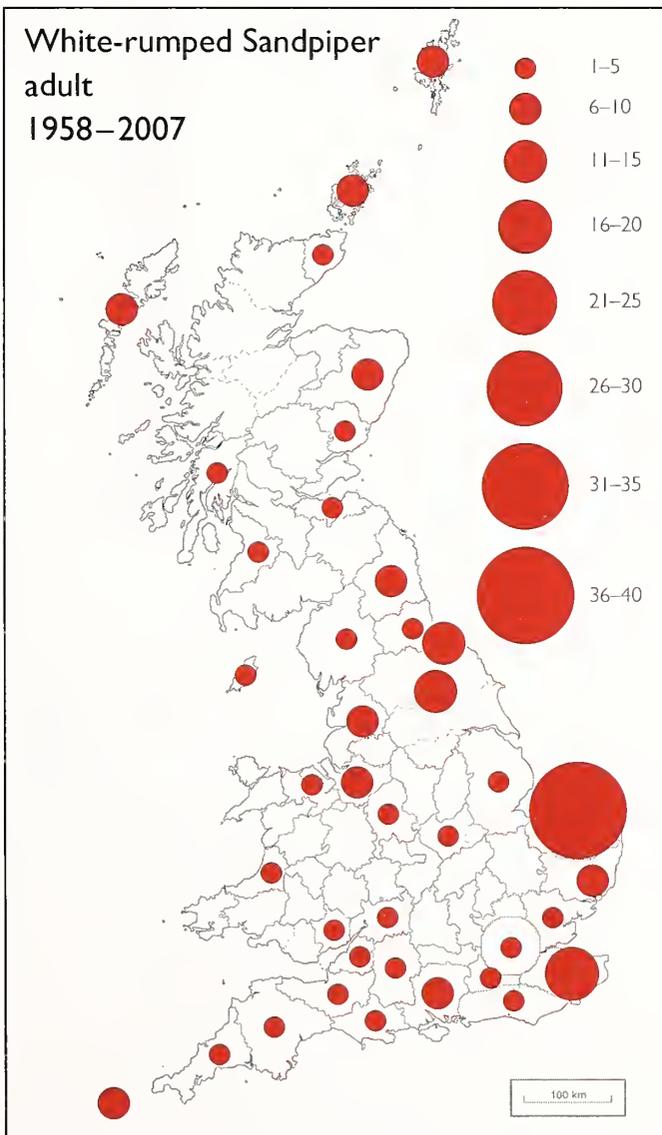
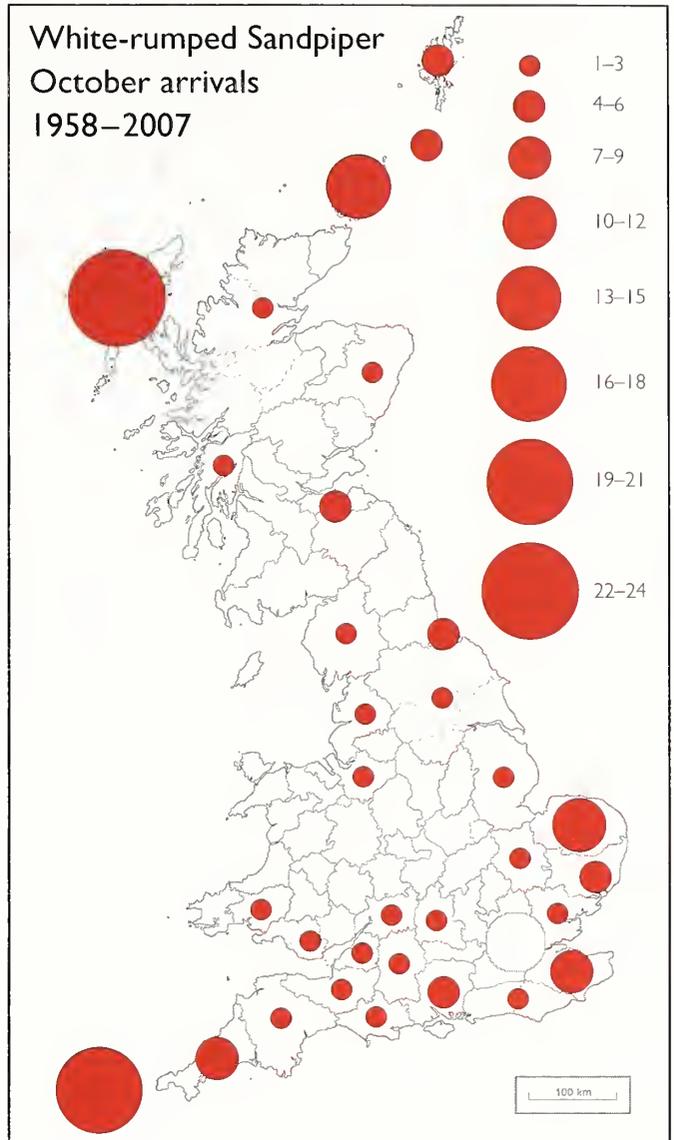
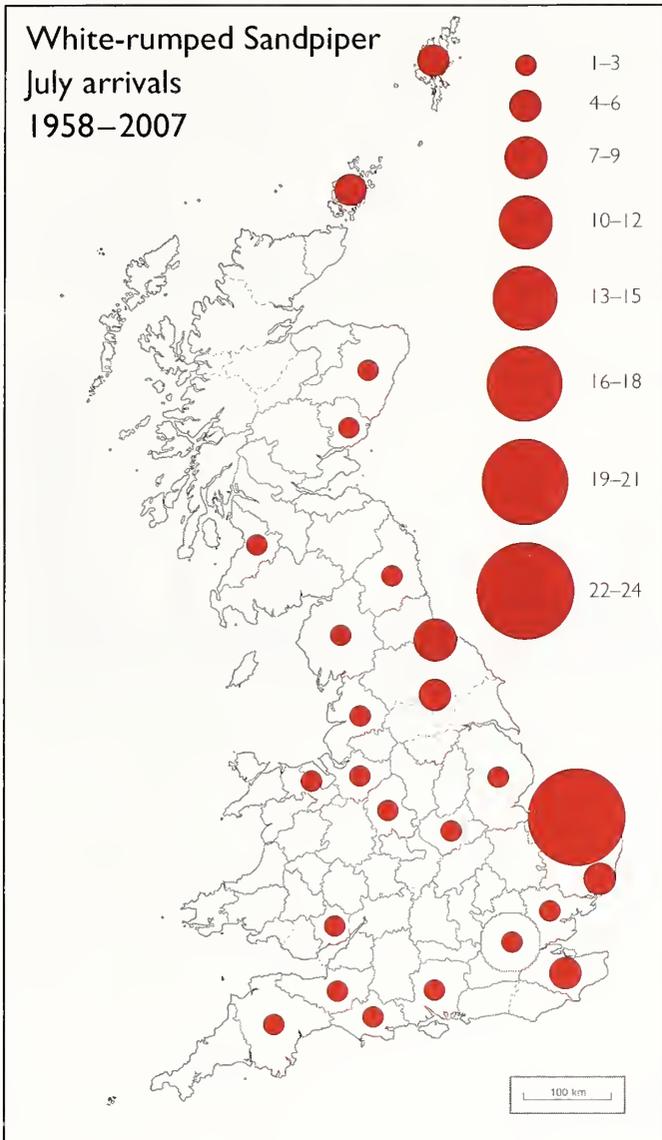


Fig. 37. Records of White-rumped Sandpipers in Britain during 1958–2007 by ten-day period.

The origin of summer adults is not certain but their timing and distribution often coincides with those of adult Pectoral Sandpipers *C. melanotos*, and they typically appear with arrivals of adult Little Stints *C. minutus* and Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea* which originate from Arctic Russia and Siberia. It seems reasonable to assume that late-autumn birds (mostly youngsters) in the west of Britain have crossed the Atlantic. Perhaps birds that have crossed the Atlantic then disperse and are responsible for records of young birds on the east coast and inland? Or perhaps such birds also originate from Siberia? Whatever their origin, it is clear that a significant proportion of first-year White-rumped Sandpipers reach Britain later than other regular Nearctic shorebirds of the same age. Fig. 37 shows that late-autumn arrivals peak in mid October and continue into November. Exactly why they arrive here so much later than other species is unexplained.

Fig. 38 (page 393). Distribution of White-rumped Sandpipers in Britain, 1958–2007. Top left, July arrivals; top right, October arrivals; bottom left, birds reported as adults; bottom right, birds noted as juvenile or first-winter.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
801	21 (14=)	52 (2)	51 (3)	47 (5)	1977/54/1      1975/48/4

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67 <2
1968–77 19
1978–87 18
1988–97 16
1998–2007 25

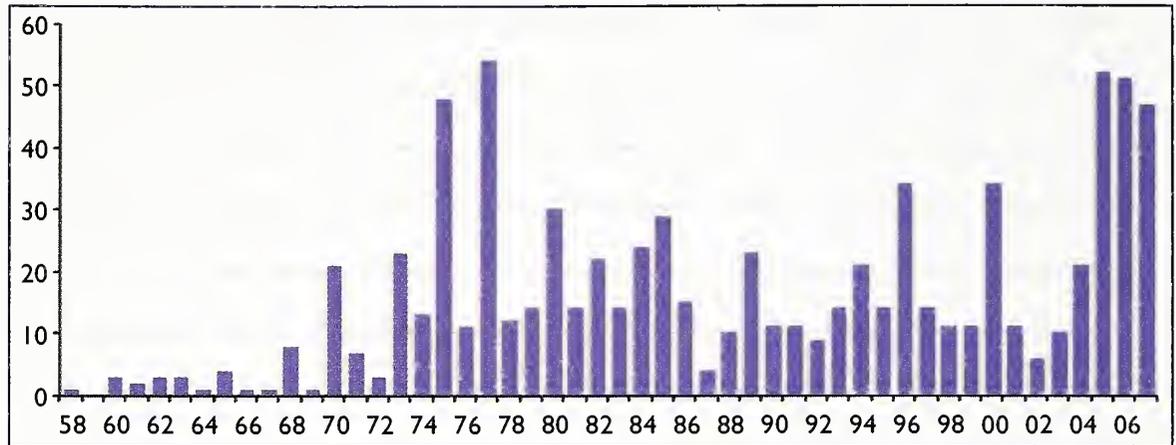


Fig. 39. Annual totals of Buff-breasted Sandpipers in Britain, 1958–2007.

The review period saw Buff-breasted Sandpipers reaching Britain in numbers not seen since the mid 1970s, with the second- (2005), third- (2006) and fifth-highest (2007) annual totals (fig. 39). There has been a substantial shift, however, in the distribution of Buff-breasted Sandpipers since

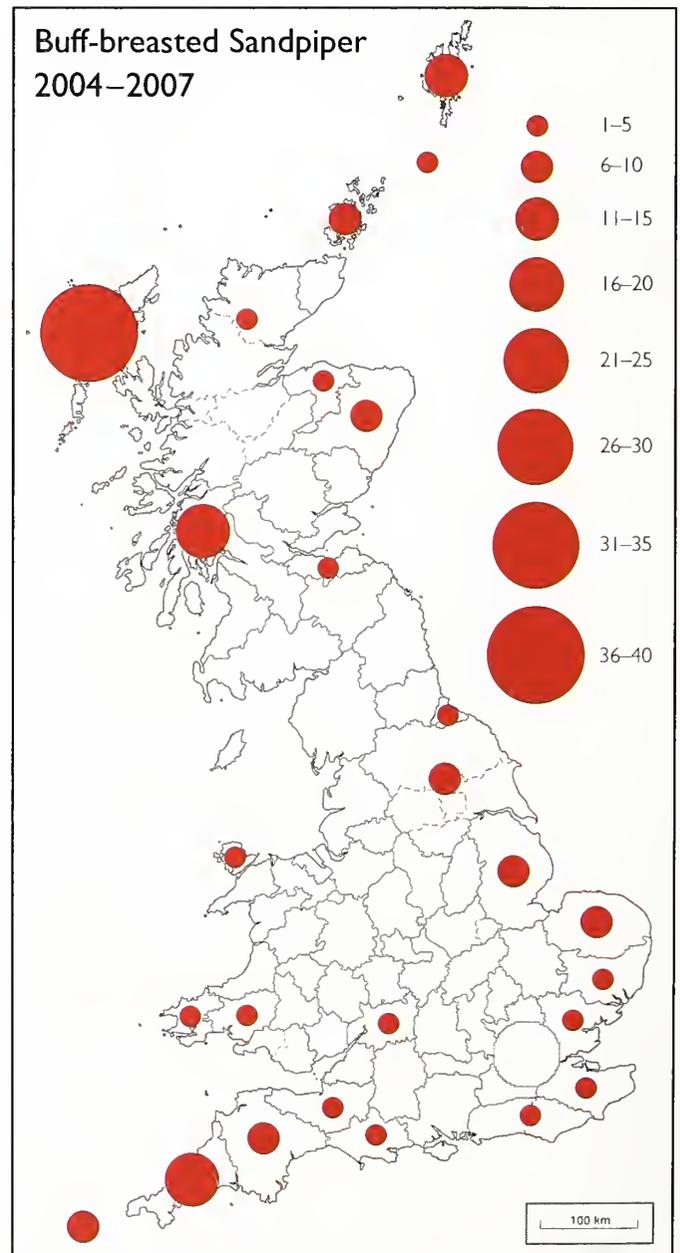
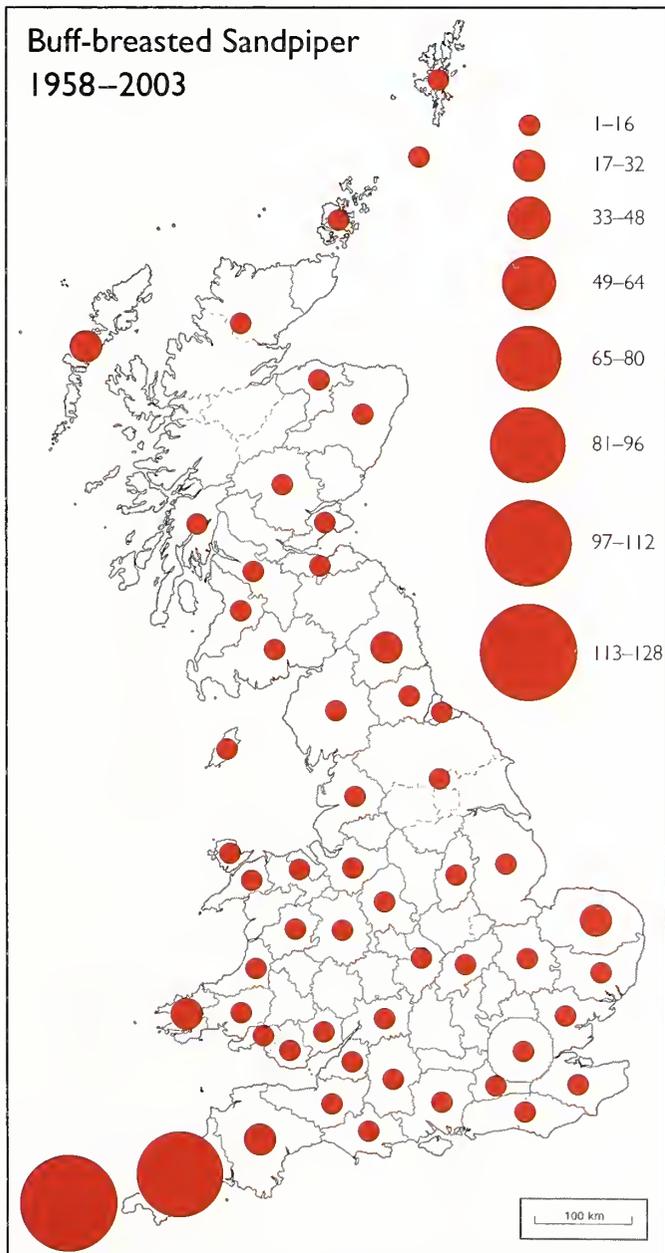


Fig. 40. Distribution of Buff-breasted Sandpipers in Britain, 1958–2003 (left) and 2004–07 (right).

the 1970s. In each of the years 2005–07, the lion’s share of the records was in western Scotland. In 2005 and 2006 there were 15 and 12 respectively in the Outer Hebrides, while in 2007 there were nine in both Shetland and Argyll. Comparative distribution patterns are shown in fig. 40.

