

DS 104



# British Birds

May 2014 • Vol. 107 • 243–306



NATURAL HISTORY  
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Scarce migrant birds  
in 2008–10: passerines

Subalpine Warblers

Falls



# British Birds

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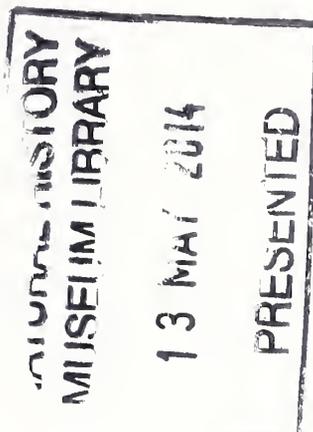
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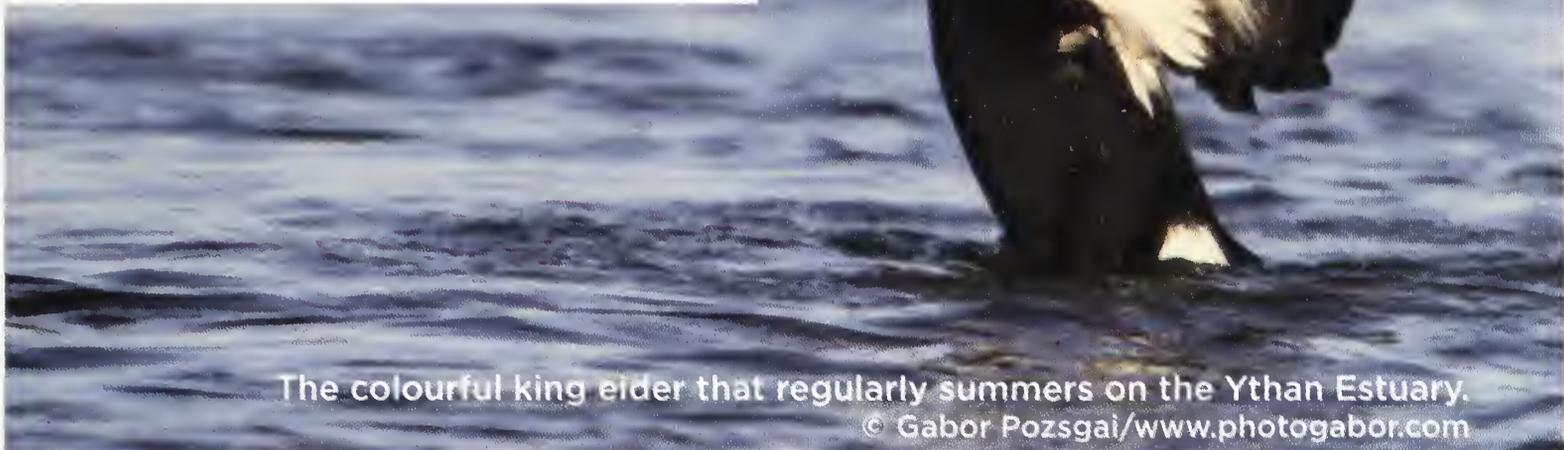


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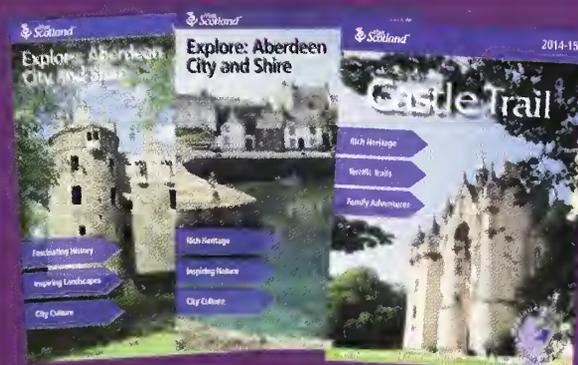
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# British Birds

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For the second month in a row, much of the main content in *BB* is about migration. The conclusion of the latest scarce migrants report fleshes out the trends of those passerines that are not quite national rarities yet still capable of being a high point of most days in the field. Richard Aspinall’s analysis of major falls focuses chiefly on commoner species, and on the collective rather than the individual. I was particularly pleased to see his article arrive on my desk because it seems to me that large movements of common birds never quite get the press they deserve. Perhaps this is because it is that much harder to convey a real sense of the event unless you’re actually there. Stumble across a male Rustic Bunting on a fine morning in late May and with a photograph, or even simply the bird’s name, people will understand immediately: that was a good bird, a good day. But 500 Blackbirds coming in off the sea in dribs and drabs and little flocks on a misty November morning? Perhaps just as memorable and exciting as one scarce migrant, yet the great majority of us would find it hard to capture the moment with a camera or a paintbrush, while the bald statistics struggle to conjure up the spectacle. A few lines of narrative can help to set the scene or relive the moment – but there’s no substitute for being there...

*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.

## Citizen Action for Swifts

In 2009, there were approximately 5.3 million breeding pairs of House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* in the UK as well as 1.9 million pairs of Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (Musgrove *et al.* 2013). These two species largely depend upon human settlements for nesting sites and both are red-listed as birds of serious conservation concern. On the other hand, the Common Swift *Apus apus*, virtually exclusively dependent upon human dwellings for its nest sites, and with an official population estimate of 87,000 pairs, is amber-listed – a species of medium conservation concern.

### Red- and amber-listing

Red- and amber-listing are based, among other things, upon trends measured by the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). According to the BBS, House Sparrows declined steadily from 1994 until about 2008, but then climbed back up to roughly 1994 levels by 2012. Starlings, on the other hand, have suffered a continuous decline all the way from 1994 to 2012, at an average rate of over 3% per annum and getting worse.

Swifts have done a similar thing to Starlings, though at a slightly slower rate. Since the last round of red/amber/green-listing, in 2009, Swifts have continued to decline. Although BBS is a blunt tool for monitoring Swift population levels, the trend is corroborated by a corresponding decline in BirdTrack reporting rates. The tetrad occupancy rates in *Bird Atlas 2007–11* (Balmer *et al.* 2013) showed widespread declines within 20-km squares since the *1988–91 Breeding Atlas*. Indeed, the latest Atlas indicates that Swifts have been losing ground for at least the last four decades, since the *1968–72 Atlas*. Somehow, it doesn't feel right that the Swift is 'only' amber-listed.

Part of the reason lies in the rules for amber- and red-listing. Red-listing requires a decline of at least 50% in 25 years. However, BBS has been running only since 1994 (and BirdTrack since 2002), so, although Swifts declined by 37% between 1994 and 2009, it

was only across 15 years. Prior to 1994 we had the Common Birds Census, which collected data for House Sparrows and Starlings but not for Swifts, so the first two species managed 25 years of data.

Whether they are designated amber or red, Swifts are declining at roughly 3% per annum, which is equivalent to a population half-life of about 20 years. It is not a crisis yet, but if something is not done, it will become one.

### How is the Swift faring today compared with in the past and with other species?

It is tempting to speculate where Swifts were nesting in pre-history. It is probable that, when the UK was covered in forests, Swifts were limited to a few cliffs and holes in trees, situations in which a few pairs continue to nest in Scotland and in Poland, Scandinavia and places east of there. Then we knocked down our trees, but we (unintentionally) put up alternative nesting places in our dwellings. Now we are building hermetically sealed dwellings and, when we repair existing buildings and roofs, we hermetically seal them up too. Not even insects can get in.

There has been a parallel situation in the USA, where they also knocked down much of their forest. As a result, the Purple Martin *Progne subis* was deprived of nest sites. Roll forward a century or two, and today virtually 100% of the Purple Martin population nests in Purple Martin houses. Over one million homes in the eastern USA have a Purple Martin house in their yard!

After knocking the trees down, we Brits then introduced the Starling to our former North American colonies, which occupied the nesting places of the smaller Eastern Bluebirds *Sialia sialis*. Again, roll forward a century or two and virtually 100% of the Eastern Bluebird population now breeds in nestboxes with an entrance too small for Starlings.

The recovery of the Barn Owl *Tyto alba* in the UK has largely been driven by the provi-

sion of nestboxes and the Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*, another species in trouble, also responds well to nestboxing.

### So what is to be done?

Here lies a lesson for us. If we want to keep our Swifts, even expand our Swift population, we need to provide nesting places for them. Eventually, 100% of the UK Swift population will be nesting in places provided deliberately for them. They will require hundreds of thousands of nestboxes. Nature, as part of the built environment, enhances people's lives. Architects and developers can exploit this opportunity. They need to incorporate nesting places into the design of their new developments and renovations (Gunnell *et al.* 2013).

The UK Government wants millions of homes to be built over the coming decades, so the provision of hundreds of thousands of nestboxes – inside eaves and in attics behind gable ends – should be achievable. The example of Fulbourn, in Cambridgeshire, shows what can be done: by 2013, 75 pairs of Swifts had already made use of 227 Swift boxes in a new housing development.

Larger organisations, particularly the RSPB, have responded to the amber-listing of Swifts by promoting their cause and creating and maintaining the Swift Inventory. In the southwest this has been used to encourage local authorities to make it a condition of all new development projects that nesting places for Swifts and other building-dependent species are incorporated. This has been adopted as an example of good practice by national stakeholders in the fields of planning, architecture and ecology/nature conservation and is now being put into practice elsewhere in the UK. But the RSPB does not have the practical resources to install nestboxes.



Gray Joliffe

### What can you do?

If you are worried about Corn Crakes *Crex crex* or Corn Buntings *Emberiza calandra*, or albatrosses (Diomedidae) or island endemics, there is not a lot you can do as an individual, apart from chucking your money at larger organisations, such as the RSPB, to do something on your behalf. But, such large organisations cannot do anything on the ground for Swifts: it is up to individuals and small groups, as well as architects and developers.

This is where you can make a difference. There is a rising band of Swift 'nuts', of which I am one, all involved in local lobbying and local projects, such as putting nestboxes on their own houses, in a local church belfry or school. By working with local government planning departments, pressure can be brought to bear on developers to conserve existing nest sites and to build nest sites into new developments. Property owners, housing associations, churches and schools can all play their part.

Many people put up tit boxes: it provides education and entertainment for their kids and it makes them feel good. But frankly, Blue *Cyanistes caeruleus* and Great Tits *Parus major* are doing just fine, so why not divert the money and effort to Swift boxes instead? What's more, Blue and Great Tits will also use



**106.** A Common Swift *Apus apus* at the entrance to a man-made nestbox in Norfolk.

Swift boxes. Swift boxes with larger entrances are also good for Starlings and, in our experience, House Sparrows prefer Swift boxes to sparrow terraces. In fact, there is a general shortage of cavities, so by providing Swift boxes you may help all five species, three of which need help. You can do it this year – even June is not too late to attract prospecting young Swifts into their first nesting place.

If you erect a tit box, or even a Barn Owl box, there is a high chance that something will move in without doing anything more. Swifts are not that easy. The best place to install Swift boxes is within the building fabric, which although difficult to do in an existing building, can be done in a way that compromises neither the appearance nor the function of the building. Failing this, nestboxes placed on the outside under eaves, protected from rain and sun are a good substitute. Either way, Swifts can be slow at finding new nesting places, unless they are installed to replace nest sites lost nearby, but the whole process can be accelerated by playing attraction calls through speakers placed close to or inside a nestbox. Fortunately small, low-cost, solid-state equipment, easy to install and easy to operate, is now available.