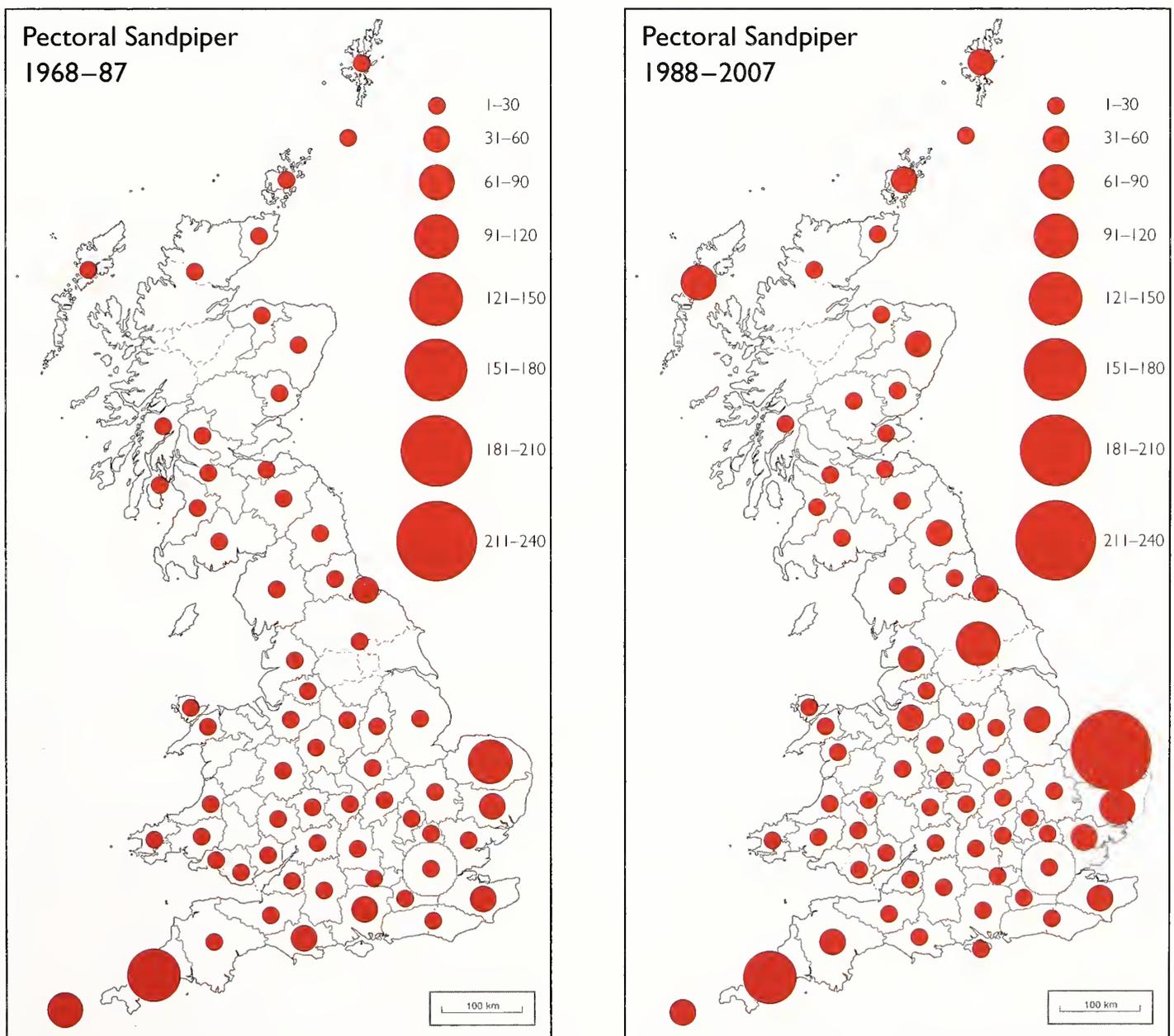
Increased observer effort in northwest Scotland, for example on Tiree (Argyll) and Lewis (Outer Hebrides), which were seriously under-watched until recently, must be responsible for some of the increase. However, the 26 individuals in 2004–07 in the Northern Isles, which have been relatively well watched since the 1970s, surely points to a genuine increase in the north.

**Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos***

Total 1968–2007	No. 2004 (rank/40)	No. 2005 (rank/40)	No. 2006 (rank/40)	No. 2007 (rank/40)	Other annual maxima 1968–2007 (year/number/rank)
2,695	106 (7)	130 (4=)	153 (2)	121 (6)	2003/192/1    1999/132/3

Since 1968, the annual totals of Pectoral Sandpipers reaching Britain have fluctuated, with numbers showing a peak in the mid 1980s (notably in 1984, with 130 birds) and then a more consolidated increase through the 2000s (the decade ending in 2007 included seven of the top eight annual totals; fig. 42).

Arrivals during the review period were widely scattered throughout Britain. Norfolk, with 70, was the top county, followed by Yorkshire with 36, Cornwall with 34 and the Outer Hebrides with 33. As with Buff-breasted Sandpipers, the distribution of Pectoral Sandpipers hints at a shift away from southwest England in recent years, although a more general shift rather than to northern



**Fig. 41.** Distribution of Pectoral Sandpipers in Britain, 1968–87 (left) and 1988–2007 (right).

Annual means 1968–2007
<u>1968–77</u> 39
<u>1978–87</u> 63
<u>1988–97</u> 54
<u>1998–2007</u> 113

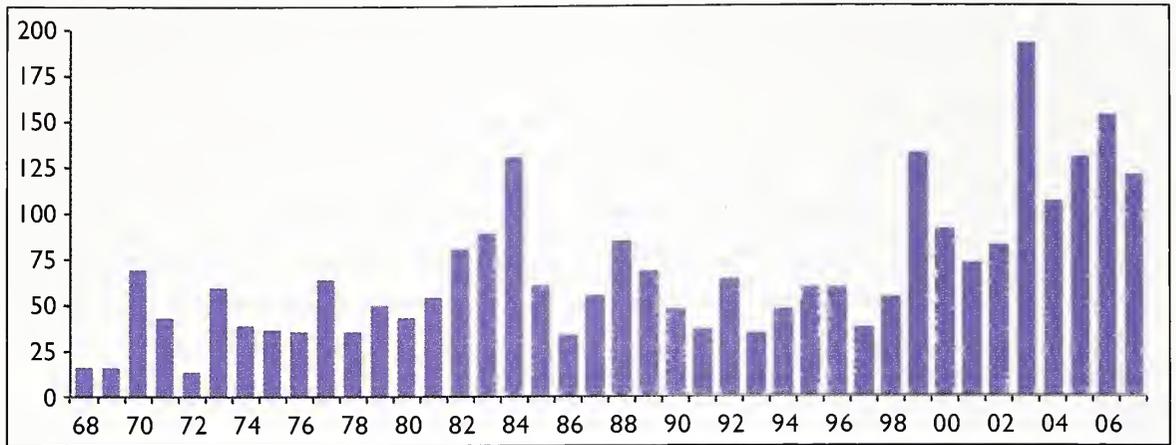


Fig. 42. Annual totals of Pectoral Sandpipers in Britain during 1968–2007.

and western Scotland in particular. Fig. 41 shows the distribution patterns for 1968–87 and 1988–2007. Numbers in Cornwall and Scilly combined showed a 12% decline (from 217 to 192) between these two periods, while those in Norfolk and Suffolk increased by 110% (from 137 to 288). In northern England (from Cheshire to Lincolnshire northwards), numbers also more than doubled, from 227 to 467 (106%), while in Scotland they rose from 86 to 336 (291%)!

These data provide ample opportunity to speculate on the origins of birds arriving in Britain. The increase in eastern Britain may have two sources: birds coming directly from Siberia (where they breed) may be augmented by adults moving south through Britain following an early transatlantic crossing from Arctic Canada, making landfall farther north than in earlier years. There has also been a recent increase in records in the Netherlands, but in that country a higher proportion occurs earlier in the autumn: 29 of 59 (49%) autumn birds prior to 1996 occurred in July and August (van den Berg & Bosman 1999). In Norfolk, the comparable figure is only 29% (146 out of 508 between 1968 and 2007). This suggests that most birds reaching the Netherlands are of Siberian origin, and that fewer birds turn up there in late summer after a transatlantic crossing.

### Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
695	27 (12=)	27 (12=)	22 (20)	27 (12=)	1999/71/1      1989/47/2

Annual means 1986–2007
<u>1986–90</u> 36
<u>1991–95</u> 31
<u>1996–2000</u> 35
<u>2001–07</u> 26

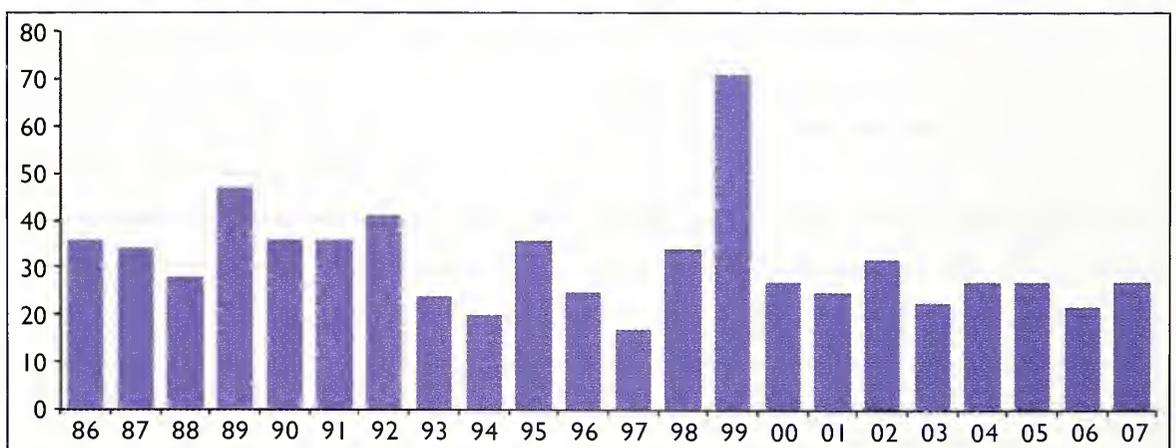


Fig. 43. Annual totals of Red-necked Phalaropes in Britain, 1986–2007.

The review period saw four consistent and unremarkable years (fig. 43). With the seven-year period ending in 2007 having a mean annual total lower than the three previous five-year periods, Red-necked Phalarope seems to be getting rarer as a migrant as well as a breeding bird.

The distribution of records consistently shows a more easterly pattern than that of Grey Phalarope *P. fulicarius*, and 2004–07 was no exception. Most were seen in Norfolk (21), Yorkshire (eight) and Hampshire (seven), with the remainder being widely scattered, mostly in southern and eastern England, with several inland records. One of the Hampshire birds, a juvenile at Gosport on 7th–8th October 2005, had been ringed as a chick on Shetland earlier in the year.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Other annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
5,443	230 (11)	411 (2)	109 (18)	255 (9)	2001/1,125/1 1989/366/3

Annual means 1986–2007
1986–90 282
1991–95 145
1996–2000 166
2001–07 354

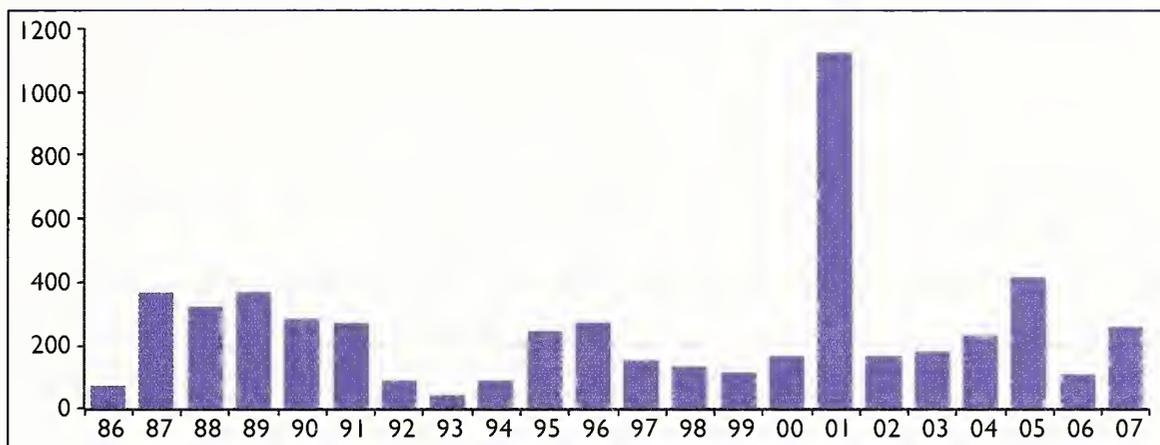


Fig. 44. Annual totals of Grey Phalaropes in Britain, 1986–2007.

The annual total of 411 birds in 2005 was the second-highest since 1986, though still well short of the exceptional 1,125 in 2001 (see fig. 44). There were two distinct arrivals in autumn 2005, the first in late September and early October, and the second peaking in early November (fig. 45).

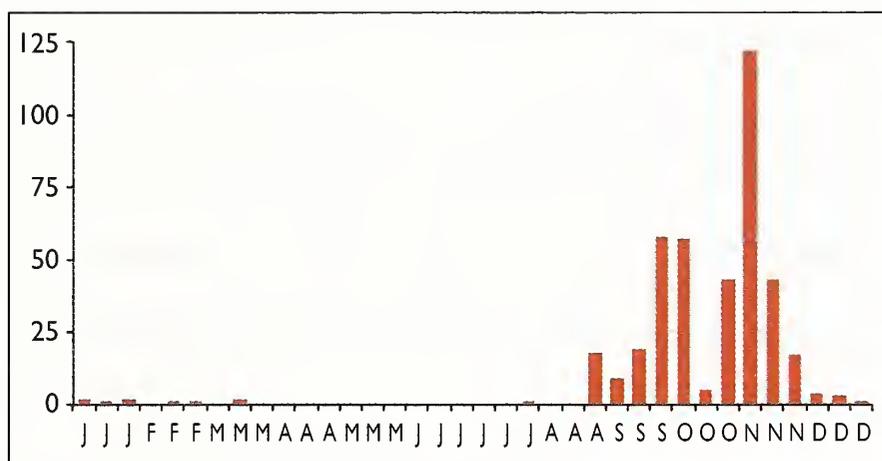


Fig. 45. Grey Phalaropes in Britain in 2005, by ten-day period.

The distribution of records differed between these two periods. During the first, most were seen in the southwest (chiefly Cornwall, Scilly and sea area Sole), and also in western Scotland (chiefly Argyll and the Outer Hebrides). Later in the autumn there were large numbers in Devon (43) and Dorset (39), with many wind-blown birds straggling further inland. Overall, more were seen in the Outer Hebrides (64) in 2005 than in any other recording area.

The occurrence pattern in the remaining years of the review period shows the lion's share of records in the southwest, Argyll, the Outer Hebrides and Norfolk, together with a wide scatter of sightings from coastal Wales, the Northern Isles and several inland English counties.



241. Grey Phalarope, West Bexington, Dorset, December 2006.

Kit Day

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
813	16 (23=)	20 (13=)	1992/49/1      1970/37/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67 8
1968–77 22
1978–87 16
1988–97 18
1998–2007 18

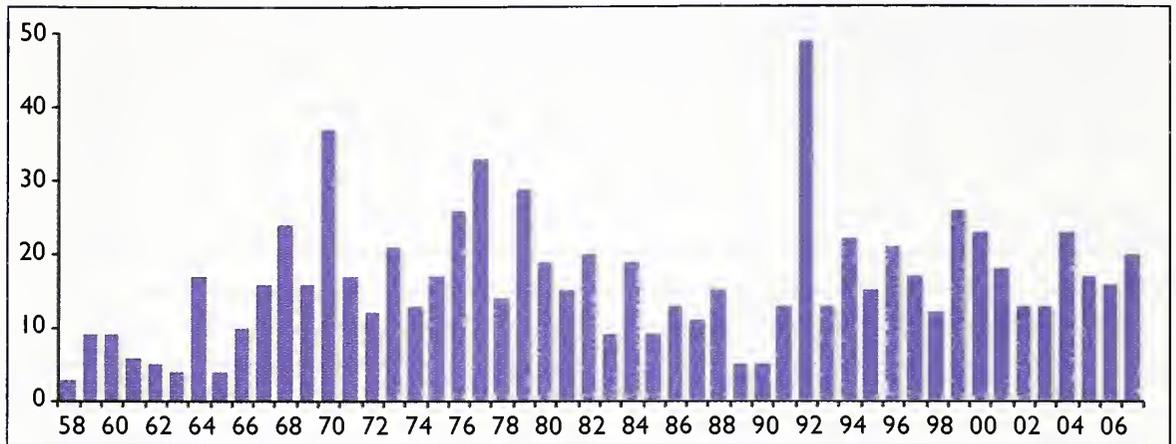


Fig. 46. Annual totals of White-winged Black Terns in Britain, 1958–2007.

The number of White-winged Black Terns in Britain each year has remained remarkably consistent since the influx of 49 in 1992, at between 12 and 26 – a pattern that continued in 2006 and 2007 after the species came off the BBRC list. Seven of the 36 (19%) in these two years were in spring (a little lower than the overall proportion of spring birds since 1958, 28% of 813).

Coastal counties in the east and southeast accounted for most of the sightings during this two-year period (fig. 47), while the drop in records from Wales and southwest England continued: there has been less than one bird a year in those two regions since 2000, whereas during 1970–2000 there was an average of four a year.

Twenty-two of the 36 birds were found in August, compared with just four in September and one in October; the last was a juvenile at Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, on 21st–29th October 2007.

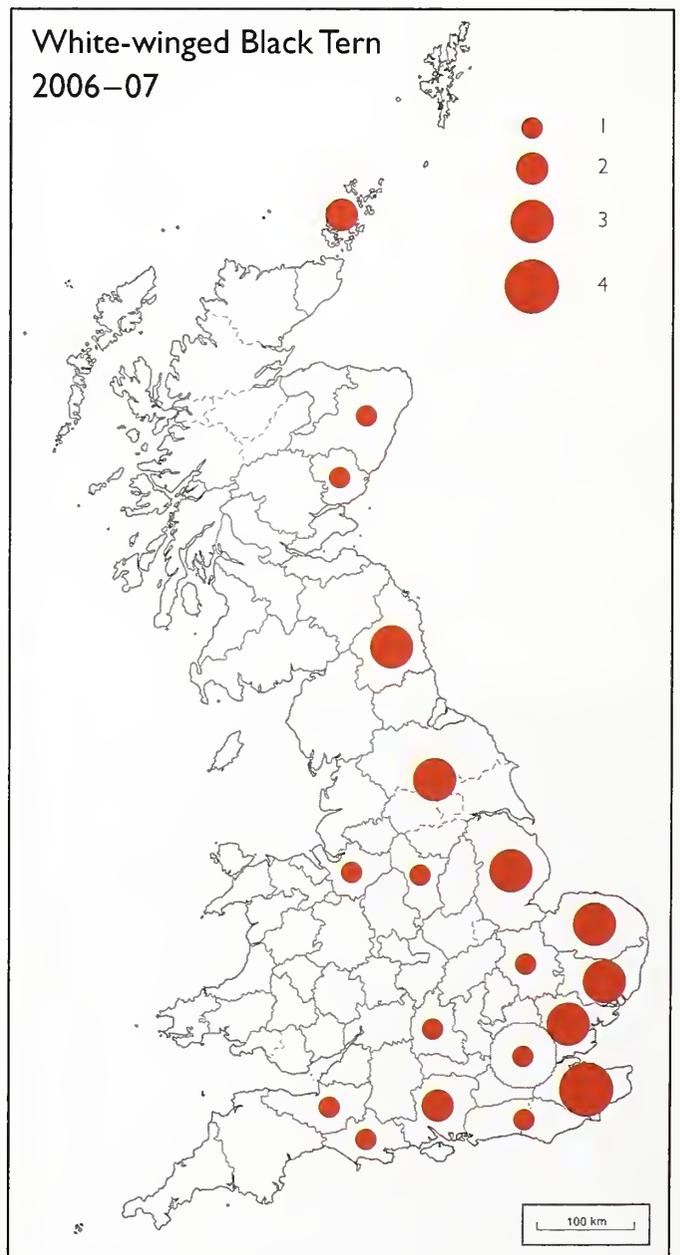


Fig. 47. Distribution of White-winged Black Terns in Britain, 2006–07.

Graham Catley



242. Adult White-winged Black Tern, Barton, Lincolnshire, May 2006.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*

Total 1968–2007	No. 2004 (rank/40)	No. 2005 (rank/40)	No. 2006 (rank/40)	No. 2007 (rank/40)	Annual maxima 1968–2007 (year/number/rank)
5,475	227 (7)	162 (11)	86 (24)	340 (4)	1987/710/1 1997/396/2

Annual means 1968–2007
1968–77 36
1978–87 175
1988–97 165
1998–2007 172

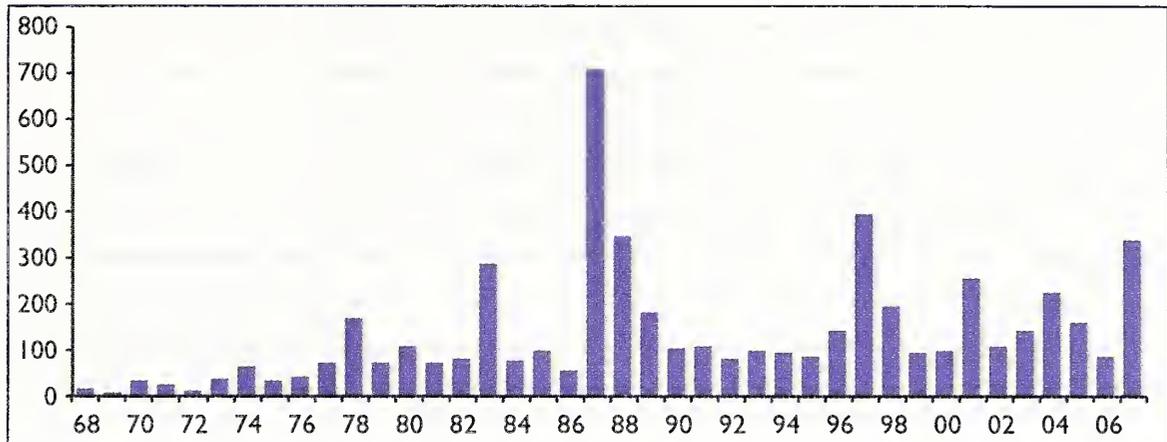


Fig. 48. Annual totals of Sabine's Gulls in Britain, 1968–2007.

Of the four years treated here, the 340 in 2007 comprised the fourth-highest total since 1968, while the ten-year means suggest that the overall trend in numbers recorded is steady. Unusually, Cornwall failed to dominate the county totals during the review period, and there were good numbers along the North Sea coast (notably 94 in Yorkshire, 75 in Norfolk), as well as Pembrokeshire, Caernarfonshire, Argyll and the Outer Hebrides in the west.

The influx of 2007 (fig. 49) contributed a great deal to the easterly bias of records in the review period, with 52 in Norfolk and 53 in Yorkshire, most of the latter being seen from Flamborough Head. 'At sea' records include 24 birds seen on pelagic trips off Scilly, in sea area Sole; four birds seen from the *Scillonian* between Cornwall and Scilly, in sea area Plymouth; and one bird off Stonehaven, North-east Scotland, in sea area Forth. Inland records in 2007 included three first-winters at Beddington Sewage-farm, Greater London, on 9th October; two each at Rutland Water, Leicestershire, and Upper Bittell Reservoir, Worcestershire; and a juvenile at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire, on 29th September.

The main arrival period in 2007 was the middle ten days of September, while the month as a whole accounted for 77% of all dated 2007 records. Two in January (at Carbis Bay in Cornwall and Amwll in Anglesey), the first spring record for Hampshire (at Hurst Beach on 6th May), and two juveniles seen during a pelagic trip off Scilly on 27th July were the only ones seen outside the August–November period.

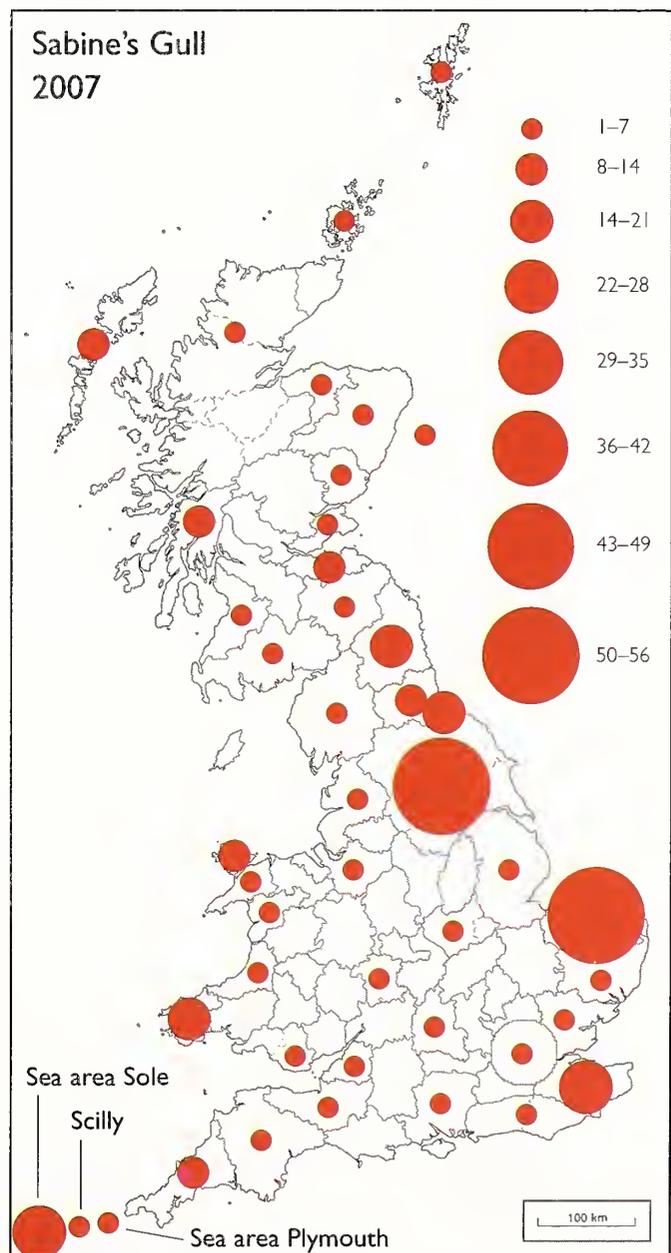


Fig. 49. Distribution of Sabine's Gulls in Britain in 2007.

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
1,752	88 (3=)	45 (22)	43 (24)	37 (25)	1992/108/1      1990/94/2

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
0
1968–77
2
1978–87
39
1988–97
76
1998–2007
59

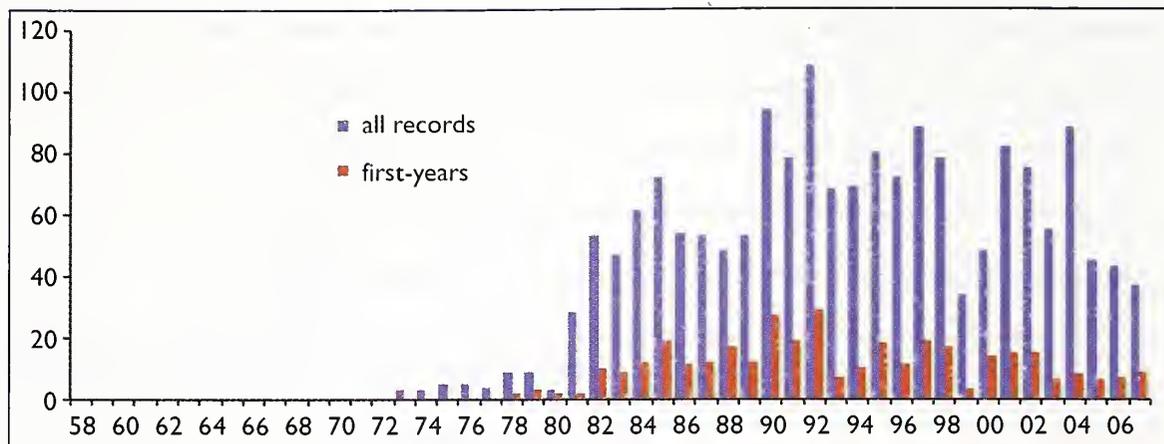


Fig. 50. Annual totals of Ring-billed Gulls in Britain, 1958–2007.

Although many Ring-billed Gulls return annually to traditional wintering sites (one at Stromness, Orkney, was 20 years old in 2007; another, at the Isle of Dogs and other sites in the Thames Estuary, returned for at least its tenth year in 2007), the species is now occurring in sufficiently

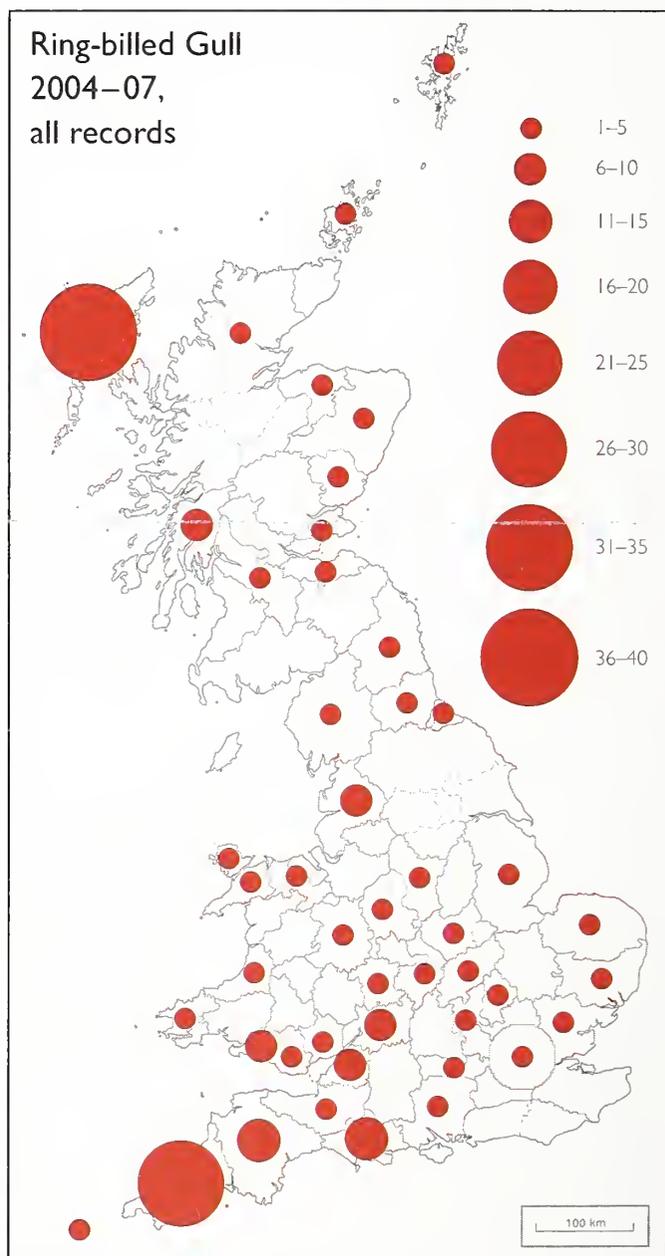


Fig. 51. Distribution of Ring-billed Gulls in Britain, 2004–07; first-years (left) and all presumed newly arrived birds (right).

high numbers that some duplication of records is likely, especially of adults that move between sites. Fig. 50 shows annual totals since 1958, and the proportion of first-year birds; the latter may provide a better indication of the number and distribution of recent transatlantic arrivals.

There were 30 new first-winters during the review period, the majority in the west, and particularly in Cornwall (seven) and the Outer Hebrides (six). The distribution of Ring-billed Gulls of all ages shows a more widespread pattern (see fig. 51), underlining the possibility that birds in central England may not be recent arrivals. Records from the Outer Hebrides outnumbered those in Cornwall 38 to 34 when all new birds are counted (and, at the other end of the scale, one at Thornton Point, Fife, on 27th February 2006, was a county first). There is, however, no obvious difference in the timing of records of first-winters and other age groups; the vast majority of all arrivals being between early November and mid April.



Marc Read

243. 3CY Ring-billed Gull, Hayle, Cornwall, January 2006.

There is, however, no obvious difference in the timing of records of first-winters and other age groups; the vast majority of all arrivals being between early November and mid April.

### Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Other annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
501	25 (2)	6 (36=)	2002/27/1 1998 & 1988/24/3=

Annual means 1958–2007
1958–67
5
1968–77
8
1978–87
11
1988–97
13
1998–2007
14

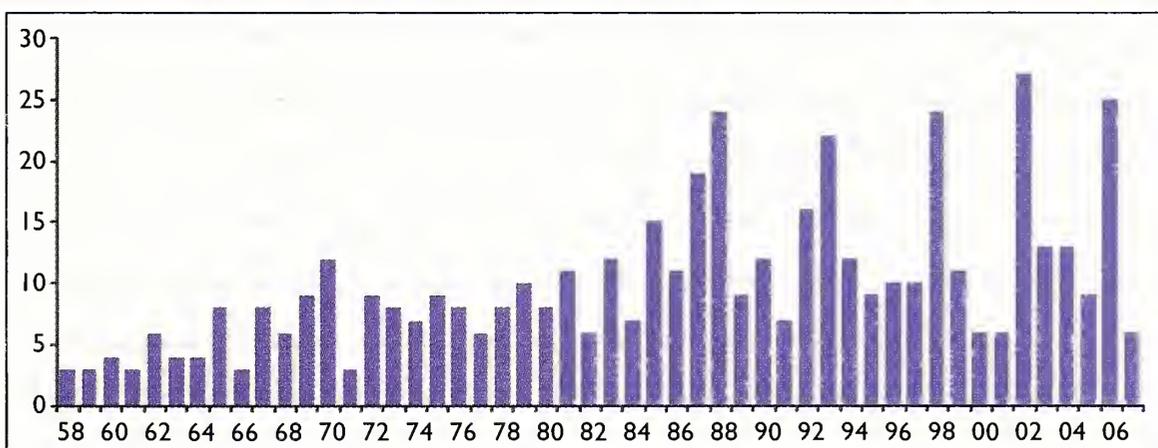


Fig. 52. Annual totals of Alpine Swifts in Britain, 1958–2007.