### In conclusion

There are some 25 million homes in the UK. That works out at one pair of Swifts for every

287 homes. Surely, with a combination of efforts by the house-building industry and individuals in their own homes we can do a lot better. Few things in summer are more enthralling than a vibrant colony of Swifts in your neighbourhood.

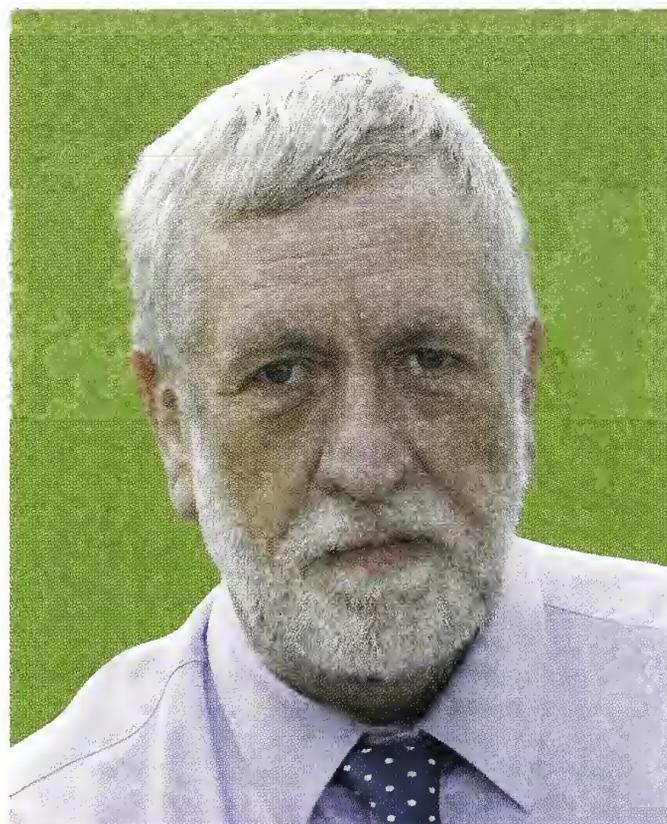
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### Online resources

- BBS trends: [www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/latest-results/population-trends](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs/latest-results/population-trends)
- Red, amber & green explained: [www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/status\\_explained.aspx](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/status_explained.aspx)
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### Dick Newell



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# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

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

## Public outrage at mass raptor poisonings in Scotland

An alliance of farmers, landowners and members of the public has combined to fund a reward approaching £30,000 for information about the deaths of 19 birds of prey in Ross-shire.

Following the initial news concerning the illegal poisoning of the raptors – 14 Red Kites *Milvus milvus* and five Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* – an anonymous donor came forward and increased RSPB Scotland's initial reward from £5,000 to £10,000.

More than 160 people then contributed to RSPB Scotland's JustGiving site within a week. And this was then followed by a pledge of £12,000 made by a group of farmers and landowners from the Moray Firth area.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, Head of Species and Land Management for RSPB Scotland, said: 'We welcome the pledge made by local farmers and landowners. The illegal killing of these birds has disgusted many in the local community and beyond and we hope that by working together we can identify those responsible and help to eliminate wildlife crime.'

'We would also like to thank everyone who has given so generously on our JustGiving site [www.justgiving.com/wildlifecrimescotland](http://www.justgiving.com/wildlifecrimescotland) in an effort to help bring those responsible to justice. The public outrage over the deaths of these birds is clearly reflected in the comments posted by those donating.'

Brian Etheridge has worked for the RSPB as a Red Kite officer on the Black Isle for 19 years. He said: 'This was the worst two weeks of my life. I have worked with all of the birds – each one was ringed and tagged by me. I was there at the very beginning when they were only a few weeks old and I was there at the end when I went to collect their bodies. It's a huge mix of emotions; I've gone from being very, very angry to extremely sad. Some of these birds I've known very well and

for a very long time.'

One of the dead birds was a 16-year-old female that Brian first tagged in 1998. She had been breeding on the Black Isle for 14 years and had raised 25–30 young, one of which (an eight-year-old female) was also among the dead.

Alex Matheson, from the Brahan Estate, said: 'I would like to express in the strongest possible terms our total condemnation of any form of illegal poisoning. Responsible land managers across the country are working hard to stamp this sort of thing out and show that wildlife crime is just not acceptable. Brahan Estate have actively supported the reintroduction of Red Kites in this area from the beginning and we will continue to do so. An incident like this, right on our doorstep, is hugely disappointing.'

Duncan Orr-Ewing added: 'This appalling incident highlights the very real threat illegal poisoning poses to fantastic species like the Red Kite. The vulnerable Black Isle population in particular has been repeatedly hit by deaths due to illegal poison use. The Chilterns population in southern England is nearly ten times bigger, yet both projects started at the same time in 1989 with the same number of birds released into the wild. That is a shocking indictment of the behaviour of some people in this part of rural Scotland.'



107. Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Yorkshire, March 2013.

Adrian Dancy

## Government response to call for licensing of grouse moors

The e-petition ‘Licencing of upland grouse moors and gamekeepers’ launched by Islay resident, and former RSPB employee, John Armitage has attracted 10,426 signatures, triggering a Government response, but one which will provide little solace to those who wish to see the grouse-shooting fraternity under greater scrutiny. This was the Government statement:

‘The Government is aware of incidences of illegal killing of birds of prey and Ministers take the issue very seriously. To address this, senior Government and enforcement officers in the UK identified raptor persecution as a national wildlife crime priority. Raptor persecution is subject to a prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance plan led by a senior police officer through the Raptor Persecution Delivery group. The National Wildlife Crime Unit, which is funded by the Government, monitors and gathers intelligence on illegal activities affecting birds of prey and provides assistance to police forces when required. Shooting makes an important contribution to wildlife control and conservation, biodiversity and to the social, economic and environmental well-being of rural areas, where it can provide a supplement to incomes and jobs. The overall environmental and economic impact of gamebird

shooting is therefore a positive one and it has been estimated by the industry that £250 million per year is spent on management activities that provide benefits for conservation. When carried out in accordance with the law, shooting for sport is a legitimate activity and our position is that people should be free to undertake lawful activities. There are no current plans to restrict sport shooting in England. This Government encourages all shoot managers and owners to ensure they and their staff are following recommended guidelines and best practice to reduce the chances of a conflict of interest with birds of prey. We acknowledge that crimes against birds of prey are abhorrent but it should be noted though that, despite instances of poisoning and killing of birds of prey, populations of many species, such as the Peregrine Falcon [*Falco peregrinus*], Red Kite and Buzzard have increased. While a small minority is prepared to kill birds of prey, and where possible these people are brought to justice, this demonstrates that the policies in place to conserve these species are working. This e-petition remains open to signatures and will be considered for debate by the Backbench Business Committee should it pass the 100,000 signature threshold.’

## Gunning for Malta’s hunters

BirdLife Malta has launched a legal challenge to spring hunting in Malta by filing a Judicial Protest in the Maltese courts, while in Brussels a delegation of MEPs has lobbied the EU Environment Commissioner, Janez Potočnik, to call on the European Commission to suspend any further derogations to allow spring hunting.

Readers of last month’s *BB* eye by Joe Sultana (*Brit. Birds* 107: 188–190) will be familiar with the legal twists and turns taken by successive Maltese governments to justify spring hunting of Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur* and Common Quails *Coturnix coturnix* by the island’s 10,500 hunters.

In the Judicial Protest, BirdLife Malta argued that successive Maltese governments have repeatedly failed to satisfy the conditions of Malta’s own National Framework Legislation, which sets out the criteria that must legally be met in order for a spring hunting season to be opened. ‘The primary condition that must be met before spring hunting can even be considered to be legal is that there must be no detrimental impact on the European populations of the species hunted,’ said Nicholas Barbara, BirdLife Malta’s Conservation Manager. ‘But the Legislation completely neglects to take

account of the unfavourable conservation status of Turtle Doves and Quails in Europe. Instead, the Framework Legislation refers incorrectly to the *global* conservation status of the species. This is used to justify spring hunting in Malta and it is completely wrong.’

BirdLife went on to argue that successive spring hunting derogations have systematically failed to meet several other conditions specified by the Framework Legislation. ‘The opening of a hunting season in spring for Turtle Dove and Quail is dependent on the number of these birds reported shot and bagged by hunters in autumn,’ said Mr Barbara. ‘But these figures have been shown to be unreliable. The Government acknowledges this fact but then continues to base its decision to allow spring hunting on these very same figures.’

During the spring hunting season itself, the failure of the authorities to prevent the widespread illegal killing of protected species year after year under cover of the legal season, and the lack of adequate and verifiable controls and monitoring to limit the numbers of Turtle Doves and Quails killed, both indicate the failure to meet two further conditions of the Legislation.

Meanwhile, in Brussels, similar arguments were put to the EU Environment Commissioner. 'It is clear that many MEPs from across Europe are extremely concerned about the impact of spring hunting in Malta on Europe's birds,' said Steve Micklewright, BirdLife Malta's Executive Director. 'While we continue to hope that the Maltese Government might respond to the concerns being raised and take appropriate action to suspend spring hunting in Malta, we have to be realistic. A public referendum is consistently emerging as the

only way spring hunting can be challenged and perhaps it is the best way for the issue to be decided after all – in a fair and democratic poll of Maltese voters.'

Meanwhile, BTO President and BBC TV presenter Chris Packham travelled to Malta at the end of April to highlight the spring slaughter with a nightly YouTube diary of hunting horrors filmed during the day. See [www.chrispackham.co.uk](http://www.chrispackham.co.uk) for 'Malta – Massacre on Migration'.

## Champions of the Flyway

A happier celebration of spring migration in the Africa–Eurasia flyway took place in and around Eilat, in Israel, on 1st April. The inaugural *Champions of the Flyway* bird race saw teams of birders from both sides of the Atlantic competing for the trophy. Local knowledge helped a joint Israeli–Palestinian team, the Palestine Sunbirders, to the highest score on the day with a blistering 169 species in the 24-hour race period. But, in recognition of the benefits of their familiarity with the region, the Sunbirders shared the overall title with the eBirders from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, whose meticulous organisation and planning saw them post an impressive 165 species. The next-placed international team, the Digital Stringers, came in on 159 species, followed by the Birding Frontiers team (with *BB* Editor, Roger Riddington, BBRC's Paul French and Adam Hutt from Spurn) on 155. The Frontiers team were missing their captain and talisman, Martin Garner,

another BBRC member, who was sadly unable to take part.

Sponsorship of the teams raised \$60,000 for conservation projects in the Flyway with \$30,000 paid out straightaway to Bird Conservation Georgia (BCG) to help protect birds of prey migrating through the Batumi bottleneck in Georgia. More than one million raptors of 35 species migrate through the narrow bottleneck between the Black Sea coast and the Lesser Caucasus Mountains every autumn. Illegal hunting of the raptors is widespread but BCG is tackling this with its annual Batumi Raptor Counts, where volunteer counters stay with local families, making a valuable economic contribution to the area that underlines the value of the migration spectacle.