The Alpine Swift is another species right on the border between national rarity and scarce migrant (with 140 in the decade 1998–2007). In the two years since the species' removal from the BBRC list at the end of 2005, the total of 25 in 2006 was the second-highest, while the meagre six in 2007 made that a poor year. Take out the five years with 20+ records since 1988, and the overall trend is only a very shallow increase (fig. 52).

In 2006, ten arrived between 28th March and 3rd April, with a further nine in the remainder of April. Most were in southern England and East Anglia, with four in Suffolk (the top county), the first for Bedfordshire (at Stewartby Lake on 1st April) and some interesting records from the Home Counties: Bergher's Hill, Buckinghamshire, on 8th April; Hampstead Heath, London, 8th–15th April; and Little Marlow, Berkshire/Buckinghamshire, 15th–18th April. Later arrivals included one at Arlington Reservoir, Sussex, on 1st May, singles in Cornwall and North Yorkshire (the most northerly record of the year) in July, and three in October. The last was at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, on 23rd October.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Total 1958–2007	No. 2004 (rank/50)	No. 2005 (rank/50)	No. 2006 (rank/50)	No. 2007 (rank/50)	Annual maxima 1958–2007 (year/number/rank)
1,014	31 (11)	41 (4)	33 (8=)	33 (8=)	1997/132/1    2002/104/2

Annual means 1958–2007
<u>1958–67</u> 4
<u>1968–77</u> 6
<u>1978–87</u> 15
<u>1988–97</u> 39
<u>1998–2007</u> 37

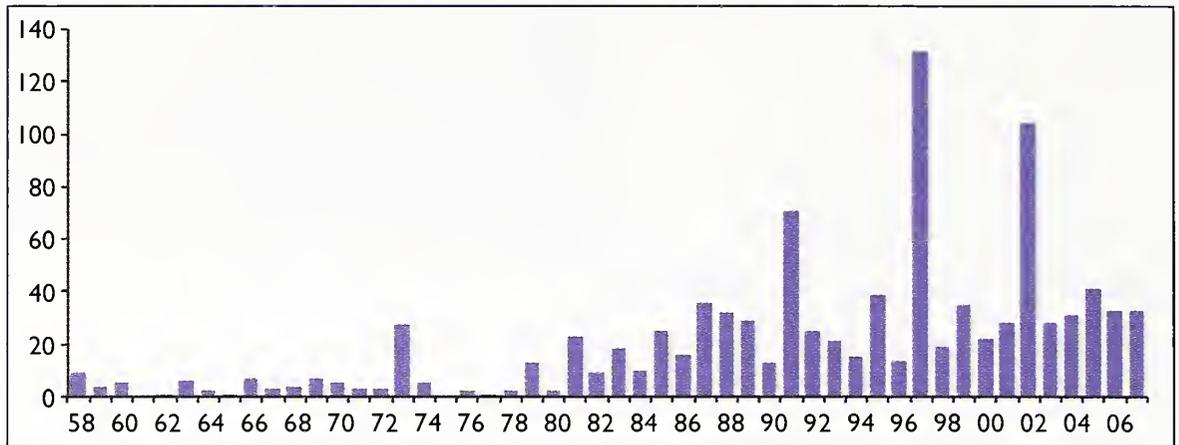


Fig. 53. Annual totals of European Bee-eaters in Britain, 1958–2007.

The four totals in the review period are respectable rather than exceptional, although it should be noted that, along with other conspicuous and mobile species in this report, establishing an accurate national total is not always easy. The total of 41 in 2005 stands as the fourth best on record, but it is some way short of the two 100+ years of 1997 and 2002 (fig. 53).

The distribution in 2004–07 showed a typical southeasterly bias, with 26 in Kent, and 15 in both Norfolk and Suffolk, while there were relatively few in the southwest. The combined 138 birds included 48 in May, 25 in June and seven in both July and August. There was just one in April, at Bideford, Devon, on 30th April and 1st May 2004, and only one in September, at Aberlady, Lothian, on 27th in 2006. Notable groups or small flocks included ten at Seasalter, Kent, on 6th June 2004 and seven at Dunwich, Suffolk, on 14th May 2005. Among several groups of five birds, one was at Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant, Montgomeryshire, on 27th May 2007.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Total 1968–2007	No. 2004 (rank/40)	No. 2005 (rank/40)	No. 2006 (rank/40)	No. 2007 (rank/40)	Annual maxima 1968–2007 (year/number/rank)
4,673	103 (24)	100 (26=)	106 (22)	88 (33)	1968/218/1    1980/188/2

Annual means 1968–2007
<u>1968–77</u> 120
<u>1978–87</u> 126
<u>1988–97</u> 130
<u>1998–2007</u> 91

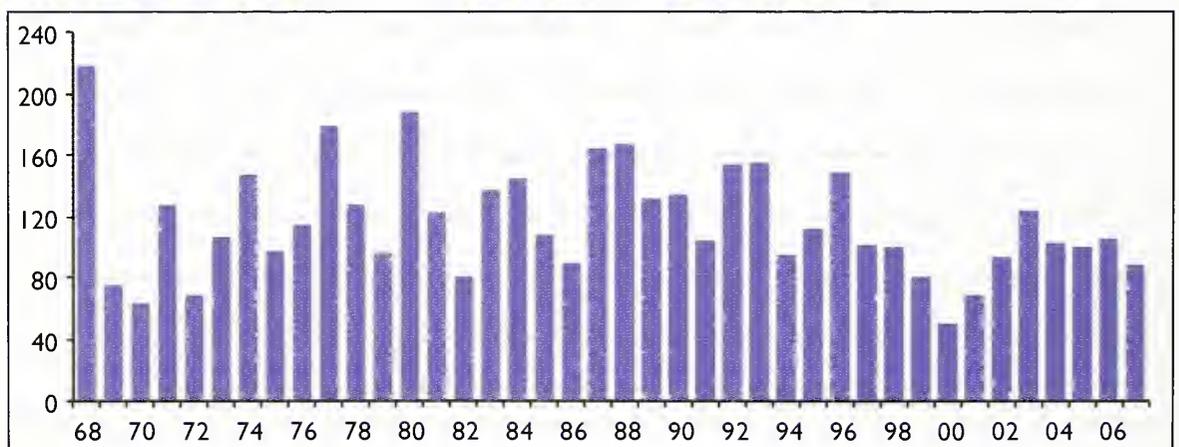


Fig. 54. Annual totals of Hoopoes in Britain, 1968–2007.

The review period produced four generally unremarkable years for Hoopoes, and the ten-year mean for 1998–2007 is well below that for the three previous decades. Nonetheless, only about a dozen of Britain’s recording areas failed to record a Hoopoe during the review period! Typically, the lion’s share turned up along the south coast of England, with the 44 in Dorset being the top

county score for the period. Records were spread between February (Treen, Cornwall, 24th–26th February 2007) and November (Sandy Point, Hampshire, 14th November 2006). Of the cumulative 397 birds in 2004–07, just 74 were seen between August and November.

*Wryneck Jynx torquilla*

Total 1986–2007	No. 2004 (rank/22)	No. 2005 (rank/22)	No. 2006 (rank/22)	No. 2007 (rank/22)	Annual maxima 1986–2007 (year/number/rank)
6,179	337 (6)	361 (3)	264 (16)	154 (21)	1998/416/1    2002/389/2

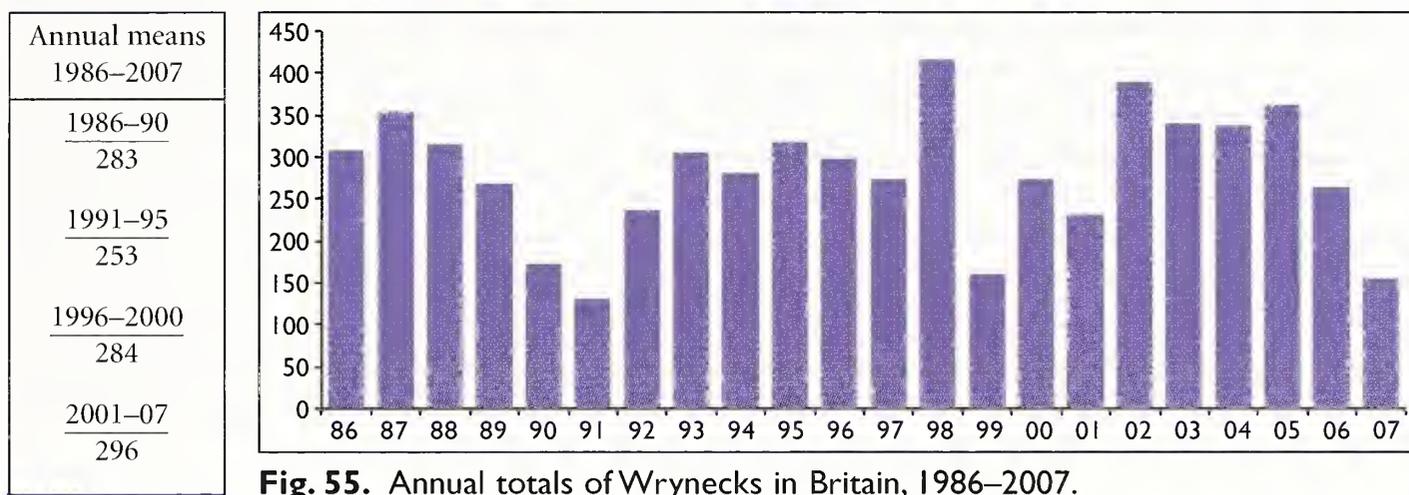


Fig. 55. Annual totals of Wrynecks in Britain, 1986–2007.

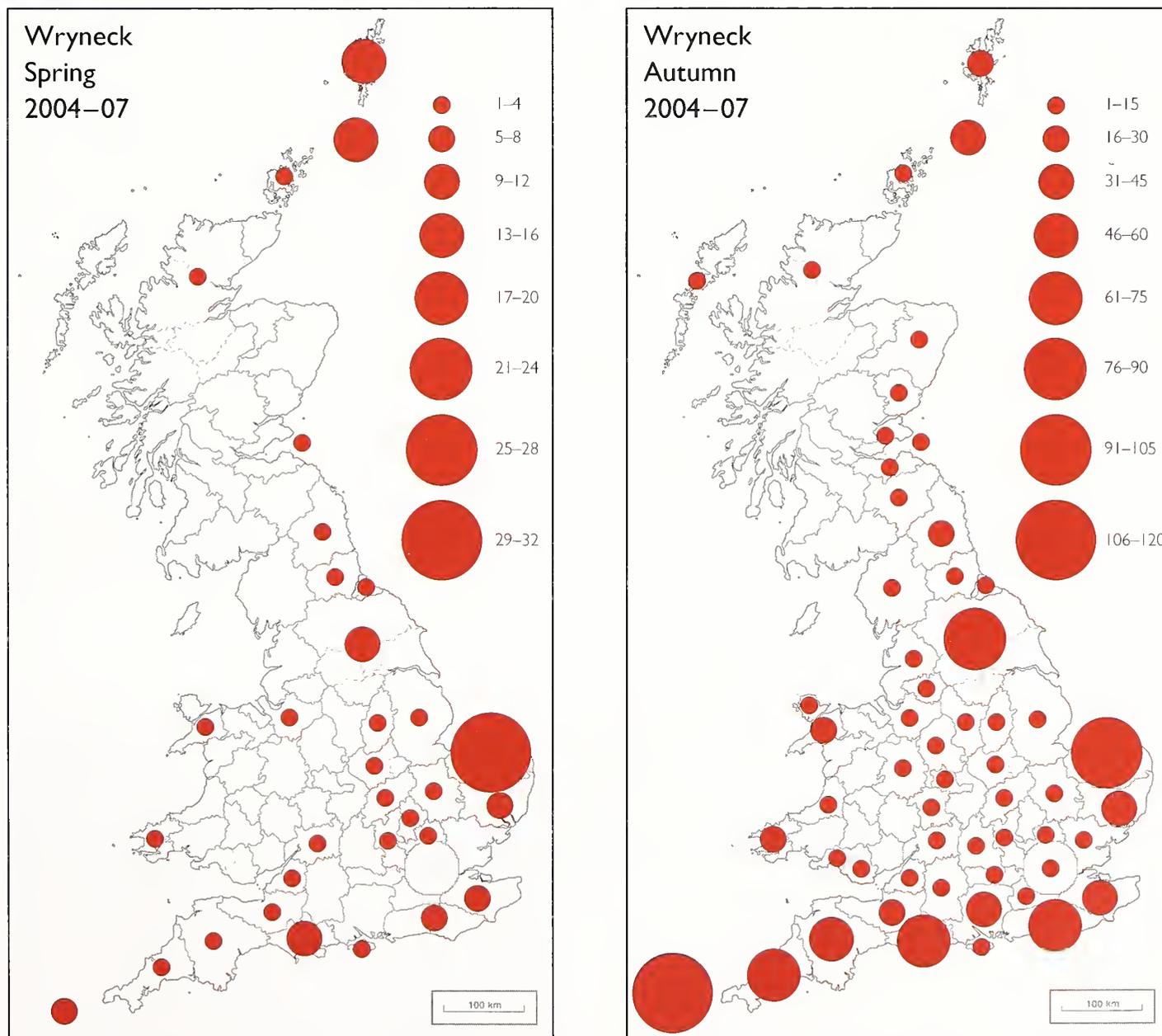


Fig. 56. Distribution of Wrynecks in Britain during 2004–07, spring records left, autumn records right.



**244.** Wryneck, Warham Greens, Norfolk, October 2007.

During the review period, the third- and sixth-highest totals since 1986, 361 in 2005 and 337 in 2004 respectively, preceded two unspectacular years in 2006–07. Nonetheless, as fig. 55 shows, there appears to be little in the way of an overall trend.

The vast majority of the records listed here (87% of 1,116) were in autumn, mostly on the south and east coasts from Yorkshire southwards. Of the 139 spring records, the 29 in Norfolk made that the best recording area for the species (fig. 56). Of all scarce migrants reported here, this species is perhaps more likely to be encountered inland than any other, and given its cryptic plumage and unobtrusive habits, it is also likely to be highly under-recorded.

#### Acknowledgments

This report marks, after 30 years, the end of my bird-recording career. The Scarce Migrants Project dataset now contains over 107,500 records, and I would like to say thank you to all those who have helped. There are too many people to mention individually, including all those county recorders and editors whose reports have been used and with whom I have liaised. The BTO provided useful data on Aquatic Warblers captured for ringing that helped to clarify some bird report entries. However, I would like to personally thank Charles Copp, Ian Dawson, Chris Harbard, Peter Lansdown, John Martin, Roger Riddington, John Ryan, Jimmy Steele (for understanding) and Keith Vinicombe (for arguing about reverse migration among other topics); and the members of my families, those long gone and those present, who have tolerated my indulgence and lack of entrepreneurial abilities.

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# Short paper

## Flight heights of Marsh Harriers in a breeding and wintering area

The proliferation of windfarms in Britain in recent years has attracted much attention, including from conservationists concerned with the possibility of harmful effects on birds, which are potentially at risk of collision with wind turbines and ancillary equipment. There are particular concerns for large birds of prey, since the persistent loss of individuals may have a serious impact at the population level (for example Drewitt & Langston 2006, Madders & Whitfield 2006 and Nygård *et al.* 2010).

In the UK, the Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* is 'amber-listed' (Eaton *et al.* 2009) with an estimated breeding population in 2010 of 258–327 breeding females/pairs (Holling *et al.* 2012). An important population of this species is present throughout the year on the arable and grazing marshes of the Isle of Sheppey, Kent (Oliver 2005, 2008). This area is attractive to windfarm developers and early in 2013 two turbines were installed on land adjacent to the area most favoured by harriers. These turbines have a hub height of 85 m and blades of 41 m (thus giving an overall height of 126 m and a ground clearance below the blades of 44 m) and they are designed to rotate at speeds of 6.0–17.5 rpm. There are indications that future applications may be made for installations in the main

area frequented by Marsh Harriers.

Since there appears to be no published data on the heights at which Marsh Harriers fly, and with the prospect of further windfarm development in this area, I collected data on several aspects of the flight behaviour of Marsh Harriers on Sheppey, including the height of flying birds, which is a necessary component in any assessment of collision risk (Douglas *et al.* 2012).

### Study area and methods

The southern part of the Isle of Sheppey was for many years traditional grazing fresh marsh, though in recent decades much has been converted to arable. Eastern Sheppey, encompassing Harty Marshes and part of Eastchurch Marshes, is dominated by Capel Fleet, which is fringed for most of its length by reeds *Phragmites*, often in dense stands. Either side of the fleet are low-lying fresh marshes and arable land, bounded to the west by Capel Hill and to the east by Harty Hill, both rising to almost 30 m.

Marsh Harriers breed extensively in the fleet and the adjoining fields, with some extending to the lower slopes of the hills. A complete census of this area in 2005 revealed 31 females present in the breeding season, of which 26 bred or possibly bred in an area of



Phil Haynes

**245.** Part of the Isle of Sheppey study area in Kent in May 2013, showing two wind turbines that were installed in early 2013.