The *British Birds* Conservation Trust has recognised the conservation value of the *Champions of the Flyway* bird race with a £500 donation to this year's event.

## Common Guillemot bridling survey 2014

It is now more than 30 years since Tim Birkhead co-ordinated a survey of the frequency of bridling in Common Guillemots *Uria aalge* (published in *Journal of Zoology* 202: 165–176). Given the population and environmental changes that have occurred since then, a repeat survey is being organised for 2014 by Sarah Wanless ([swanl@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:swanl@ceh.ac.uk)). If you are visiting a Guillemot colony in 2014, could you check a sample of birds to get an estimate of the proportion of bridled birds? Ideally, she would like a sample size of >500 birds per colony, but smaller samples are still useful. If possible, birds should be sampled in several different breeding areas. Counts of Guillemots on the sea/sea rocks should be kept separate. When a bird is asleep, it is easier to see that it is bridled rather than unbridled, and only birds where the face can be clearly seen side-on should be counted.

## More enigmatic 'Siberian Chiffchaffs'

The plumage and vocal limits of Siberian Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* have been discussed in various items published in *BB* since 2005, but the topic continues to provoke discussion and controversy. During the winter of 2013/14, at least nine Chiffchaffs have been encountered (one in Sweden and eight in England) which showed plumage features associated with Siberian Chiffchaff but called consistently and persistently as Common Chiffchaff (*P.c. abietinus/collybita*). As spring approached, two of these Chiffchaffs with anomalous calls proved also to be 'mixed singers', with individual song phrases containing notes from the repertoires of both Siberian and Common Chiffchaff. Given the increasing taxonomic significance which is afforded to vocalisations, this development is highly intriguing. For more detail on this visit: <http://deanar.org.uk/tristis/casestudy3.htm>

## 60th anniversary of SEO

And there are celebrations in Spain this month to mark the 60th anniversary of the Spanish Ornithological Society, SEO. It was founded at the iconic Coto Doñana reserve in May 1954, by a handful of ornithological pioneers including Francisco Bernis, Mauricio González-Gordon, José Antonio Valverde and José Manuel Rubio, who carried out the first expeditions to this mythical wildlife haven.

Sixty years later, SEO is commemorating the

anniversary by holding the Doñana International Birdfair, on 1st–4th May in the Dehesa de Abajo Nature Reserve, with exhibitor marquees and a whole programme of events including children's workshops, excursions, photography contests, art exhibitions and other activities at the nearby Francisco Bernis Ornithological Centre in El Rocío (Huelva) and at the Cañada de los Pájaros Reserve in La Puebla del Río (Seville).

## Putting Britain and Ireland's birds on the map

The BTO has combined all breeding and wintering Atlas data so that, for the first time ever, over 3,500 maps showing the distribution, range change and abundance for over 500 species since 1968 are freely available online.

There are many fascinating stories. For example, the Corn Crake *Crex crex* maps show the huge range loss that the species has experienced since 1968, while those for the Gadwall *Anas strepera* show its spread out of the east. The spectacular recovery of the Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, the popula-

tion of which was down to a single breeding pair in the early 70s, is the perfect illustration of the importance of collecting and storing data over time.

Simon Gillings, BTO lead scientist on the project, said: 'To finally see all these maps in one place is tremendous but it is the ability to toggle between different maps for a species and see its range shrinking or expanding before your eyes that really brings home how some of these species are changing.' To see the maps visit Bird Atlas Mapstore at [www.bto.org/mapstore](http://www.bto.org/mapstore)

## Richard Chandler bows out after 34 years' service to BB

Last month saw the retirement of Richard Chandler as a trustee of the *British Birds* Charitable Trust. Richard's involvement with the journal began way back in 1980, initially as a photographic consultant, and since then he has served terms as chairman of both Directors and the Editorial Board. As chairman of BB2000, it was Richard, supported by Peter Oliver and other stalwarts, who saved the journal when it was threatened with closure in 2000.

For a shorebird enthusiast who has photo-

graphed most of the world's waders, we couldn't think of a more appropriate farewell gift than the Robert Gillmor print of Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* presented by current BB2000 chairman John Eyre at the March Board meeting (plate 108).

Richard said: 'The print is even more appropriate than you might think. Until about 1990, the *BB* Board met in Stanley Cramp's sparsely furnished office in Grays Inn Road, in London. The sole decoration of any sort was a lino print by Robert of a Northern Wheatear [*Oenanthe oenanthe*]. Stanley and Peter Grant were both heavy smokers (particularly Stanley!) and at meetings I would sit opposite them in an attempt to avoid some of the smoke. This gave me a good view of the Wheatear print, whose bold design I particularly admired. I have always associated *BB* Board meetings with Robert's prints, so to be presented with a Gillmor lino print (and of a wader) was very appropriate, and very, very much appreciated!'

While his role in the governance of *British Birds* has now ceased, Richard will continue as a valued member of *BB*'s Editorial Board, although he will hand on the chairmanship of that group to Martin Collinson this summer.



Roger Riddington

108. Richard Chandler, John Eyre and a Robert Gillmor print, March 2014.

# Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2008–10

## Part 2: passerines

Steve White and Chris Kehoe



Ben Green

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

**Abstract** This report summarises the scarce passerine migrants recorded in Britain during 2008–10. Three good years for Red-rumped Swallows *Cecropis daurica* (the second-, fourth- and sixth-highest totals) continued the trend towards increasing numbers in spring. Also from southern Europe, 33 Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans* in 2008 represents the second-highest total on record. The fortunes of warblers with Siberian origins were mixed: increasing numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* maintained the trend apparent since 2003 and Radde's Warblers *P. schwarzi* had three impressive years, whereas fluctuating numbers of Pallas's Leaf Warblers *P. proregulus* showed no pattern and annual totals of Dusky Warblers *P. fuscatus* were poor. Scandinavian migrants had mixed fortunes: a record 398 Barred Warblers *S. nisoria* arrived in 2010, numbers of Common Rosefinches *Erythrina erythrina* and Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* in 2010 were the second- and third-highest to date respectively, and 2008 saw the third-best tally of Red-breasted Flycatchers *Ficedula parva*; whereas Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* numbers fluctuated but remained below average, reinforcing that species' long-term decline. Other species faring poorly included Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
3,095	131 (7)	82 (18)	64 (28)	1994/235/1 1992/184/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 34
1970–79 51
1980–89 84
1990–99 132
2000–09 86

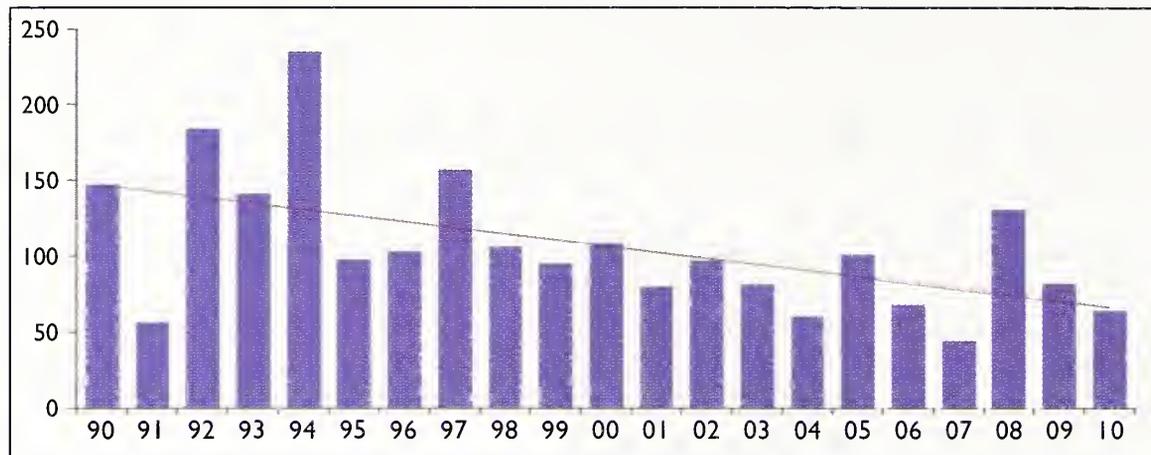


Fig. 1. Annual totals of Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* in Britain, 1990–2010.

The three years under review presented a mixed picture: 131 in 2008 was the highest total since 1997 yet 64 in 2010 was another very poor return. Golden Orioles continue to decline as migrants in Britain (fig. 1), just as the species has as a breeding bird (Holling *et al.* 2013; note that records from the few remaining breeding sites are excluded here). A moderate decline is suspected in Europe as a whole (BirdLife International 2013).

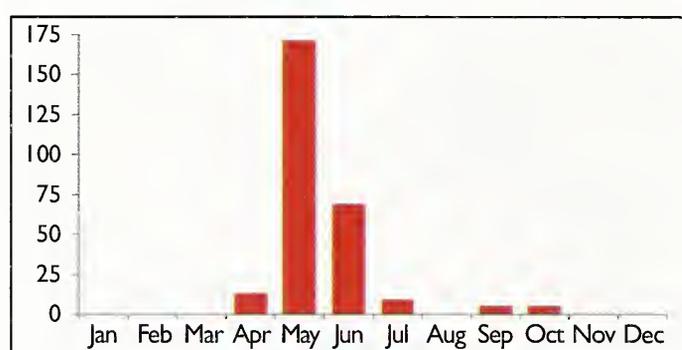


Fig. 2. Arrival dates of migrant Golden Orioles *Oriolus oriolus* in Britain by month, 2008–10.

Typically, almost all migrants occurred in spring, overwhelmingly during May, with the earliest in Carmarthen on 15th April 2008 and the latest in several areas during the first week of July (fig. 2). Less typically, however, fewer than half the reports came from the south coast (including 72 on Scilly, 24 in Cornwall and 22 in Kent). Most of the remainder were divided fairly evenly between East Anglia, northeast England and the Northern Isles with the largest totals being 30 in Yorkshire and 17 in Shetland. Only eight were seen in Scotland away from the Northern Isles (all but one of them in Argyll and the Outer Hebrides), 13 in Wales, ten in inland English counties and one in northwest England (Lancashire & North Merseyside). Some 110 were reported as males (24 of which were first-summerers) and 30 as females.

There were ten autumn records, between 9th September and 30th October, six of them in Scilly and singles in Cornwall, the Outer Hebrides, Shetland and Yorkshire.

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Total 1986–2010	No. 2008 (rank/25)	No. 2009 (rank/25)	No. 2010 (rank/25)	Other annual maxima 1986–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
5,507	373 (3)	111 (24)	145 (20)	1988/423/1 1998/374/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2009
1986–89 256
1990–99 231
2000–09 202

The real scale of the decline since the 1980s of one of our more conspicuous scarce migrant passerines seems, if we assume an increased number of observers, likely to have been even greater than the 20% suggested by the annual means. Fraser (2013) suggested that this decline was largely a result of falling numbers in spring, although the 238 individuals reported in spring 2008 helped to produce the third-highest annual total since 1986. Numbers in 2009 and 2010 were noticeably low, however.