Phil Haynes



**246.** Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and wind turbine, Kent, March 2013.

c. 900 ha (Oliver 2008). Partial censuses in 2006 and 2007 suggested that numbers had remained stable but a third partial census, in 2012, suggested that numbers had fallen, perhaps by as much as a third, although there has been a substantial increase on the adjoining marshes since 2005 (pers. obs.). In the breeding season, harriers routinely cover distances of 2–3 km (pers. obs.), which is easily within reach of the study area from adjoining breeding and hunting areas. Clarke (1995) referred to a range of studies reporting distances covered from the nest of 1.5–8.0 km.

The wintering population has increased steadily over the past 20 years (Oliver 2005) and in 2010/11 and 2011/12 the peak counts on Sheppey and related marshes south of the

Swale (the channel of water separating Sheppey from the mainland) were respectively 82 and 97 (pers. obs.). The largest roosts are in Capel Fleet and in recent winters there have been up to 65 individuals at a single roost.

For this study, I surveyed the western part of Capel Fleet and the adjoining marshes and hillsides. As far as possible, observations were made once a month from April 2010 to March 2012 (except in June 2010 and in August in both years) and normally commenced between 09.00 and 10.00 hrs GMT. Wet and windy (more than force 4) conditions were avoided. Eight vantage points, at heights of between 4 m

and 20 m above sea level, were used non-randomly, with observations made from a car in all but one case. All vantage points afforded clear, approximately 180°, views of the marshes and hillsides with just small areas of dead ground, covering a total area of c. 600 ha.

During each watch the area was scanned continuously through 10x binoculars until a Marsh Harrier was seen in flight. Once a bird was located, I watched it until it landed or was lost to sight. The observed flight period was timed and the bird's height noted initially and when it changed elevation, using three height bands: <20 m, 20–60 m and >60 m. Heights were estimated by eye; scattered structures (including a house) in the

**Table 1.** Data on flying Marsh Harriers, Sheppey, Kent, April 2010 to March 2012.

	March–July	September–February
No. watches	11	12
Total watch time	1,045 min	1,104 min
No. birds watched	129	139
Total flight time	379 min 50 s	281 min 11 s
% time birds seen in air	36.3%	25.4%
Flight time per bird: mean (range)	2 min 57 s (5 s–17 min 35 s)	2 min 1 s (5 s–12 min 32 s)
Flight height (% flight time)		
<20 m	196 min 48 s (51.8%)	238 min 52 s (85.0%)
20–60 m	65 min 49 s (17.3%)	39 min 15 s (13.9%)
>60 m	117 min 13 s (30.9%)	3 min 4 s (1.1%)

survey area helped my estimates, but the categorisation of birds flying around the 60-m boundary was difficult (see Madders & Whitfield 2006 for discussion of the problems). The total time that harriers were observed in each flight band was summed for each watch. 'Sky-diving' harriers were excluded from the observations, which are summarised in table 1. When more than one harrier was visible, only the first-seen bird was tracked. Other harriers may have been in the air but not seen while I was watching a target bird; any effect of this on the proportion flying at each height band is unknown. Flight heights were, on average, higher in the breeding season (March–July) than in the non-breeding season (September–February), so the data have been split between those two periods. In total, the flight heights of 268 harriers were recorded.

In addition to daytime observations, I made limited flight-height counts as birds approached communal roosts.

## Results

Fig. 1 shows the percentage of time spent by birds in each height band in each season. Marsh Harriers spent proportionately more time at higher elevations in the breeding season, which mainly reflects the inclusion of more high-soaring birds or those returning with food from more distant hunting grounds. Birds spent proportionately more time in flight during the breeding season, and the mean flight time for observed individuals in the breeding season was almost 50% higher than in the non-breeding season (table 1).

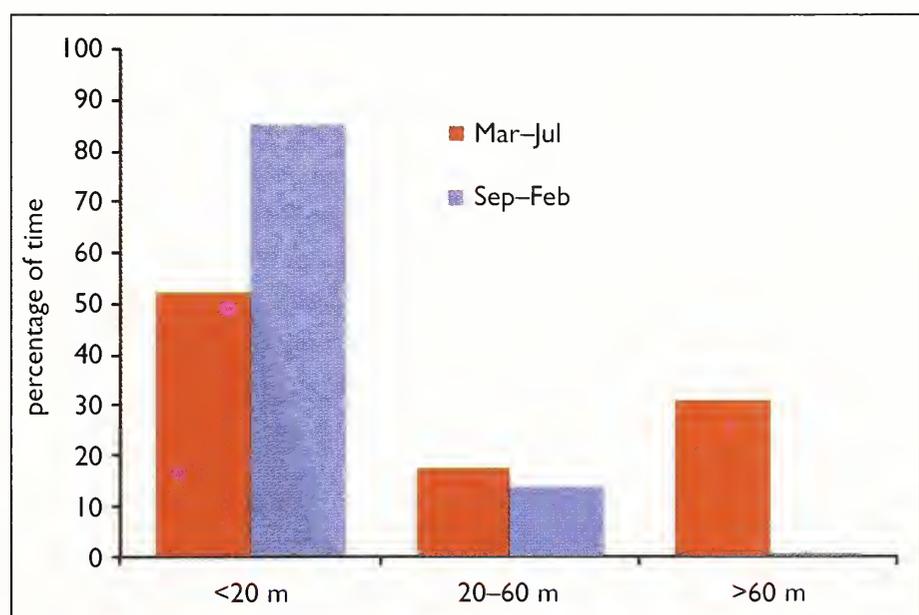
Observations at winter roosts were focused on counting the total number of birds present, so data on flight height is limited. In general, most birds approached roost sites at heights of up to c. 20 m. On occasions when all the birds at a roost take off and circle together, they rarely go above 20 m, but when shifting from one roost to another at dusk (a regular occurrence) or if approaching a roost from long distance, they will normally fly

much higher, often up to 60 m, before dropping quickly to the roost. In October and November 2012, sample counts were made on two evenings of birds approaching a roost. These involved a total of 56 individuals; 50 (89%) approached at up to 20 m and six at 20–60 m. In addition, three were seen flying to a more distant roost, one below 20 m and two at 20–60 m.

## Discussion

SNH (2005) suggested that a minimum of 36 hours of observation time should be spent in a given season to obtain results that are sufficiently reliable for calculating collision risk. Douglas *et al.* (2012) suggested a minimum of 62 observation hours, but also acknowledged that modelling collision risk is highly susceptible to assumptions on avoidance rate – in other words, all such data are likely to be subject to uncertainties of interpretation. My observation times fall short of the suggested guidelines (at 17 hours 25 minutes, March–July, and 18 hours 24 minutes, September–February), but nonetheless provide some quantified evidence of the time spent in flight by Marsh Harriers in the study area, in different height bands.

Anecdotal evidence over many days of observations suggests that the level of activity reported here can be expected at any time during daylight hours and the limited counts at a roost, again supported by many years of watching harrier roosts, indicate that large numbers will be airborne in this area at dawn and dusk in winter. Weather conditions are



**Fig. 1.** The height of flying Marsh Harriers in the breeding and non-breeding seasons, Sheppey, Kent, April 2010 to March 2012.

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**247.** Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and wind turbine, Kent, March 2013.

most likely to cause temporal variations in flight activity, with harriers being far less active on windy and, especially, wet days. For example, on 11th March 2012 (sunny and warm, wind NW force 2), in 47 minutes of observation I watched just two harriers in flight, which had a mean flight time per bird of 16 minutes 43 seconds and which between them were in the air for 33 minutes 26 seconds (71.1% of the observation time). On 16th March 2012 (dull and cold, wind SW force 4), in one hour of observation I watched 16 harriers in flight, with a mean flight time per bird of 1 minute 25 seconds, in total 22 minutes 35 seconds of flight time (37.7% of the observation time).

The height bands I used do not match the heights of the turbines currently installed in the area, so it is difficult to estimate the percentage of flights that would be at risk of direct collision with the rotor blades if similar turbines were installed in the study area. Fig. 1 suggests that during September–February, 85–99% of flights would be below the blades but during the breeding season that figure falls to 52–69%.

Martin (2011) suggested that an important reason for collisions by birds is because of the

limited binocular vision of many species and it seems very likely that a harrier would have a blind spot in its frontal vision making collisions with even very prominent objects in their flight path probable. The results of a study of breeding White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* in Norway (Nygård *et al.* 2010) support this, although the White-tailed Eagle is a less manoeuvrable species than the Marsh Harrier. Clearly, further relevant data on Marsh Harriers is desirable.

#### Acknowledgments

Rowena Langston was very helpful in directing me to information on survey methods and Aly McCluskie kindly commented on an early draft. Much of the personal information referred to was collected by many different volunteers. I am very grateful to all of them.

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# Notes

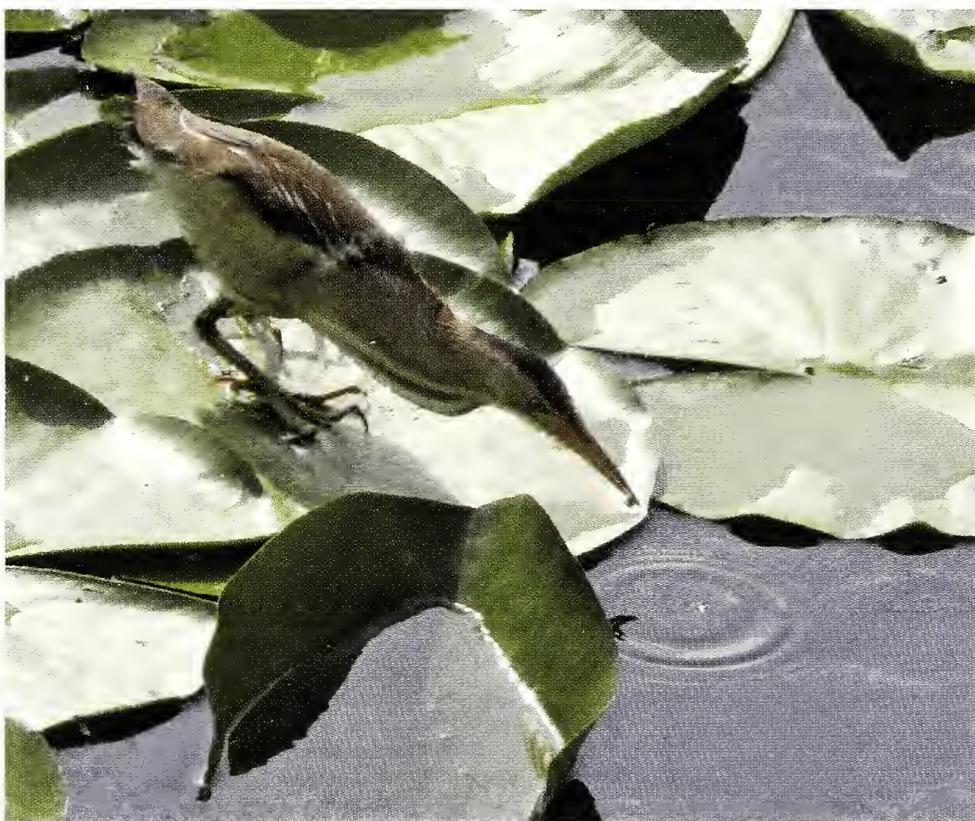
## Bait-fishing Little Bittern

In the summer of 2011, a female Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* was observed four times fishing with invertebrate bait at the pond of Crosagny (which straddles the French departments of Savoie and Haute-Savoie). The pond is an old fish pond, some 8 ha in extent, maximum depth up to 1 m, and has supported a breeding pair of Little Bitterns for many years and several other species of heron throughout the year.

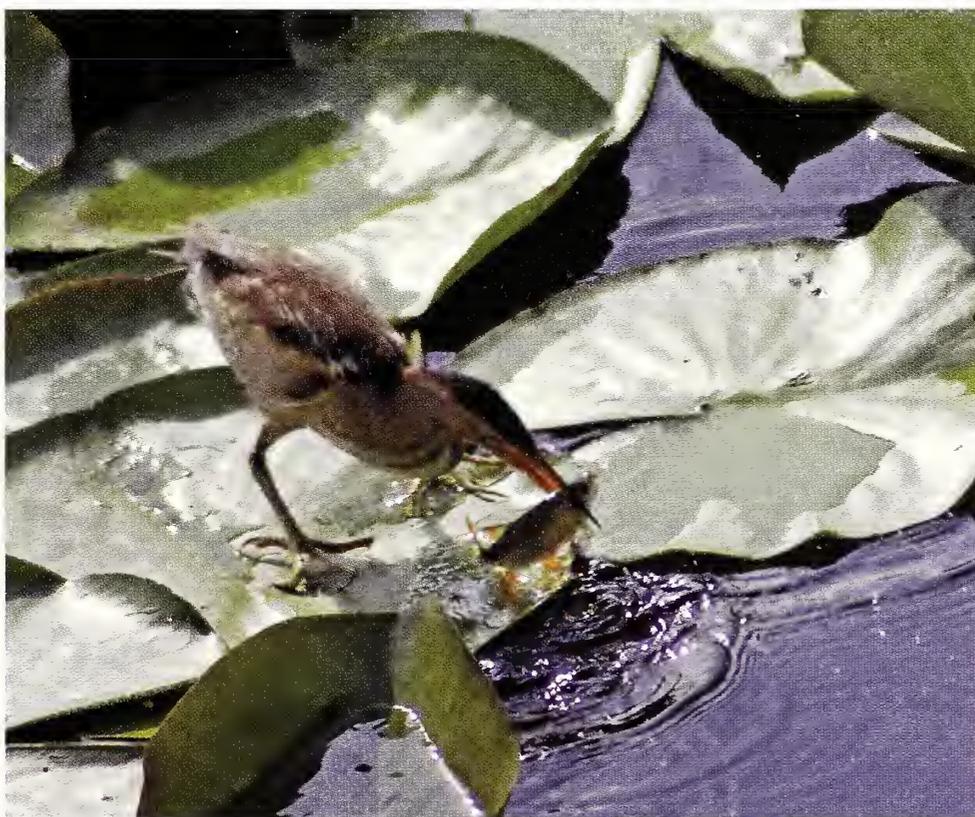
The first sequence of fishing with bait was observed and photographed on 30th June at 08.20 hrs, for about one minute. The bird, walking on water-lily leaves, suddenly caught an object, seemingly an insect. Then, retaining the prey in its beak, it continued a few metres to the edge of open water. The bittern gently laid the bait on the water surface and adopted a crouched posture. A moment later, it stretched its neck out and caught a fish (a roach *Rutilus rutilus* or a rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus*), which was swallowed head first. See plates 248 & 249; more photos are available at: [https://plus.google.com/photos/113847114570566650216/albums/5826955760710569377?authkey=CIWJ\\_KGYrv7ErQE](https://plus.google.com/photos/113847114570566650216/albums/5826955760710569377?authkey=CIWJ_KGYrv7ErQE)

A similar sequence was observed a few days later, then a third, and finally a fourth on 6th July in the late afternoon, which was also photographed. During the last observation, the

bittern again caught what appeared to be an invertebrate (possibly a beetle) on the water-lily leaves, and placed it on the water surface at 17.38 hrs, watching the slight drift of the bait to the right. This being unsuccessful, she took the bait again at 17.43 and chose another spot, to the left, and laid it on the water again at 17.44. She was rewarded by



Marius Bonhomme



Mireille Reigner

**248 & 249.** Bait-fishing female Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Crosagny, France, June 2011.

catching a roach or rudd at 17.45. Some three minutes after that, the bird grabbed a new invertebrate, walked a little and stopped to lay the bait; but this time it rapidly gave up, took the bait once more and disappeared in vegetation after 17.51.

In the literature, this behaviour is classified as 'bait fishing' or 'baiting' (Ruxton 2011; [www.heronconservation.org/resources/Behavior\\_Terminology.pdf](http://www.heronconservation.org/resources/Behavior_Terminology.pdf)). Observations of it are rare among bird species and have most often been reported for members of the heron family (Ruxton 2011). This is only the third published record of this behaviour for the Little Bittern. The first record concerned a bird observed in Hungary on several evenings between 5th and 24th June 2000 (Baumann 2000). Perched in reeds, this bird caught dragonflies as bait to fish over water,

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## Treetop-hunting by Marsh Harriers

On several occasions since 2008 I have seen Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* hunting over the treetops of mixed woodland in north Norfolk. The gently undulating landscape inland from the coast is a mosaic of arable fields, permanent pasture and mixed woodland, and is used for hunting both by a small number of inland-breeding Marsh Harriers and by fledged juveniles from farther afield. The sightings have generally involved juvenile birds after fledging, in late July or August, mainly in the area south of Holkham Park. The method employed involves the harrier quartering back and forth low over a length of mature trees (15 m high or more), varying its height above the woodland while looking actively from side to side. Rapid bursts of speed are a prelude to the bird dashing through a break in the canopy and sometimes actually disappearing into the foliage of the crown of the trees. The main quarry on such occasions seems to be

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and repositioned its bait several times, with success. The second involved a juvenile near Cape Town, South Africa, on 8th May 2010 (Ryan 2013). That bird placed a grasshopper on the water several times and repositioned it if it drifted.

### Acknowledgments

We thank Werner Baumann, Didier Benson, Thomas Bugnyar, Jacqueline Crivelli, Hiroyoshi Higuchi, Frédéric Jiguet, Ian Julian, James Kushlan, Louis Lefebvre, Frédéric Mahler and Mireille Reignier for their help.

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Wood Pigeons *Columba palumbus*. While some are actively chased, I have yet to see a successful kill. Presumably, young pigeons, which are abundant at that time of year, would be a realistic target, particularly as they spend a great deal of time perched up motionless.

In years of poor gamebird productivity, prey opportunities may be difficult to come by and some harriers even resort to scavenging roadkill. Whether treetop-hunting is prompted by this or it is simply opportunistic behaviour by inexperienced youngsters is unknown. Although I have observed it less regularly, I have occasionally seen similar behaviour from adult birds over Holkham Pines adjacent to nesting grounds on nearby marshes. I can find no reference to such behaviour but Richard Rowe (pers. comm.) referred to such tactics from a juvenile close to Great Massingham, also in inland Norfolk, in August 1995.

## Sharing of prey by female Marsh Harriers

On the afternoon of 25th June 2012, at Holkham NNR in Norfolk, I noticed a female Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* return from the nearby marshes with a Coot *Fulica atra* chick in its talons. Anxious to see its destination within the reedbed, I watched its progress over the meadows and was surprised to see it go to ground in the grass instead of taking the prey to its nest. At this point a second female harrier came out from the reedbeds (where there were up to three harrier nests) and landed beside the first female. With no apparent sign of conflict, the first female flew back out onto the marsh whilst the second 'collected' the Coot chick and went back to its nest in the reeds, followed by the third breeding female, which had appeared on the scene too. Generally, when breeding Marsh Harriers are coexisting in a small area, it is not unusual to witness excited and often noisy interest by the other females when a male returns to feed its mate or young, but this was the first time in over 25 years of watching/wardening that I had ever seen a female bring in food and 'pass' it to a neighbouring breeding female.

Sternalski *et al.* (2012) (see also Blanc *et al.* 2013) highlighted the existence of some male

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## Common Buzzards robbing Marsh Harriers of prey

On three occasions in the summer/autumn of 2012, I witnessed Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* robbing Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* of their prey at Holkham NNR in Norfolk. In the first two instances, a male Marsh Harrier taking prey back to the nest was the victim. On the first occasion (6th June), the harrier was about 1.5 km from its nest, while the Buzzard was less than 1 km from its nest. The Buzzard continually dived at the harrier with its talons out, and after a great deal of twisting and turning by both species over a period of about two minutes, the harrier finally dropped its prey (which appeared to be a duckling). The harrier left empty-handed and the Buzzard perched in an oak tree *Quercus* for a further couple of

Marsh Harriers that develop an adult plumage that resembles the female. One hypothesis for this is that some males in female-type plumage can breed more successfully in areas of high population density by avoiding some of the conflict/competition with rival males. However, through constant watching at the site, I knew that the birds I had seen were all the regular females from the nesting area.

One possible explanation was that the second female was a youngster from a previous breeding season fledged by the first female. With the site supporting growing numbers of wintering birds in recent years, the species could now be safely referred to as an increasing resident (rather than merely a summer visitor, as it was in the past), and sometimes it has been seen that loose family bonds do extend over an intervening winter. Whatever the explanation, I can find no previous evidence of such behaviour.

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minutes before dropping into the field to retrieve the lost prey. After a minute or so of searching, the Buzzard failed to find its reward and it too left with nothing.

The second instance (3rd July) involved different individuals of each species, some 3 km from the initial observation. On this occasion, the male harrier was intercepted at a distance of only about 30 m from its nest-site, just as it was about to pass its prey to its mate. This time the Buzzard moved in relatively quickly and grabbed the prey from the talons of the harrier. No resistance or effort to regain the prey was made and the Buzzard swiftly disappeared back to a nearby wood and its own nest-site.

A third instance of similar behaviour was

noted on 8th November, but this time a juvenile Buzzard and a juvenile Marsh Harrier were involved. The harrier was circling over Holkham marsh with a rat *Rattus* in its talons and was intercepted by the Buzzard, which flew in at speed from a distance of c. 600 m. No physical contact was made but the Buzzard circled the harrier persistently, diving at it periodically with talons outstretched and rushing past alongside it over a period of about two minutes before the harrier dropped the rat, which was caught expertly by the Buzzard.

Whilst Marsh Harriers have been breeding at the site since 1982, Common Buzzards

have been nesting close to the reserve only in more recent times. In 2012, with five pairs of Common Buzzards nesting in woodland on the reserve's boundaries, there were many instances when the two species were hunting the same areas of marsh and meadow. With almost 20 pairs of Marsh Harriers along a stretch of the coastal marshes of about 8 km, it was perhaps inevitable that conflict would occur at some stage. It seems that such interactions between these two species have so far been unrecorded and it will certainly be interesting to see if the Common Buzzard's presence in the region results in continued kleptoparasitism.

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## Attempted predation by Common Kestrel at a House Sparrow nestbox

At about 19.00 hrs on 25th June 2012, we recorded an attempt by a Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* to predate House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* nestlings in a nestbox in rural Nottinghamshire (plate 250). The Kestrel used both its feet and beak to try to get at the nestlings but was unsuccessful. The diet of the Common Kestrel is chiefly formed of small mammals (e.g. Yalden & Warburton 1979) but it will also take other organisms, including small birds, and especially nestlings and fledglings during June–July or when small mammal numbers are reduced (Village 1982). Several studies show that the House Sparrow is one species taken by Kestrels (e.g. Yalden 1980) but to our knowledge this is the first recorded incidence of a Kestrel attempting to take nestlings from a nestbox.

The nestlings in this nestbox were particularly vocal and obvious, spending much of the day with their heads poking out of the nestbox entrance, presumably because they were being raised by just one parent. This was the only incidence of attempted predation that was recorded during a wider study of a population of House Sparrows in nestboxes at this site. We considered the possibility that the preferred food of the Kestrel was scarce at this time (midsummer) but the dissection of pellets from a nearby Kestrel box indicated that the majority of food items were mammals, although some bird remains were present (and note that Yalden & Yalden 1985 found that bird remains are especially difficult to find in Kestrel pellets). Although we cannot be sure that it was a local Kestrel



250. Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* at a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* nestbox, Nottinghamshire, June 2012.

we recorded at the sparrow nestbox, the pellets suggested that there was no lack of small mammals in the surrounding area.

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## Black-headed Gull with supernumerary foot

While checking Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* for rings at Arnside, Cumbria on 18th February 2013, I noticed an adult bird with what at first sight appeared to be a strange growth on its right leg. On closer inspection (plate 251) the 'growth' turned out to be a supernumerary foot comprising at least two toes with webbing between them attached to the inside of the tibio-tarsal joint. A third toe may have been present but I was unable to get a clear view of it. This supernumerary foot did not appear to have any obvious effect on the bird – it did not walk with a limp, for instance – nor did the other 20 or so Black-headed Gulls present treat it as anything other than one of their number.

There are a number of records of birds with supernumerary digits (see review by Poulis 2011), but they are very unusual and this appears to be the first record in the Black-headed Gull and the first in which the supernumerary organ is attached to the tibio-tarsal joint. It appears that such abnormalities may arise from mutations in the bird's genetic make-up or



Robin Sellers

**251.** Adult Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* with supernumerary foot attached to tibio-tarsal joint, Arnside, Cumbria, February 2013.

from the effect of chemicals in the environment on embryonic development.

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## Persistent attacks by Eurasian Sparrowhawk on Eurasian Jays

Three or four Eurasian Jays *Garrulus glandarius* feed on the hanging nut containers in my garden in Bedfordshire every day. On 6th December 2012, at about 10.00 hrs, I saw a

first-winter Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* attempt to take a Jay, which jinked sideways neatly. After this initial attempt, the Sparrowhawk tried again and again to catch a

Jay. Each time the Jay escaped and, almost instantly, it or another Jay would be back on the nuts and the Sparrowhawk would try again. Every now and then, the Sparrowhawk perched briefly on an exposed branch overlooking the lawn, but the Jays simply ignored it until the next attempt. About one in five attacks resulted in the tables being turned, with a Jay chasing the Sparrowhawk. This behaviour continued until at least 12.45, when I had to leave the house, with no success for the Sparrowhawk. At one stage I

thought that two Sparrowhawks must be involved, but it became apparent that it was just one that returned quickly after each failed attempt. No tits or finches appeared at the feeders during the whole period, where normally there are half a dozen at any one time when there is no raptor present. The day was calm and sunny, with some snow still lying from a snowfall the previous day. Ian Newton (*in litt.*) commented that 'this level of persistence is amazing, and I know of nothing similar'.

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## Crop size and food caching of Eurasian Jay

The autumn of 2012 saw a huge movement of Eurasian Jays *Garrulus glandarius* in the UK. I was fortunate that one decided to visit my garden in rural Buckinghamshire, where I first noted the bird clinging to my peanut feeder in mid October. After that, I put out loose peanuts on the lawn and (unsurpris-

ingly) the Jay seized upon this easy source of food immediately.

I was surprised by the quantity of peanuts this bird could take in one go and the frequency of visits. The Jay was clearly caching the nuts for harder times, and it was also interesting to see how dominant it was over other crow species, seeing off Magpies *Pica pica* and Jackdaws *Corvus monedula*, on one occasion six of the latter at once.

After an initial casual observation of the Jay taking exactly 50 peanuts (!), I decided to record the results of my observations (table 1). The three dates for which multiple counts were recorded were the only ones on which I was able to watch for any length of time. At the time given, the bird would fly from the garden to a nearby thick hedge about 40 m away.

Careful observations, through binoculars at a distance of about 15 m, showed that when the bird's crop was full, it would line the peanuts up along the entire length of its bill. At this point, as the bird dropped its head to collect the next nut, it would sometimes drop a nut or, indeed, as it snapped one up, crush one and have to get another. This means that on some of the highest counts in table 1, the count could be exaggerated by a few nuts, as clearly it was very difficult to be sure how many were staying in the bill. Plate 252 shows the Jay with a very swollen crop, full of peanuts, as it lines further ones up along its bill.

I measured ten peanuts at random; they were all about 10 mm long and 5 mm in

**Table 1.** Number of peanuts taken in one go by a Jay *Garrulus glandarius* in a Buckinghamshire garden in autumn 2012. BWP states that up to nine acorns can be transported in the gullet (90 large pine seeds, 15 beech nuts or ten hazelnuts – but no mention of peanuts) with heavier loads taken to more distant caches.

Date	Number of peanuts	Departure time
17th October	50	–
23rd October	21	07.45
	37	08.00
	31	09.15
	19	09.45
	8	07.37
24th October	40	07.42
	83	07.52
	29	08.12
	78	07.53
25th October	73	08.00
26th October	72	08.15
31st October	35	07.20
5th November	35	07.30
	21	07.35
	18	07.45

diameter. I weighed 70 nuts, picked at random, and they totalled 21 g.

On other occasions (after the loose nuts were all gone), I watched the Jay taking whole peanuts from the peanut feeder, when it would perch on a branch and peck at the nut, eating the smaller pieces. I can only assume from this behaviour that when it was seen to take the large numbers of whole nuts none (or very few) were swallowed whole and they were all carried away in the crop.



Mike Wallen

252. Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*, Buckinghamshire, October 2012.

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## Male Blackcap singing while incubating

On 6th June 2012, I recorded video footage at the nest of a Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* at Cocentaina, Alicante, Spain [www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/key-refs](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/key-refs). This recording shows the male performing a normal full song during incubation. Singing from inside a nestbox is not uncommon behaviour in some species, for example the Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. In Starlings, song delivered from the nestbox appears to be primarily to attract a mate, and ceases once pair-formation is complete, apart from instances of polygamy (Eens *et al.* 1990, 1994).

Howard (1907–14) suggested that, in Blackcaps, singing from the nest seldom occurs and constitutes a response to other males' song. In the example I recorded, although another Blackcap was singing nearby, the incubating male began singing fully seven minutes after the neighbour's song started. An alternative and more likely explanation in this case is that this behaviour is a form of communication between the two members of a pair. Indeed, in the recording discussed here, the male ceases to sing and leaves the nest shortly after a series of 'tack'

calls are heard close by, probably from the female partner. Blackcaps often rear two broods per season and fledging of the first-brood chicks and laying the first egg of the next clutch sometimes occur just a few days apart (*BWP*; pers. obs.). To remain paired for the second breeding attempt, males might be forced to sing once they are already paired and maybe even while incubating. Peterson *et al.* (2004) found that singing from the nest does not increase predation rate, and such behaviour may be more widespread among Blackcaps, and other passerines that are multi-brooded during a season, than records suggest.

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## Juvenile European Stonechat feeding sibling

At Kelling Heath, Norfolk, in the early evening of 5th August 2012, I watched three fully fledged young European Stonechats *Saxicola rubicola* feeding actively from the vegetation and sometimes in the air, while both parents kept watch nearby. These young birds were the survivors from a second brood of six, all of which were colour-ringed as pulli on 6th July.

A Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* suddenly appeared on a dead gorse *Ulex* branch some 40 m in front of me. I focused my telescope on this bird just in time to see it fly off, to be replaced immediately by a juvenile Stonechat with a small moth in its bill. A second juvenile Stonechat then appeared next to the first, wing-flapping, gaping and

stretching its neck towards its sibling, which then fed the moth to it. The moth was quickly swallowed and both birds then flew, in different directions. I continued watching for over half an hour but did not get a repeat performance. None of the three fledglings were seen begging food from the parents.

This behaviour is something I had not seen previously nor heard of and it is not mentioned in either *BWP* or *Stonechats* (Urquhart 2002). It would be interesting to know if anyone else has witnessed similar behaviour in this or any other species.

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# Letters

## Daylight hunting by Barn Owls – is England a special case?

In global terms, the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* is one of the most widely distributed of birds. So I was surprised to hear from Tom Noah, a member of the German rarities committee, that the bird he would most like to see during a visit to the UK last October was Barn Owl. He said that he had never seen one hunting in the daytime and I then realised that, despite extensive travels in Europe and other parts of the world where Barn Owls occur, neither had I outside the UK. I often see them at night in Spanish towns and Hungarian villages, while they regularly roost in trees and cliffs near staff quarters at African lodges that I visit. But I have never witnessed them hunting in the daytime like the birds I see regularly in Norfolk and my home county of Nottinghamshire. I put the same question to several widely travelled colleagues and this also seems to be the case among my circle of birding friends. Why should the UK be so different?

One possible answer was revealed in late

2012 when Dave Hursthouse and others watched a Barn Owl being attacked and killed as it quartered fields near Hayton, Nottinghamshire, in daylight. Perhaps the lack of avian predators such as Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* and Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* in England during the twentieth century has allowed Barn Owls to take advantage of daytime hunting in periods of food shortage or when more food is required to feed youngsters? Certainly it has been very easy to find daytime-hunting Barn Owls in eastern counties like Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire where raptors were persecuted – and it will be interesting to see if Barn Owls change their habits as the number of Common Buzzards continues to rise. It would be interesting to know whether any overseas birders see Barn Owls hunting regularly in daylight in regions where there are high numbers of buzzards and eagles, or whether high densities of large raptors in an area makes for nocturnal Barn Owls.

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## The origins of the vernacular name of Common Scoter

The origins of the name ‘scoter’ seem to have slipped through the fingers of lexicographers. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* ducks the issue by classifying the word as ‘of unknown origin’, a phrase echoed in the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary and others. However, there appears to be more to this story.

Lockwood (1984) stated that ‘scoter’ was ‘originally a Yorkshire term for the Common Scoter [*Melanitta nigra*], first in Ray 1674 [*A Collection of English Words... with a Catalogue of English Birds*] then in Ray 1678 [Ray & Willughby’s *Ornithology*]; it was eventually adopted by Pennant in 1768 (*The British Zoology*) ‘and so became effectively the standard term’. However, he continued: ‘nonetheless it is spurious. It must be a scribal or printing error for Sooter, i.e. a soot-coloured duck – one of its German names is Russente soot duck – the bird being not unnaturally named after the striking black plumage of the male, as in the local names BLACK DIVER, BLACK DUCK.’

I think that there is strong evidence to support an alternative and more substantial explanation. Choate (1973) suggested that scoter ‘is probably a variation of coot, which is used by hunters for scoters’. This alerted me to consider that now-archaic forms of English are often retained in American bird names (e.g. loon and murre) and that such vernacular use may indicate that there was once a wider cultural link between the two names in question. The discovery of the name ‘cooter’, attached to the illustration of a Razorbill *Alca torda* in F. O. Morris’s *British Birds* (1850–1857), drew a blank in an online search, but the word *scooter* immediately revealed an American website ([www.thegamebirdlist.com](http://www.thegamebirdlist.com)), which named *Melanitta nigra* as ‘Common scooter, American scooter, black coot, sea coot, black duck’. That certainly underlines Choate’s hunch.