Red-backed Shrikes were reported from 46 recording areas, roughly 60% of the total (fig. 3). Overall, the Northern Isles accounted for almost a third of all records with the bulk of the remainder seen on the east coasts of Scotland and England and to a lesser extent in southern



John Malloy

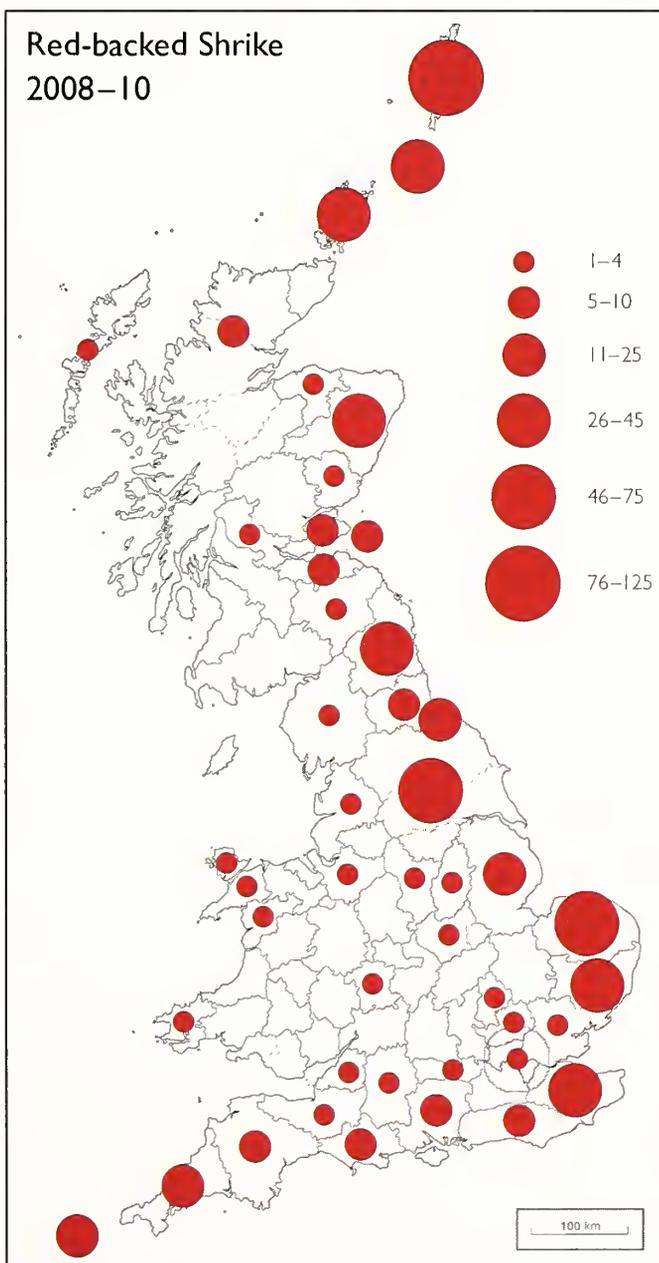
**109.** Juvenile Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, St Mary's Island, Northumberland, September 2008.

England. Shetland headed the list with 119 birds seen, followed by Yorkshire with 69 and Norfolk with 64; the highest totals in southern England were 31 in Kent and 25 in Scilly. Red-backed Shrikes are always scarce away from the east and far south of Britain: there were just eight in Wales and six in northwest England. They are even less regular in inland counties but were

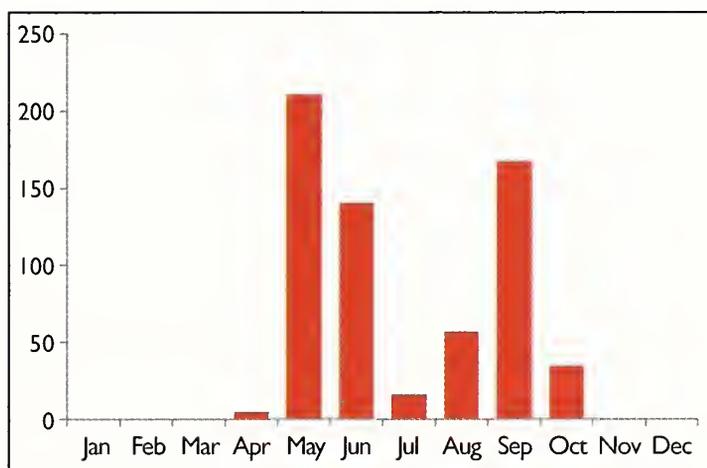
recorded in nine during 2008–10: Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Derbyshire, Greater London, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire & Rutland, Nottinghamshire, Wiltshire and Worcestershire.

There were some slight seasonal differences in distribution, in particular in the Northern Isles, which accounted for 38% of all British records in spring and 21% in autumn.

The earliest spring arrival was on 22nd April 2009, at Penwithick, Cornwall, but there were only four other April records and the bulk of spring passage was in May (fig. 4). Most autumn records were in September with the latest (at Bempton, Yorkshire) on 31st October 2009. In spring, 138 were reported as males and 111 as females, while in autumn 137 were aged as juveniles and 11 as adults.



**Fig. 3.** Distribution of Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* in Britain, 2008–10.



**Fig. 4.** Arrival dates of Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* in Britain by month, 2008–10.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Total 1986–2010	No. 2008 (rank/25)	No. 2009 (rank/25)	No. 2010 (rank/25)	Other annual maxima 1986–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
3,332	189 (3)	97 (19)	271 (1)	1998/238/2	Fluctuating	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2009
1986–89 132
1990–99 128
2000–09 126

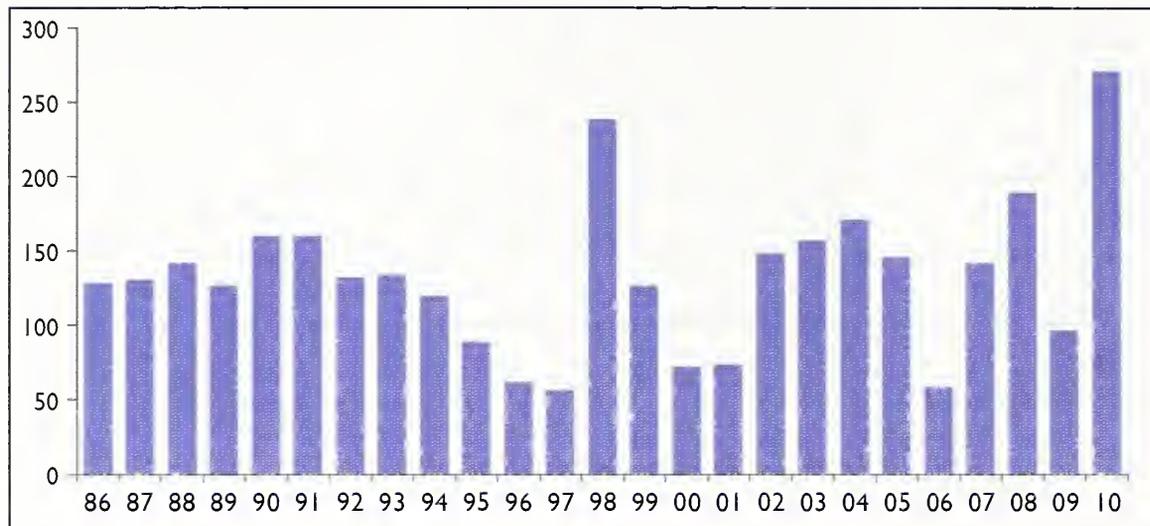


Fig. 5. Annual totals of Great Grey Shrikes *Lanius excubitor* in Britain, 1986–2010.

Fraser (2013) presented data for Great Grey Shrikes rather differently

from those of other species, including only spring and autumn records in the annual totals and producing a separate estimate of the wintering population. Here, we have treated the species in the same way as all other passerines. The statistics presented include all records, excluding presumed returning wintering birds.

Average totals per decade have been remarkably consistent since 1986 but annual figures show a rather different picture, decreasing sharply from the mid 1990s (despite a large influx in 1998) before rising again from 2002 (fig. 5). The current period produced two of the three best years on record, sandwiching an average year in 2009.

Some 190 Great Grey Shrikes, including returning birds, were first recorded during December to February but the total wintering population may have been somewhat higher since many of the 91 November arrivals, and some October birds, are likely to have remained into the winter months. This species is probably under-recorded in winter and perhaps the best estimate of the British

wintering population is around 100–150 birds.

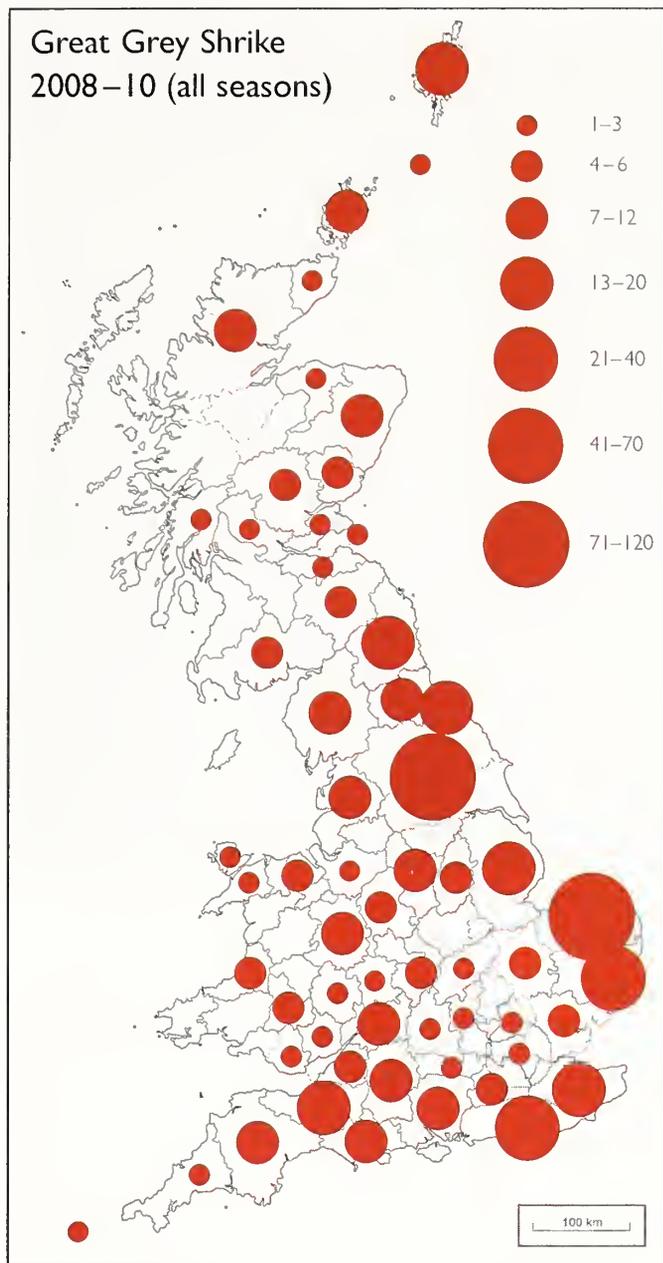
Although there may be some migrants on the move in late February, there was a small surge in new arrivals that were reported for only a day or so from mid March. This spring passage included 35 in March and 39 in April but only six in May.

One on Alston Moor (Cumbria) on the very early date of 31st July 2009 was thought to have been present in spring, raising the intriguing question as to whether it had summered. Otherwise, the earliest autumn migrant appeared on 18th September 2009 but a surge in the last week of September revealed 64 new arrivals; passage peaked

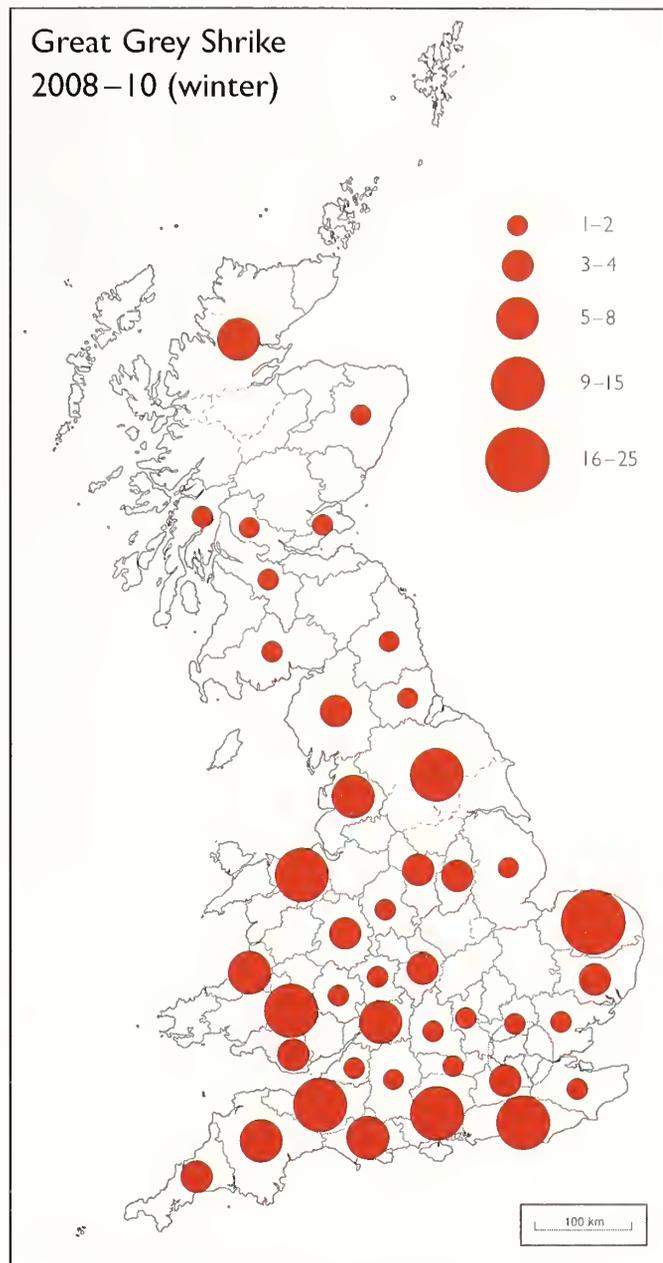


John Grist

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*



**Fig. 6.** Distribution of Great Grey Shrikes *Lanius excubitor* (excluding returning birds) in Britain, 2008–10.



**Fig. 7.** Distribution of Great Grey Shrikes *Lanius excubitor* in winter (December to February) (all records) in Britain, 2008–10.

at 204 during October before falling to 76 in November.

The Great Grey Shrike is the most widespread species considered in these reviews, being found in 61 recording areas during 2008–10 (about 80% of the total), with almost complete coverage in England and Scotland. Their winter distribution was broadly similar to that during the rest of the year but included only 42 recording areas (figs. 6 & 7). The largest numbers were found in Norfolk, Yorkshire and Sussex but both Denbighshire (especially Clocaenog Forest) and Hampshire (especially the New Forest) were notable for wintering birds.

### Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
880	31 (3)	26 (5)	21 (16)	1997/36/1	2002/32/2	Stable	Low

Woodchat Shrike records are fairly consistent from year to year and average numbers have barely altered for 20 or more years, although the annual totals were good in both 2008 and 2009. Records were fairly widely distributed yet almost 60% occurred in the southwest, including 17 on Scilly and 14 in Cornwall. There were just two records in Scotland: Papa Westray (Orkney) from 30th September to 2nd October 2008 and Unst (Shetland) on 18th September 2009. In northern England there were seven in Yorkshire, two in both Cleveland and Lancashire & North Mersey-

Annual means 1958–2009
<u>1958–59</u> 13
<u>1960–69</u> 12
<u>1970–79</u> 13
<u>1980–89</u> 16
<u>1990–99</u> 21
<u>2000–09</u> 22

side, and one in Northumberland (the most northerly mainland record, at Bamburgh on 26th May 2009). There were four Welsh records, all in Pembrokeshire. Records from landlocked counties are always notable and there were two during

the review period: at Brandon Marsh on 29th May 2009 (the first record within Warwickshire’s present county boundaries), and at White-moor Haye (Staffordshire) on 8th September 2010.

A very early bird appeared on the Lizard (Cornwall) on 2nd–11th April 2010 but the main arrival in all years took place from the last ten days of April to the end of May. Spring accounted for roughly three-quarters of all records, all but eight of them to the south of a line from the Humber to the Mersey. Throughout the spring 15 males and nine females were reported. Two were first seen in July but one on Scilly on 29th August 2010 was perhaps the first autumn migrant. Eleven followed in September, mostly in eastern and northern Britain, while the solitary October record was again on Scilly, on the 1st in 2010. Nine autumn birds were reported as juveniles and just one as an adult.

Two records of ‘Balearic Woodchat Shrike’ *L. s. badius*, which continues to be assessed by BBRC, were accepted during the review period: Minehead (Somerset), first-summer female, 29th–30th June 2008, and Windmill Farm (Cornwall), first-summer male, 10th–11th April 2010.



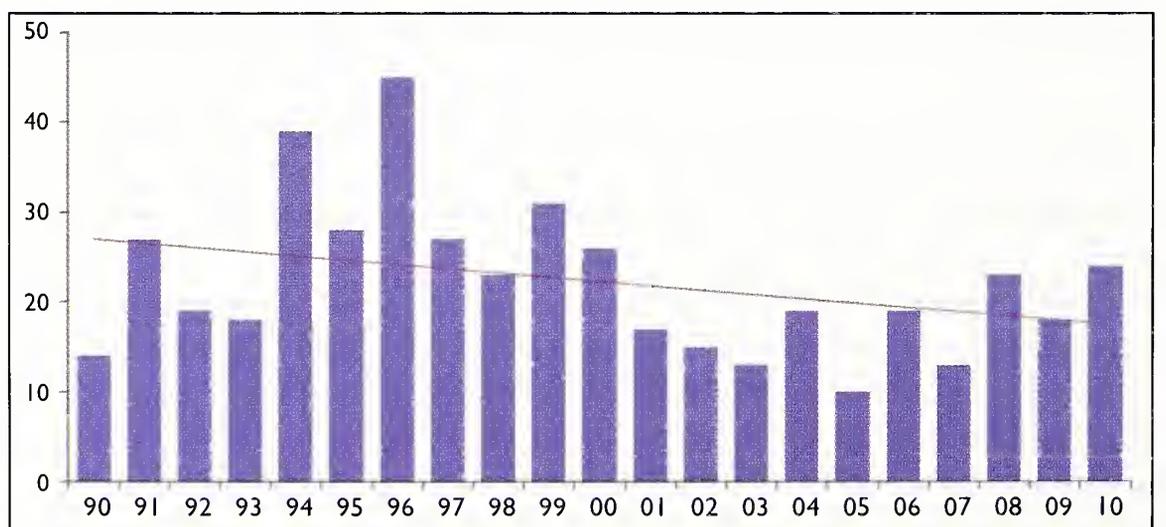
Graham Catley

**110.** Juvenile Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, Easington, Yorkshire, September 2009.

### Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
763	23 (9)	18 (15)	24 (8)	1996/45/1	1994/39/2	Declining	Low

Annual means 1958–2009
<u>1958–59</u> 4
<u>1960–69</u> 5
<u>1970–79</u> 11
<u>1980–89</u> 13
<u>1990–99</u> 27
<u>2000–09</u> 17



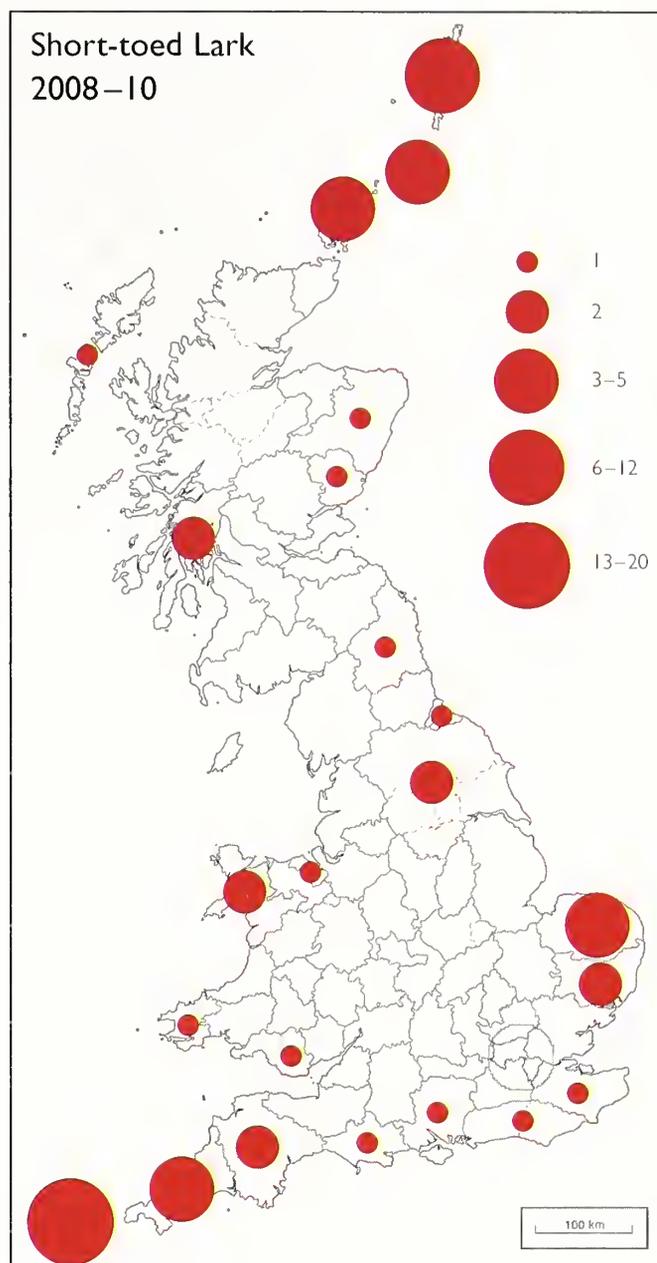
**Fig. 8.** Annual totals of Short-toed Larks *C. brachydactyla* in Britain, 1990–2010.

The decline that began in the early years of the present century continued, despite two reasonable totals during this period (fig. 8). As usual, most records were in either southwest England or the Northern Isles, which accounted for 33% and 29% respectively of all records; Scilly and Shetland headed the list with 15 and 10 records respectively, with a distinct bias towards Scilly in spring and Shetland in autumn. The largest totals away from these two areas were five in Cornwall, Norfolk and Orkney (fig. 9).