I was further intrigued by Choate’s

comment that: ‘...*macreuse* in the north of France means a scoter, and in the south, a coot.’ The etymology of *macreuse* is, in fact, directly linked to an old French name for Coot, *Macrolle*, which is recorded in the modern form *Foulque macroule* (Centre National des Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales; [www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/Macreuse](http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/Macreuse)). This seems to be a word of Germanic origins and is related to the Frisian *markol* (waterhen) and to a northern Dutch form *meerkol*, a variant of *meerkot*. *Meer* derives from the Latin *mare* (sea), while *kot* and *coot* would seem to share a hypothetical West Germanic root *köte* with the Dutch *koet* (Lockwood 1984; OED). In short, *meerkot* is *sea-coot*.

Further evidence for the link lies in Belon (1555, *L’Histoire de la Nature des Oiseaux*), also cited in the online etymology, by the words: *macroule* ‘*diable de mer*’ (sea devil). Significantly, Lockwood has *devil* as one of the old names for Coot, and quoted a 1580 record that states that ‘because of its blackness is called a Diuell’.

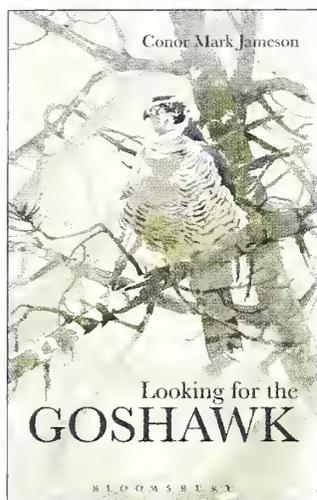
Remembering the Yorkshire origins of the word *scoter*, and given the heritage of the Danelaw in that region, it seems reasonable to suggest that an English dialect form, rooted in either Norse or Anglo-Saxon, would have conveyed the concept of *sea-coot*, and that this could readily have condensed, via the form *scooter*, into our mysterious *scoter*.

I feel that this second explanation has considerable substance as a rationale for the origins of this curious name, versions of which were probably in use long before its adoption by Ray, or before the settlement of North America.

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## Looking for the Goshawk

By Conor Mark Jameson

Bloomsbury, 2013

Hbk, 368pp; line-drawings

ISBN 978-1-4081-6487-7 Subbuteo code M21421

£18.99 **BB Bookshop price £17.00**

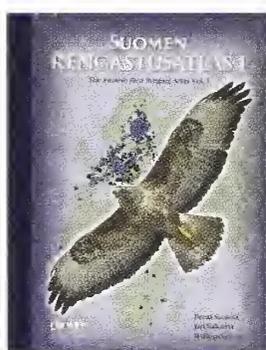
I am very fortunate to live close to where Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* are thriving and in the New Forest there must be in excess of 20 pairs breeding. However, this bird is still an enigma for many people – a phantom of the forest that sees all but is rarely seen. The title of the book is very accurate as much of it is in diary format as the author travels to many places in the hope of seeing a Goshawk, but almost always he fails to succeed. In that sense it made me realise how privileged I am to be able to see this bird so easily, as his tales of long walks to remote woods where the birds failed to materialise reminded me of the many times when I have also searched and failed. I also admired the way that so often he doubted his own ability to be sure of what he was seeing. Again that brought back memories of my own uncertainty when first getting to know the species. However, his relentless searching and repeated failures did start to wear me down in the end.

There is no doubt that Conor Jameson has a

terrific way with words, and his ability to describe with passion what all of his senses are detecting is impressive, but I was hoping for a lot more factual information. I do like books that have a clear structure that I can navigate and, while we are told about visits to the USA, Germany and various parts of the UK to seek information, there is a randomness to this Goshawk journey that left me feeling a bit frustrated. Indeed, I felt personally deflated when yet another expedition to a wild wood resulted in a nil result. Perhaps that shows the power of Jameson's writing?

Whether you enjoy this book will probably depend on the degree to which you like to have your facts delivered in an orderly fashion with arguments for and against the evidence presented. While I enjoyed reading much of it, I actually hoped to learn more about Goshawks. Where it is weak on facts the book is strong on emotion, and there is no doubt that while reading the highs and lows of searching for Goshawks I felt as though I had accompanied a friend on a mission.

*Keith Betton*



## Suomen Rengastusatlas I / The Finnish Bird Ringing Atlas Vol. I

By Pertti Saurola, Jari Valkama and William Velmala

Finnish Museum of Natural History and Environment, 2013

Hbk, 551pp; many colour photographs, maps, graphics

ISBN 978-952-10-8572-7 Subbuteo code M21673

£43.00 **BB Bookshop price £38.50**

Although geolocators are now used in large numbers and satellite transmitters are getting smaller every year, bird ringing is still one of the main tools of bird research. One of the main aims of bird ringing has been, and indeed still is, to study bird migration; and in the last decade or so there has been a marked increase in the publication of books dealing with analyses of bird migration through ringing recoveries on a national level.

The monumental *Migration Atlas* for Britain & Ireland in 2002 (Wernham *et al.*) was followed by other national atlases from Sweden (2001/2008), Norway (2003/2006), Denmark (2006), the Czech Republic and Slovakia (2008), Italy (2008) and Hungary (2009). Now the first volume of the Finnish Bird Ringing Atlas has been published.

Since rather few people outside Finland speak Finnish, the authors have produced an almost

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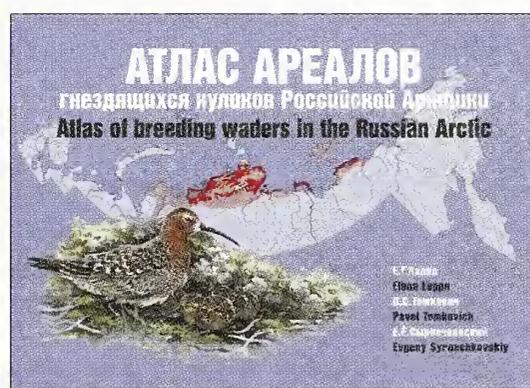
bilingual introduction as well as English summaries for every species account, and English subtitles for all figures and tables. The introductory chapters contain information about bird ringing in general and in Finland as well as a detailed description of the methods used for analyses of the recoveries. I was surprised that only birds ringed in Finland were included and not those ringed abroad and refound in Finland. I especially liked the chapter dealing with legendary Finnish ringers – did you know that there has been a ‘ringer of the year award’ since 1971? All the chapters are beautifully illustrated with well-chosen photographs, the layout is just perfect and the text is an easy but informative read.

Bird ringing is used in many aspects of ornithology. To do a complete analysis of the ringing recoveries of any country could fill many books. Therefore, any migration atlas unfortunately needs to concentrate on certain subjects. The species accounts of this first volume contain the non-passerines from swans to skuas. They are of varying length and usually contain – when the

number of recoveries allows – graphs of ringing totals per year, cause of death, timing of migration, migration direction and age distribution of recoveries. In addition, maps show ringing sites and locations of recoveries according to finding circumstances and/or age. The better the data, the more maps and graphs are presented; for example in the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* account there are seven graphs and 17 maps! All of them are well designed and the message is clearly visible. Each species also has a table with data on ringing totals and number of recoveries, oldest individual, longest distance covered and fastest migration speed. The summary includes a description of the status in Finland as well as an analysis of the graphs and maps presented.

This is a superb migration atlas – actually the best I’ve ever seen! Although I would rather like to see a detailed analysis on a European, or preferably Palearctic, level, I can’t wait to receive the second volume!

Jochen Dierschke



## Atlas of Breeding Waders in the Russian Arctic

By Elena Lappo, Pavel Tomkovich and Evgeny Syroechkovskiy

UF Ofsetnaya Pechat, Moscow, 2012

Pbk, 448pp; 173 maps, black-and-white illustrations

ISBN 5-86676-072-X

Price c. £35 plus p&p

There is no other country with more breeding waders than Russia, where more than 70 species are recorded breeding regularly. The Russian Arctic is especially species-rich. Elena Lappo, Pavel Tomkovich and Evgeny Syroechkovskiy have been working in this remote region for many decades, primarily on the distribution and biology of Arctic waterbirds and waders in particular. I had the pleasure and privilege to participate in 12 summer expeditions to help search for breeding waders.

Owing to the vision and long-term support of Gerard Boere and the Dutch Government, this atlas of breeding waders in the Russian Arctic has been completed, after almost 12 years in preparation. It incorporates the results of personal expeditions over the past 40 years (Pavel Tomkovich has been in the Russian Arctic almost every summer since 1972) but also data from field research from as early as the late nineteenth century. More than

1,360 publications have been used to describe the distribution, from over 2,800 locations. The atlas shows detailed distribution maps of 51 regularly breeding waders out of a total of 79 waders recorded in the Russian Arctic. For many species, new ranges are described. For example, the western distribution of the Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, previously known only for Chukotka and Eastern Yakutia, is now marked to reach to the Yano-Indigirko region; the Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* is a newcomer in the European Arctic; the Wandering Tattler *Tringa incana* is a regular breeding wader in Southern Chukotka, not confined to Alaska; while the Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* now occupies a much greater range in Russia, as far west as the Taimyr Peninsula; and the Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos*, also spreading originally from Alaska, is most likely now breeding in Europe. The



seemingly discontinuous distribution of the Broad-billed Sandpiper *C. falcinellus* remains mysterious even after so many years of extensive field research, and shows that there are still gaps to be filled for this and other species.

Three maps and a detailed text accompany each species chapter. One map shows all records, a second (for almost all species) shows breeding density and finally an extrapolated map combines the first two with background GIS information on vegetation, topography and habitats. Tables list locations with varying breeding density for those species with data available. Black-and-white sketches by Evgeny Koblik enhance the book's visual appeal. The level of detail surpasses anything produced from this region or anywhere else in the Arctic for that matter.

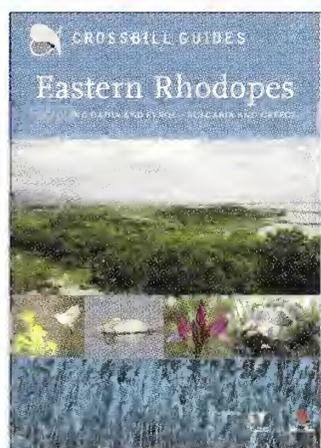
A chapter at the end of the book attempts to interpret the dynamics of species range and population size. It is fascinating to see which species have changed and spread and which have declined, but in my opinion the data are not sufficient to allow some of the interpretations made. In particular, the overall positive population trends do not fully reflect the generally declining population trends observed in many Arctic wader species. This has also been recognised by the authors but is not

clearly spelled out in the text and tables and could lead to the sadly incorrect assumption that Arctic species in general are doing well.

This book is a monumental effort. Inevitably, in such a massive work, there are a few errors. A few names are spelt incorrectly, some references are listed twice and in the caption of the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata* on p. 292 the authors could not decide between this species and the Purple Sandpiper *C. maritima*. But these are all minor quibbles considering the vast amount of information that has been included. With so many sources and references, some locations seem to have been lost and most certainly this atlas will trigger some additional information from readers to further advance our knowledge in this remote region.

This atlas is a fantastic product and deserves a wide distribution among the English-speaking birding community. Although the text is in Russian, all 173 maps and tables have English titles and captions and each species chapter contains an extensive English summary. Unfortunately, the atlas is still not available in bookshops and those interested can order a copy directly from Elena Lappo at [ellappo@mail.ru](mailto:ellappo@mail.ru)

*Christoph Zöckler*



## Crossbill Guides: Eastern Rhodopes

By Dirk Hilbers, Herman Dierickx, Alex Tabak and Albert Vliegthart

KNNV Publishing/Crossbill Guides, 2013

Pbk, 256pp; colour photos, illustrations and maps

ISBN 978-94-91648-01-4 Subbuteo code M21681

£20.95 **BB Bookshop price £18.50**

Birdwatchers may not be familiar with the term 'Eastern

Rhodopes', but many will have heard of sites such as the Evros and Nestos Deltas, Arda Valley and Dadia Forest. They support an impressive range of raptors: 22 out of the 35 European birds of prey breed here, with a further nine being present during winter or on migration.

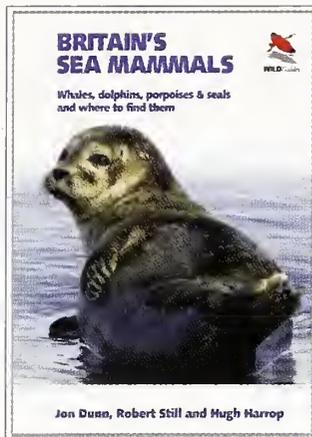
This is the first nature guidebook to cover this rugged and stunning region that crosses the borders of both Bulgaria and Greece. Like previous Crossbill Guides, it describes all aspects of the flora, fauna and the landscape. There are 18 detailed routes across both countries, and this is particularly useful because wildlife tourism is only just devel-

oping here. As always with these guides, there is an emphasis on ecology, land use and rural culture.

In total, the book lists around 280 species of birds for the area, and similar lists are given for each of the major wildlife groupings. As with previous guides in the series, there is a serious attempt to educate the reader about the area's overall ecology and conservation. While many parts of Greece (and to a lesser extent Bulgaria) have developed rapidly since the end of the hostilities that kept both countries busy until the mid twentieth century, much of this eastern end of the Rhodopes range has remained relatively unspoilt. A wildlife guide to the area was long overdue.

*Keith Betton*





## Britain's Sea Mammals: whales, dolphins, porpoises and seals and where to find them

By Jon Dunn, Robert Still and Hugh Harrop

Princeton University Press/WILDGuides, 2012

Pbk, 128pp; colour photos and illustrations, distribution maps

ISBN 978-0-691-15660-6 Subbuteo code M21376

£12.95 **BB Bookshop price £11.50**

This well-produced and nicely illustrated guide,

which will be of interest to many seabird enthusiasts, covers the 35 species of marine mammals recorded in British waters, plus True's Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon mirus* recorded from Ireland. Most of the text is devoted to field identification but there are also summaries of status and distribution drawn from the literature. One section describes where to watch sea mammals in Britain & Ireland, picking out 25 sites in the UK and six in Ireland. Inevitably, this overlooks many other important locations, and the choice rather focuses

upon the best known rather than the best ones, which is a shame. Information on distribution and seasonal occurrence is broadly correct but in some cases needs updating; if only the authors had sought an external check of all the text and maps, it would have made all the difference. What I like best, however, is the layout, which manages to pack in a lot of detail without appearing overcrowded, together with the illustrations, which are for the most part excellent.

*Peter G. H. Evans*

## Woodland Bird Songs and Calls

Hannu Jännes and Owen Roberts

New Holland, 2013

Book, 64pp; 90 colour photos

CD, 80 tracks

ISBN 978-1-78009-248-5

£12.99 **BB Bookshop price £11.50**

These two new book-and-CD combinations bring together very good recordings by Hannu Jännes with brief text by Owen Roberts. The design and style suggest that they have been produced for a relatively inexperienced audience. The recordings generally each last for 30–45 seconds and are in stereo.

It is clear that these books have been created with a European audience in mind and no doubt most of the recordings were made in Finland – so the Woodland selection includes eight species of both owl and woodpecker, Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*, Siberian Jay *Perisoreus infaustus* (but not most of the commoner crow species), Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*, Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* and Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*.

## Wetland Bird Songs and Calls

Hannu Jännes and Owen Roberts

New Holland, 2013

Book, 64pp; 90 colour photos

CD, 80 tracks

ISBN 978-1-78009-249-2

£12.99 **BB Bookshop price £11.50**

There are no distribution maps, so less knowledgeable buyers in the UK are clearly going to be puzzled by some of the selections. The choice of species for the Wetland CD are more in line with those you might expect to find in the UK, although Baillon's *Porzana pusilla* and Little Crakes *P. parva*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*, White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* and Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* give it a strong European feel. The recordings are very clear and precise – maybe a touch clinical on occasions, but that is not a problem as clarity is important.

*Keith Betton*



# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers the period from early May to early June 2013.

**Headlines** As usual, this was a fruitful four weeks of the year for rarities. A Dusky Thrush in Kent was the headline item for many, especially since it was twitchable on a Saturday. Similarly rare, though less accessible, was an Indigo Bunting in Anglesey, a summer-plumaged Pacific Diver in Shetland, a Balearic Woodchat Shrike in Orkney and a Crested Lark in Kent. Other major rarities included no fewer than three Collared Flycatchers, a River Warbler on Fair Isle and a White-throated Sparrow in Lincolnshire, while the supporting cast included two Pallid Harriers, a Terek Sandpiper in Sussex, a European Roller in Hampshire and Surrey, a Lesser Grey Shrike in Northumberland, three Paddyfield and two Blyth's Reed Warblers, and a very showy Thrush Nightingale in Cleveland. There were good numbers of Mediterranean species, including double-figure tallies of both Woodchat Shrike and Subalpine Warbler, while a heavy passage of Long-tailed and Pomarine Skuas in Scotland was also worthy of mention.