The earliest spring record was on Tresco (Scilly) on 18th April 2008, and there were five other April records during 2008–10, 19 in May and two in June, one of which remained on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) from 16th until 1st July 2008. Both August arrivals, on Tiree (Argyll) in 2008 and Blakeney Point (Norfolk) in 2010, lingered for more than a week. September produced 14, followed by 20 in October, while one on Unst (Shetland) on 3rd November 2010 was the latest autumn bird.

There were two winter records: one at Long Nanny (Northumberland) from 24th November 2007 to 2nd January 2008, and another at Seaton Cliffs, Arbroath (Angus & Dundee) on 2nd–17th January 2009.

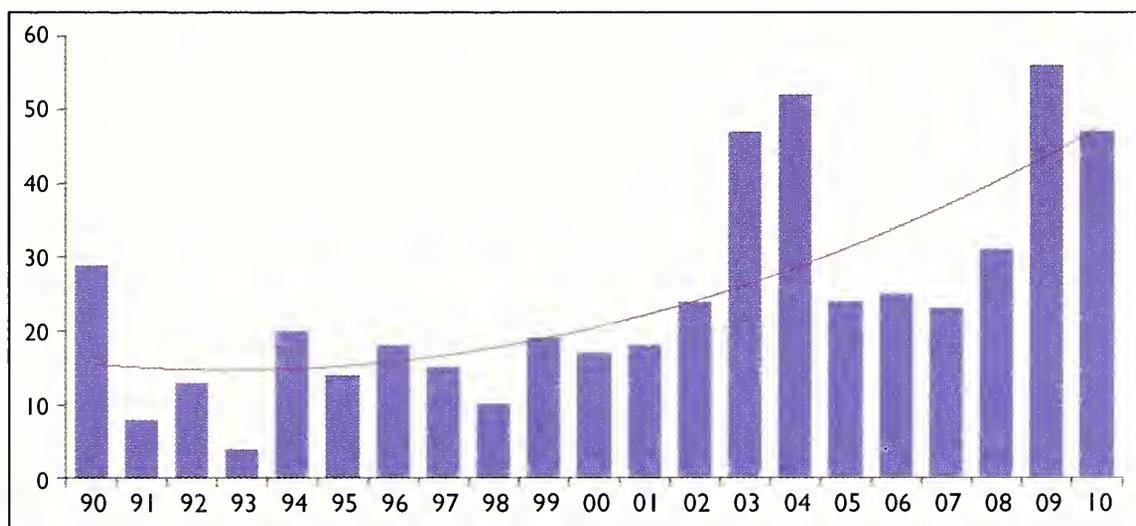
**Fig. 9.** Distribution of Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* in Britain, 2008–10.



**Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica***

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
693	31 (6)	57 (2)	47 (4)	1987/61/1	2004/54/3	Large increase	High

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
1
1960–69
2
1970–79
4
1980–89
12
1990–99
15
2000–09
32



**Fig. 10.** Annual totals of Red-rumped Swallows *C. daurica* in Britain, 1990–2010.

The Red-rumped Swallow was without doubt one of the species that BBRC got right when it was demoted from national rarity status at the end of 2005. Although the highest annual total was as long ago as 1987, eight of the ten largest counts have occurred this century, a trend that

John Malloy



III. Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, Wallsend, Northumberland, April 2008.

continued during this review period (fig. 10).

Spring accounted for 119 of the 135 records – a typical pattern of occurrence – with the earliest three records in Cornwall in 2010, during 20th–25th March. These were followed by 38 (over the three years) during April, 75 in May and three in June. Perhaps surprisingly, only 41 of these records were in counties bordering the south coast of England, with rather more (53) in eastern Britain as far north as the Northern Isles, including 24 in Yorkshire (fig. 11). Two of the June records were in Scotland in 2008, on Whalsay (Shetland) on 5th and North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 6th. None was seen during summer and the earliest autumn record was on 7th September 2008; a further 15 widespread records, four of them aged as juveniles, followed, the last being at Eyemouth (Borders), on 24th November 2009.

Most records were of singles, two were seen together occasionally and there were three larger groups: five at Portland Bill (Dorset) on 7th–8th May 2008, four at Loompit Lake (Suffolk) on 2nd–4th May 2010 and three at Kingswood (Yorkshire) on 2nd–8th May 2010.

### Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
549	15 (13)	13 (14)	18 (9)	2005/47/1	2007/42/2	Increase	High

Numbers of Greenish Warblers during 2008–10 were something of a let-down after the bumper totals of 2005 and 2007, although the ten-year mean continues to rise steadily. Birds were reported from 16 recording areas and, unlike in 2007, when a remarkable 34 of the 42 records were in Norfolk, they were fairly evenly distributed, although still predominantly on the east coasts of England and Scotland. The highest county totals during 2008–10 were seven in Northumberland, six in Norfolk, five in Co. Durham, four in North-east Scotland and then three in five areas: Cornwall, Fair Isle, Lincolnshire, Shetland and Yorkshire. One trapped on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire) on 11th June 2010 was the only record away from counties along the east and south coasts.

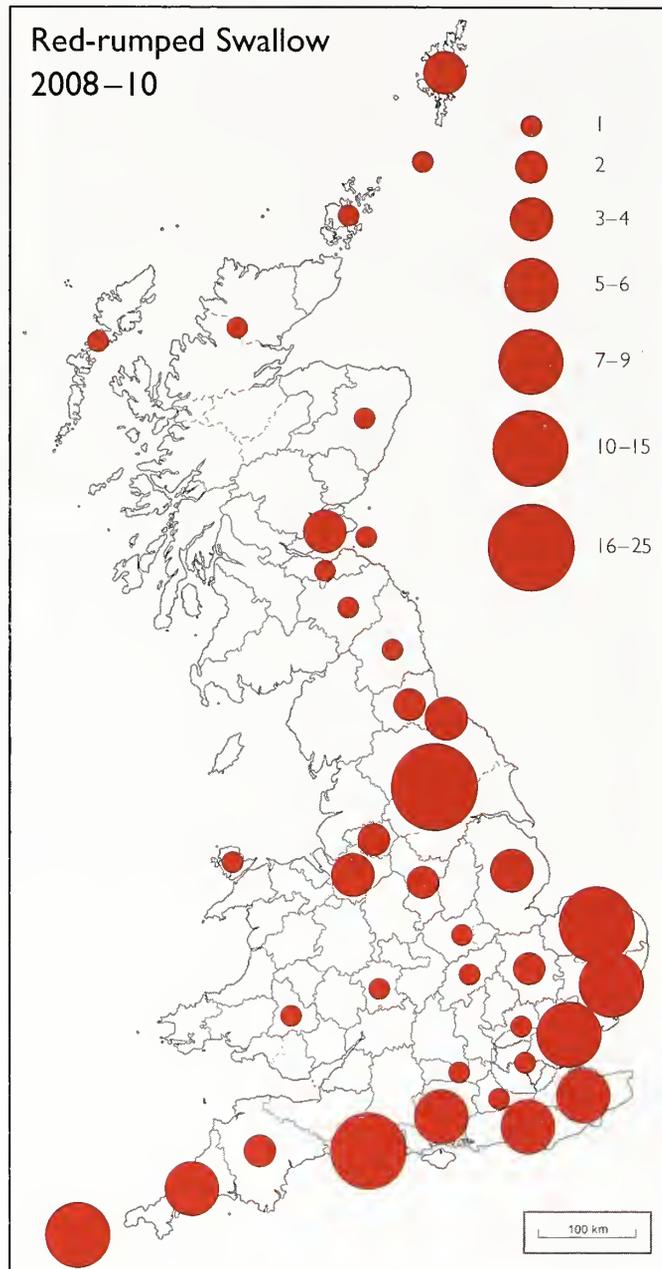


Fig. 11. Distribution of Red-rumped Swallows *Cecropis daurica* in Britain, 2008–10.

Annual means 1958–2009
<u>1958–59</u> 1
<u>1960–69</u> 2
<u>1970–79</u> 6
<u>1980–89</u> 9
<u>1990–99</u> 14
<u>2000–09</u> 22

Spring records are always of particular interest, not least because they might just be the precursor of a breeding attempt as the species continues its spread westward (BirdLife International 2013). There were four in spring during the review period in addition to the Bardsey bird, although none was reported as a singing male: singles at Wells (Norfolk) on 31st May 2008, on Bressay (Shetland) on 3rd–5th June 2008, at Newbiggin (Northumberland) on 17th May 2009 and Flamborough (Yorkshire) on 9th June 2010.

The earliest autumn record was at Sumburgh (Shetland) on 10th–11th August 2010. Eleven more new arrivals followed in August, 28 in September and one in October, at Church Cove (Cornwall) on 28th October 2010, which remained until 1st November. All records were of single birds, although three arrived in Norfolk during 27th–29th August 2010, and two in North-east Scotland on 20th August 2008.

### Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
2,324	81 (8)	23 (26)	79 (9)	2003/313/1    1997/171/2	Fluctuating	Very high

Annual means 1958–2009
<u>1958–59</u> 1
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 9
<u>1980–89</u> 39
<u>1990–99</u> 83
<u>2000–09</u> 90

As numbers have increased, the annual totals of Pallas's Leaf Warblers have fluctuated markedly between years. In the three years under review, which contributed to a ten-year mean only marginally higher than that of the 1990s, only 2009 stood out – as a notably poor year by recent standards.

Far from usual, however, were the four winter records in 2008 (in Dorset and Hampshire) and two in 2009 (in Devon and Sussex). Two males found in March 2008 (in Dorset and Hampshire) both lingered into April. In addition there were four apparent spring arrivals in 2008, which more than doubled the previous total for that season: at Swallow Pond (Northumberland) on 12th–20th April, Frampton (Gloucestershire) on 19th–21st April, Redruth (Cornwall) on 21st–25th April and Sandy Point (Hampshire) on 8th May.

The earliest autumn migrant was at Donna Nook (Lincolnshire) on 25th September 2008. A handful followed in early October but the main arrival stretched from mid October until about 10th November. Most were seen on the

English east coast, with about 30% of records in both East Anglia and northeast England: topping the charts were 36 in Norfolk and 35 in Yorkshire (followed by 18 in Northumberland, and 15 in both Kent and Lincolnshire). Ten appeared in the Northern Isles (eight in Shetland), and 13 in other parts of Scotland (Fife, Lothian, the Outer Hebrides and seven in North-east Scotland). There were just two records in Wales, both on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire) in 2010, and one in northwest England, at Bidston (Cheshire & Wirral) the same year. Birds were similarly scarce in the southwest with just 15 records during the three years, and there were no autumn records any distance inland.