American Wigeon *Anas americana* Cuskinny (Co. Cork), 12th–18th May; Loch of Hillwell (Shetland), 19th–23rd May. Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* Bridgend (Clyde), long-stayer, intermittently to 5th June; Barry Buddon (Angus & Dundee), 17th May. Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* Chew Valley Lake (Avon), 13th–15th May and 7th–9th June. Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis* Long-stayers Saltholme (Cleveland), to 20th May and Anglers CP (Yorkshire), to 21st May; St John's Loch (Highland), 10th May to 10th June; Idle Valley (Nottinghamshire), 4th June. King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* Ythan Estuary/Blackdog (North-east Scotland), long-stayer to 8th June; Inishkeas (Co. Mayo), 17th–21st May. Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* North Uist (Outer Hebrides), long-stayer again 24th May to 1st June. Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* Long-stayers Musselburgh/Portobello area (Lothian), to 22nd May, and Rosslare Bay (Co. Wexford), to 12th May;

Bamburgh (Northumberland), 14th May; Silver Strand (Co. Galway), two, 19th May; Blackdog, 1st–7th June.

Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* Grutness (Shetland), 16th May. White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* Long-stayers Burghead (Moray & Nairn), to 14th May and South Ronaldsay (Orkney), to 12th May; Buckie (Moray & Nairn), five, 12th May; Inishbofin (Co. Galway), 18th–22nd May; North Uist, 20th May and Lewis (both Outer Hebrides), 29th May.

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* Off Scilly, from a pelagic trip, one 31st May.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* Ham Wall (Somerset), pair, 6th June, at least one to 8th June. Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Cley, 20th May, then Kelling Heath (Norfolk), 26th May; Tenby (Pembrokeshire), 25th May; Cork City (Co. Cork), 7th June; Dunster (Somerset), 8th June. Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* Brading Marshes (Isle of Wight), 8th–9th June. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Long-stayers Hillsborough (Co. Down), to 26th May, Stodmarsh, to 11th May, presumed same Grove Ferry 11th May and Shorne Marshes (Kent) 14th May; Dungeness (Kent), 20th–24th May; Minsmere and North Warren (Suffolk), 11th May; Llanfachraeth (Anglesey), 14th–15th May; Doxey Marshes (Staffordshire), 9th June. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Kenfig (East Glamorgan), long-stayer intermittently to 6th June; Arcot Ponds (Northumberland), 16th May; Castlemartin (Pembrokeshire), 20th



Roger Riddington

253. Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*, Grutness, Shetland, May 2013.



Simon Knight

**254. Adult male Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*, Lakenheath Fen, Suffolk, May 2013.**

May; Marazion, 19th–31st May, Helston, 2nd June, Lizard (all Cornwall), 3rd June; Hythe (Kent), 31st May; Penally (Pembrokeshire), 4th June. **Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*** Llanfair Dyffryn (Caernarfonshire), 9th May; Acres Down, 18th May, same Oxenbourne Down (both Hampshire), 19th May; Mull (Argyll), 26th May. **Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*** Marloes Mere (Pembrokeshire), long-stayer to 9th June.

**Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*** Sruhillbeg Lough, Achill Island (Co. Mayo), 14th May.

**Black Kite *Milvus migrans*** Craig Goch Resr (Breconshire), 10th May; Wallend Marsh (Kent), 14th May; West Harford, 14th–16th May, Hauxley, 27th May and Rothbury (all Northumberland), 29th May; Abbotsbury/Bridport (Dorset), 17th May; various sites in New Forest area (Hampshire), 17th–19th May; Bromley, 18th May and Walthamstow (both Greater London), 30th May; Ratcliffe-on-Soar (Leicestershire & Rutland), 1st June; the Mullet (Co. Mayo), 1st June; Quanterness (Orkney), 3rd June; Waddington (Lincolnshire), 7th June; Brenley Corner (Kent), 9th–10th June. **Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*** Fair Isle, 3rd June;

Drimfern (Argyll), 4th June. **Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*** Lakenheath Fen (Suffolk), long-stayer to 5th June; Holt (Norfolk), 21st May; Assington (Suffolk), 21st May; Holmethorpe (Surrey), 25th May; Ouse Fen (Cambridgeshire), 1st–9th June; Hindley (Greater Manchester), 2nd June.

**Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*** Wicken Fen (Cambridgeshire), 14th–18th May; Frampton Marsh (Lincolnshire), two, 3rd June. **American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*** Inishkeas, 17th May. **Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus*** Patrington Haven (Yorkshire), 18th May. **White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*** Tacumshin (Co. Wexford), 3rd June. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*** Inishkeas, 21st May; Islay (Argyll), 22nd–23rd May; Exnaboe (Shetland), 24th May; Tacumshin, 25th May; Tiree (Argyll), 3rd June. **Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*** Coombe Hill Meadows (Gloucestershire), 16th May to 9th June; Skye (Highland), two, 23rd May; Old Moor (Yorkshire), 24th May; Lewis, 26th May; Slimbridge (Gloucestershire), 30th May to 3rd June; Scaling Dam Resr (Cleveland), 31st May; Rutland Water (Leicestershire & Rutland), two, 2nd June. **Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*** Rye Harbour

James Hanlon



**255.** Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*, Lakenheath Fen, Suffolk, May 2013.

(Sussex), 25th May. Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia* Wadebridge (Cornwall), 10th–14th May; Belvide Resr (Staffordshire), 26th May.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* Large movement in mid May, particularly off North Uist, included 614 on 11th and 455 on 13th; also 101 Annan (Dumfries & Galloway), 10th May. Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* A large movement off North Uist in mid May, which included

over 300 on 12th, 415 on 13th, and a remarkable 1,125 on 22nd May (in 2.5 hours); also 834 Corran Narrows (Highland), 23rd May.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Testwood Lakes (Hampshire), 9th June. White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* Lady's Island Lake (Co. Wexford), 23rd–26th May. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Long-stayer Tacumshin, to 25th May.

Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Long-stayers Topsham area (Devon), to 15th May, and Tacumshin to 13th May; Castlegregory (Co. Kerry), 13th–14th May; Siblyback Resr, 15th–16th May, with another Stithian's Resr (both Cornwall), 16th May; Oare Marshes area, 22nd May to 9th June, same Swalecliffe (both Kent), 27th May.

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* North Uist, long-stayer to 25th May; Arranmore (Co. Donegal), 29th May.

Steve Gantlett



**256.** First-summer female Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*, Margate, Kent, May 2013.

**Alpine Swift** *Apus melba* Staines Resr (Surrey), 12th May; Ascot (Berkshire), 15th May; Ruan Laniorne (Cornwall), 20th May; Spurn (Yorkshire), 24th May. **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* St Osyth, eight, 11th May, Colne Point (both Essex), nine, 12th May; Hythe (Kent), ten, 14th May. Then singles at Cley, 11th May; Cotswold Water Park (Wiltshire), 17th May; Church Norton (Sussex), 18th May; Ventnor (Isle of Wight), 19th May; St Mary's (Scilly), 20th May; Easington (Yorkshire), 21st May; Winterton (Norfolk), 22nd May; Dungeness, 24th May, Folkestone, 24th May, Grain, 25th May, Hope Point (all Kent), 29th May; Stronsay (Orkney), 29th May; Portland Bill (Dorset), 4th June; Bradwell (Essex), 5th June; Pegwell Bay (Kent), 8th–9th June. **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus* Broxhead Common (Hampshire), 23rd–26th May, then Thursley Common (Surrey), 26th May.

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* A substantial influx of at least 200 occurred during the second half of May, mainly along east-facing coasts, and including ten on Holy Island (Northumberland) on 20th–21st May and seven on Fair Isle on 25th May. **Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* Holy Island, 19th–20th May. **Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* Long-stayers Gwenter (Cornwall), to 11th May and St Mary's to 14th May; Hook Head (Co.

Wexford), 14th May; Tiree, 19th–21st; Lowestoft (Suffolk), 19th May; Southbourne (Dorset), 22nd May; Kenfig, 22nd–25th May; Ramsey (Pembrokeshire), 26th May; Newport Wetlands (Gwent), 28th May; Foula (Shetland), 28th May; Isle of May, 1st June; Unst (Shetland), 1st June; Dowrog Common (Pembrokeshire), 2nd June; Bardsey (Caernarfonshire), 3rd June; Spurn, 7th June. **Balearic Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator badius* Westray (Orkney), 26th May.

**Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla* St Mary's, long-stayer to 13th May; Foula, 16th–18th and 29th May; Pennington Marshes (Hampshire), 19th May; North Uist, 19th–20th May; Sumburgh Head (Shetland), 25th–29th May; Dawlish Warren (Devon), 25th May; North Ronaldsay (Orkney), 26th May; Blakeney Point (Norfolk), 31st May to 5th June. **Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* St Margaret's-at-Cliffe (Kent), 1st June.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica* Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire), 11th May; Flamborough Head (Yorkshire), 11th May; Spurn, 12th May, Beddington Sewage-farm (Greater London), 12th and 24th–25th May; Dungeness, 13th and 24th–25th May; Whitlingham CP (Norfolk), 13th May; Stodmarsh, 20th May; Weir Wood Resr (Sussex), 24th May; Hillswick (Shetland), 29th



Stef McElwee

257. Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia*, Hartlepool Headland, Cleveland, May 2013.

## Recent reports

May; Portland Bill, 7th June; Brading Marshes, 9th June.

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides* Scarborough (Yorkshire), 28th May; Gibraltar Point, 29th–31st May; Quendale (Shetland), 1st June; St Agnes (Scilly), 3rd June. **Iberian Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus ibericus* St Buryan (Cornwall), 16th May. **Subalpine Warbler** *Sylvia cantillans* St Mary's, long-stayer to 11th May; Cruden Bay (North-east Scotland), 14th–16th May; Rampside (Cumbria), 15th–18th May; Skokholm (Pembrokeshire), 16th May; Fair Isle, 25th May, with another 3rd–9th June; Copeland (Co. Down), 26th May; Scatness (Shetland), 28th May; Portland Bill, 2nd June; Bardsey, 3rd June; Skomer (Pembrokeshire), 5th June; Great Orme (Caernarfonshire), 8th–9th June. **River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* Fair Isle, 5th–6th June. **Savi's Warbler** *Locustella luscinioides* Minsmere, 12th May to 9th June; Lakenheath Fen, 25th May to 7th June; Brixham (Devon), 30th May. **Melodious Warbler** *Hippolais polyglotta* Fair Isle, 16th May. **Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola* North Ronaldsay, 20th–24th May; Shorne Marshes, 31st May; Bardsey, 7th June. **Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* Fair Isle, 27th May to 2nd June; Fetlar (Shetland), 29th May. **Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* Grimley (Worcestershire), 14th May; East Chevington (Northumberland), 19th–21st May; Dover (Kent), 31st May.

**Rose-coloured Starling** *Pastor roseus* Calf of Man (Isle of Man), 8th–9th June; Edmonton (Greater London), 9th June.

**Dusky Thrush** *Turdus eunomus* Margate (Kent), 15th–18th May.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* Portland Bill, at least 800, 1st June. **Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia* Fair Isle, long-stayer to 10th May, then two, 29th May; Hartlepool Headland (Cleveland), 19th–21st May; Virkie (Shetland), 30th May; Easington, 31st May to 2nd June, again 6th June. **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis* Whalsay (Shetland), 10th–16th May; Spurn, 18th May; Fair Isle, 9th June.

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* North Uist, 22nd May. **Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* North Ronaldsay, 25th May. **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* Spurn, 10th May.

**Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea* Llansadwrn (Anglesey), 20th May. **White-throated Sparrow** *Zonotrichia albicollis* Spalding (Lincolnshire), 28th May. **Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* Holy Island, 19th May; Fair Isle, 19th May and 3rd June; Foula, 28th–29th May. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* Unst, 28th May; Blakeney Point, 30th May. **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* Farne Islands (Northumberland), 30th May; Compton Down (Isle of Wight), 9th–10th June.



Roger Riddington

258. Female Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*, Fair Isle, June 2013.



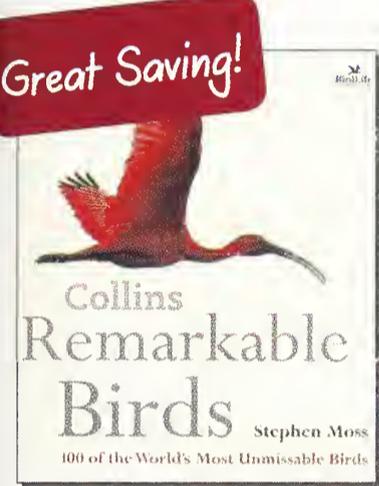
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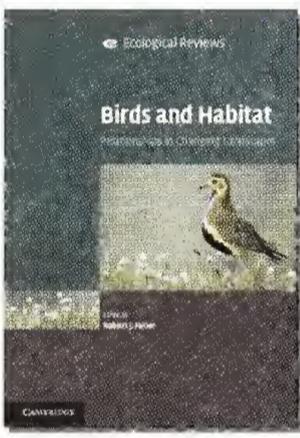
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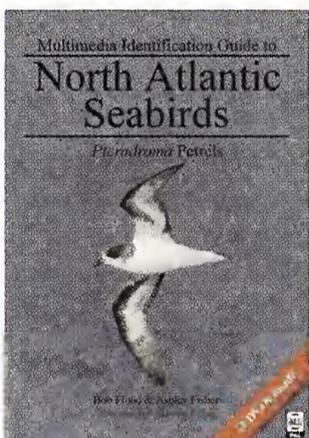
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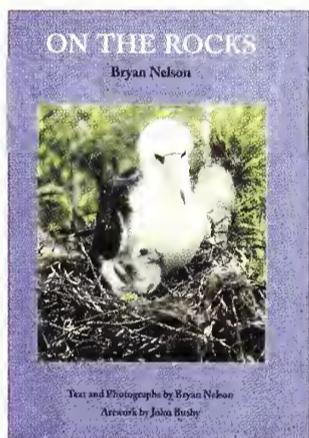
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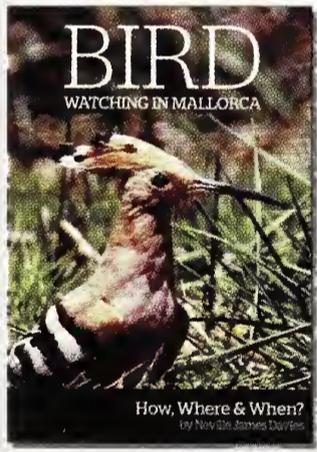
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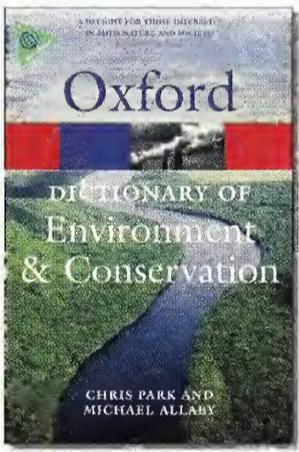
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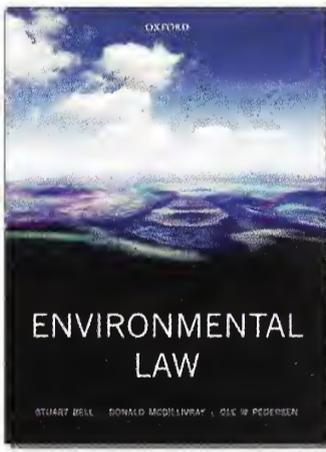
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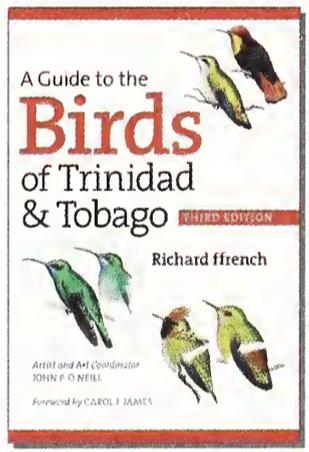
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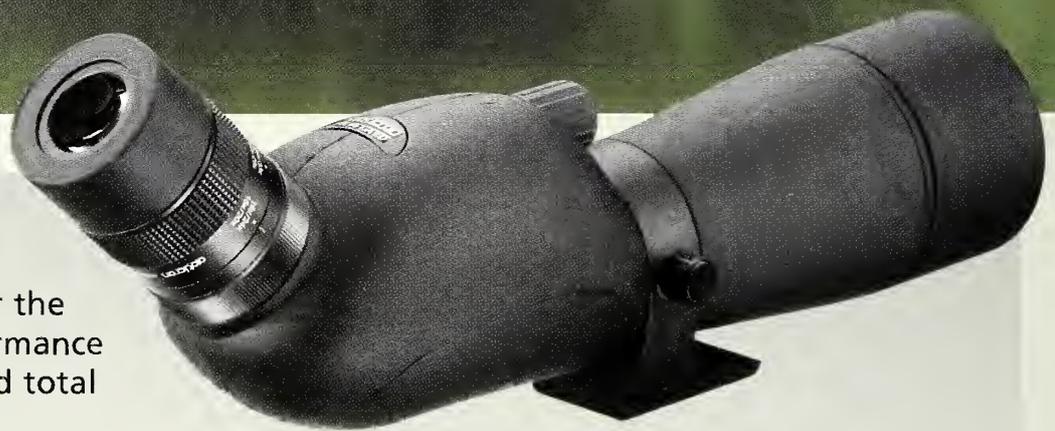
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