Graham Catley

112. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, Donna Nook, Lincolnshire, November 2008.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
15,574	1,368 (2)	692 (7)	828 (5)	2005/1,469/1 2007/1,093/3	Large increase	High

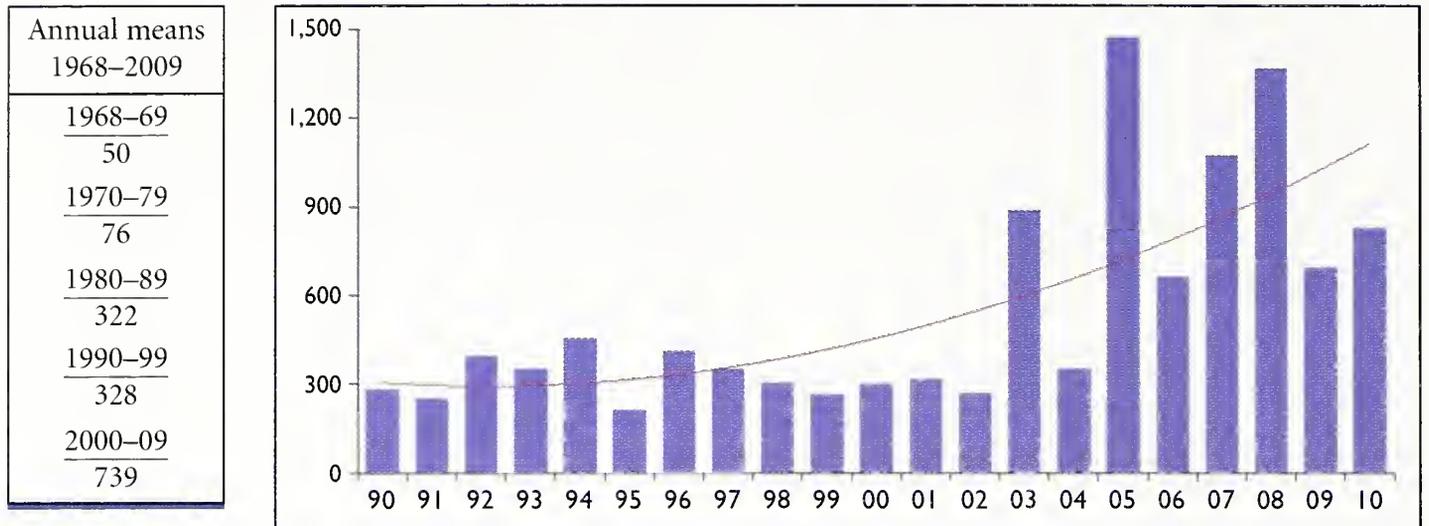


Fig. 12. Annual totals of Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* in Britain, 1990–2010.

It is perhaps debatable whether Yellow-browed Warbler should retain its ‘scarce migrant’ status, but the species remains a highlight of many birders’ year and birds continue to be reported in

detail – even though Fair Isle, Scilly and some Yorkshire sites now publish summaries only. Attempting to review the species here thus seems worthwhile, not least to demonstrate the contrast in fortunes with some other Siberian *Phylloscopus*.

After a decade of flat-lining during the 1990s, numbers of Yellow-browed Warblers exploded in the 2000s (fig. 12). On average, totals more than doubled and in six of those years were higher than any that had gone before. The year 2008 proved to be yet another spectacular one, although numbers in the two subsequent years were ‘only’ the seventh- and fifth-highest respectively since 1968.

Yellow-browed Warblers were recorded in 53 areas, second only to Great Grey Shrike (with 61) as the most widespread species among the passerines in this report, but by far the most numerous. The Northern Isles and southwest England mustered the lion’s share, each accounting for about a quarter of all reports, with northeast England following on 20% and East Anglia on 14%. Five recording areas stood out: Shetland with a three-year total of 444, Yorkshire with 415, Scilly 375, Norfolk 261 and Cornwall 197 (fig. 13).

Birds began arriving in all years in mid September with 831 of the 2,314 dated records first recorded during the latter part of that month; 1,264 arrived during October and 186 in

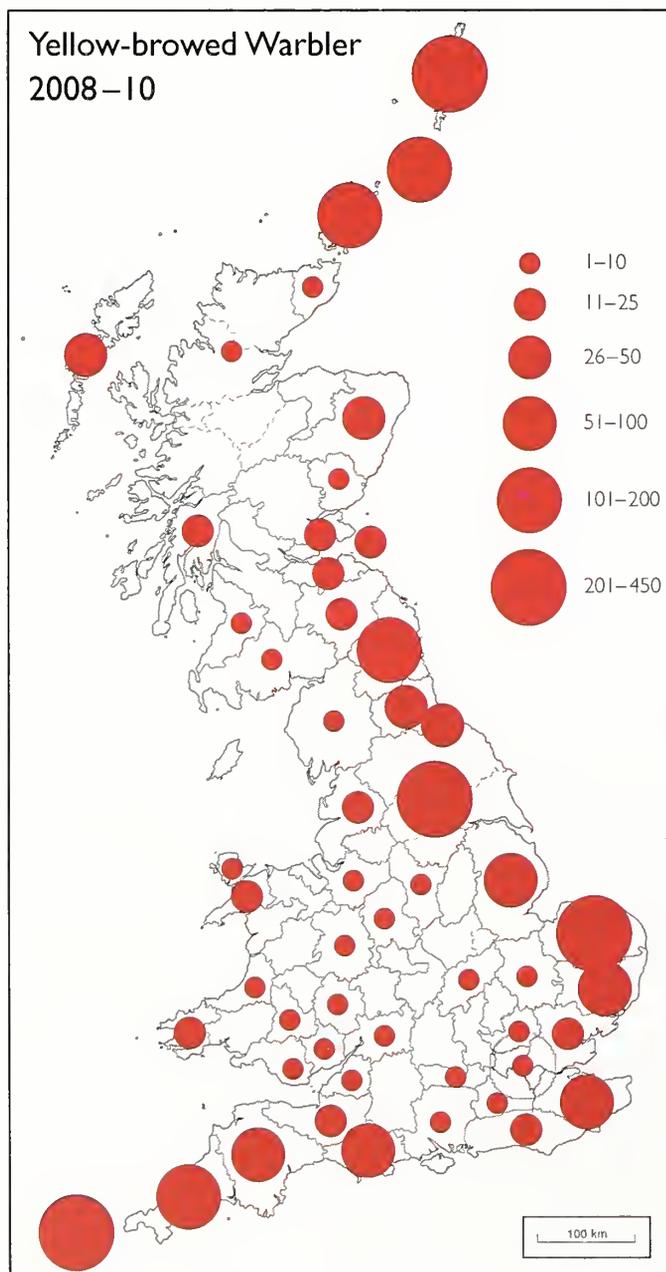


Fig. 13. Distribution of Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* in Britain, 2008–10.

November, mostly in the first fortnight, confirming the species' long-standing pattern of appearing a fortnight or more earlier than most other Siberian passerines.

There were 18 records in winter (December to March) in 2008 and nine in 2009, but only one in 2010, on Scilly. Most were in southern England, notably 14 in Cornwall. Isolated individuals wintered farther north – in Orkney, Co. Durham, East Glamorgan and Herefordshire. Several of these remained site-faithful for a considerable length of time, including singles at Cambourne (Cornwall) from 1st January to 30th March 2008, Helston (Cornwall) from 26th January to 7th March 2008 and Plymouth (Devon) from 8th February to 20th April 2008. The species remains rare in spring. Five were recorded during April and May, including Northumberland's first-ever spring records, at Swallow Pond on 1st April 2008 and on the Farne Islands on 27th; others were found in Cornwall, Norfolk and Shetland.



Colin Bradshaw

113. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, Quendale, Shetland, September 2008.

### Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
350	16 (7)	22 (4)	15 (9)	2000/31/1	1991/25/2	Uncertain	High

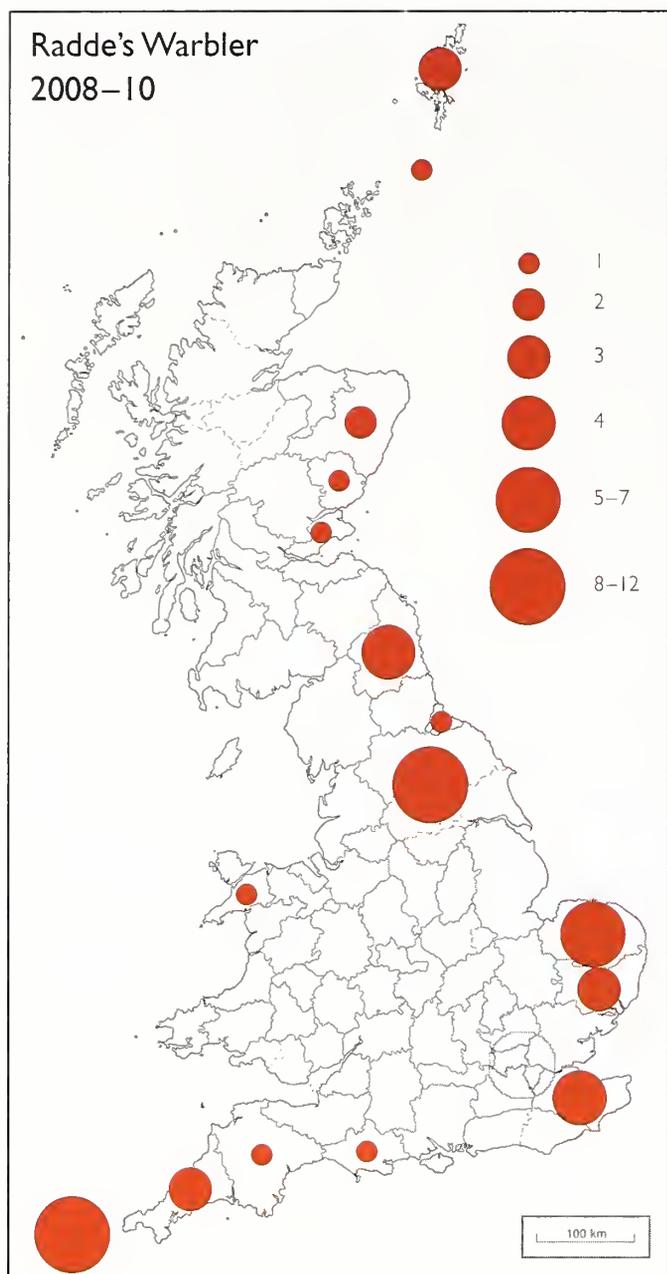
Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
0
1960–69
1
1970–79
2
1980–89
6
1990–99
10
2000–09
14

Since the species was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005, Radde's Warblers have remained extremely scarce in Britain, with just 128 recorded in



Gary Thoburn

114. Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2008.



**Fig. 14.** Distribution of Radde's Warblers *Phylloscopus schwarzi* in Britain, 2008–10.

the ten years to 2010. However, 53 of these were seen during the three years under review, all of which had annual totals within the top ten, so it seems that numbers may be on the increase, albeit slowly.

Birds were reported from 16 recording areas, almost all in eastern and southern Britain – the one exception being the Great Orme (Caernarfonshire) on 28th September 2008 (fig. 14). Over the three years, Scilly was the top county, with 11 records, followed by Yorkshire with nine and Norfolk with seven.

All 53 occurred in autumn, the earliest at Holkham Meals (Norfolk) on 24th September 2008. Seven others arrived during September, then 40 in October and five in November (four of those in 2008), the latest at Easington (Yorkshire) on 8th November 2008; autumn passage was thus somewhat more protracted in 2008 than in the other two years.

Numbers of Radde's and Dusky Warblers in Britain have been neck and neck for some time now, with 262 and 279 respectively recorded during 1990–2010. Radde's had the upper hand during this review period, with 53 records compared with 23 for Dusky, and bringing the 1958–2010 totals to within six of each other. Perhaps surprisingly, there was absolutely no correlation between annual totals of the two species during this period.

### Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
356	6 (20)	5 (21)	12 (12)	2001/26/1	2003/25/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
0
1960–69
1
1970–79
1
1980–89
5
1990–99
13
2000–09
14

The 'BBRC curse' has weighed heavily on Dusky Warbler since it was removed from the national rarity list at the end of 2005 and few county records committees have since been troubled by submissions. Although the total recorded in 2000–09 was marginally greater than in the 1990s, the ten-year total to 2010 stands at 138, while since 2006 numbers have averaged just 9.2 a year. Three of the five 'post-BBRC' years have produced single-figure totals, those of 2008 and 2009 following on from five in 2006 – and you have to go back to the three in 1986 to find a lower total.

Dusky Warblers were found in nine recording areas during the three years under review, all in eastern or southern Britain. As in 2006–07, Scilly headed the table with six records; elsewhere, there were four in Shetland and Yorkshire, two in Northumberland, Norfolk and Kent and singles in Cleveland, Suffolk and Sussex.

One on Blakeney Point (Norfolk) on 4th June 2008 was presumably a late spring migrant but all other birds arrived between the last week of September and 15th November with 'peaks' in early October in Shetland and early November in Scilly.

‘Siberian Chiffchaff’ *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

No. 2008
125
No. 2009
87
No. 2010
112

Dean *et al.* (2010) concluded that the Siberian Chiffchaff should be regarded as a scarce migrant rather than a national rarity so records are being collated on a trial basis for this

report in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the national situation. The initial figures suggest that Siberian Chiffchaffs occur somewhat more frequently than Pallas’s Leaf Warblers but much less frequently than Yellow-browed Warblers – thus, firmly in scarce migrant territory. Some uncertainties over taxonomy remain, however, and it is perhaps too soon for the revised identification criteria to have been applied uniformly during this three-year period. Generally, only records accepted by the BBRC’s ‘*tristis* panel’ and other relevant committees have been used (but note that, for example, in Shetland Siberian Chiffchaff is not classed a local rarity), so these figures are tentative.

Siberian Chiffchaffs were reported from 28 recording areas throughout the country but principally in the Northern Isles and southwest and northeast England; the top totals were 105 in Shetland, 65 in Cornwall, 40 on Fair Isle, 31 in Dorset, 13 in Scilly and 11 in both Northumberland and Yorkshire (fig. 15).

The overwhelming majority occurred in autumn but, compared with other Siberian *Phylloscopus*, there was a much greater frequency of wintering birds (fig. 16). The first bird of autumn arrived on 26th September; 107 followed during October, mostly after mid month, and 130 in November, almost all during the first fortnight – a pattern of occurrence almost indistinguishable from that of Pallas’s Warblers. Several of these November birds hung around into December, joining 75 winter ‘arrivals’ between

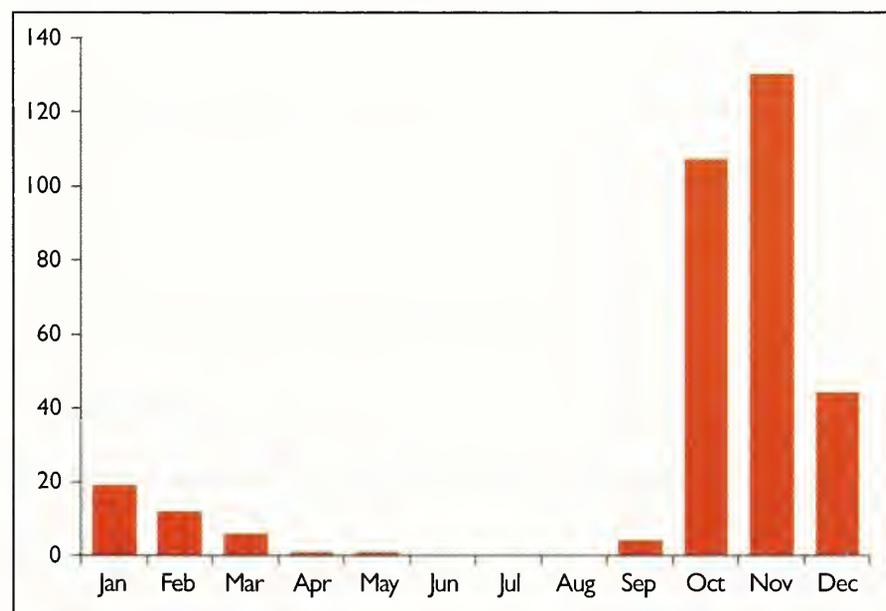


Fig. 16. Arrival dates of Siberian Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* in Britain by month, 2008–10.

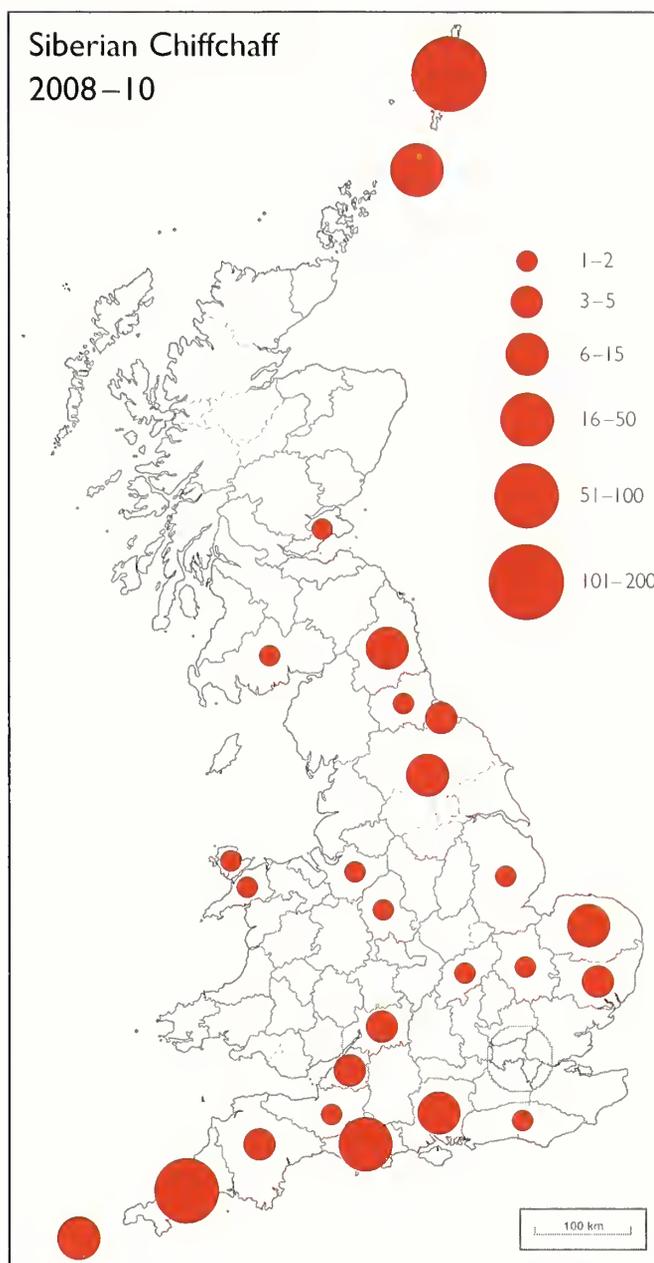


Fig. 15. Distribution of Siberian Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* in Britain, 2008–10.

December and March, a large proportion of which became long-stayers.

Wintering Chiffchaffs have been relatively common in Britain for many years but subspecies composition has been (largely) unrecorded. These initial figures for the occurrence of *tristis*, tentative though they are, suggest that Siberian Chiffchaffs may make up a significant proportion. No data exist to show whether numbers have been increasing in recent years so it will be useful to

continue to monitor them in these reports. If that does turn out to be the case, it raises the possibility that Britain is a regular wintering ground for a proportion of the breeding population. Birds recorded in March were assumed to be overwintering, while later birds are treated as spring migrants. There were just two of the latter: a singing male at Burnham-on-Sea (Somerset) on 3rd–13th April 2008, and one at Portland (Dorset) on 1st May 2009.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
6,488	142 (22)	119 (28)	398 (1)	2002/297/2	2001/239/3	Increase	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
<u>1968–69</u> 145
<u>1970–79</u> 143
<u>1980–89</u> 108
<u>1990–99</u> 158
<u>2000–09</u> 170

Moderate numbers in 2008 and 2009 were followed by a bumper crop of 398 in 2010, which exceeded the previous record (297 in 2002) by an amazing 34%, as Barred Warbler records continued their 20-year increase.

Predictably, half of all records during the three years were in the Northern Isles: 258 in Shetland, 39 in Orkney and a minimum of 30 on Fair Isle. Almost all of the remainder were on the east coast, from North-east Scotland to Kent with Yorkshire heading the list with 83, followed by Norfolk (60), Northumberland (40), Lincolnshire (27), North-east Scotland (12) and Co. Durham (11). With the exception of 22 in southwest England, Barred Warblers were typically thin on the ground away from the eastern hotspots. The only records in Scotland away from the east coast were 16 in the Outer Hebrides and three on Tiree (Argyll), while three of the eight records in Wales came from Bardsey (Caernarfonshire).

Less usual sites in England included singles at Fordham (Cambridgeshire) on 1st–2nd October 2009, Hoylake (Cheshire & Wirral) on 3rd September 2010 and Fleetwood (Lancashire & North Merseyside) on 15th November 2010.

The earliest autumn record was on Whalsay (Shetland) on 5th August 2009 and the latest at Fleetwood (above). Fair Isle and Spurn (Yorkshire) provided only seasonal totals but the monthly breakdown elsewhere showed 87 in August, 395 in September, 130 in October and seven in November.

There were two spring records – only the 17th and 18th ever – at Barnetby-le-Wold (Lincolnshire) on 10th May 2008 and Holy Island (Northumberland) on 28th–29th May 2008. Quite why this species is so rare in spring remains a great mystery. Its breeding and wintering areas, and migration routes, are somewhat similar to those of Red-backed Shrike and Icterine

Warbler *Hippolais icterina* yet records of those species are much less heavily weighted to autumn. Barred Warbler is, however, less common in its core breeding range than the other two species; rather than being unusually rare in spring it may instead be better thought of as unusually frequent in autumn, perhaps because of a migration strategy that contains a much greater element of post-juvenile dispersal prior to the onset of more concerted migration to the winter quarters – a strategy that might allow young birds to take fuller advantage of a glut of autumn fruits in northern Europe.



Richard Brooks

115. First-winter Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*, Salthouse, Norfolk, October 2010.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
630	33 (2)	21 (11=)	10 (26)	1995/37/1	1988/31/3	Stable	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
2
1960–69
2
1970–79
5
1980–89
16
1990–99
19
2000–09
21

‘Western Subalpine Warbler’ *S. c. cantillans* was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005 but ‘Eastern Subalpine Warbler’ *S. c. albistriata* and ‘Moltoni’s Warbler’ *S. c. moltonii* continue to be treated as national rarities, although there is currently a hiatus in record assessment (at least of the latter) pending a BOURC review of the taxonomy of the complex. In the meantime, the statistics in this report con-

tinue to include all records of all three taxa. So far, only five Eastern Subalpine Warblers (all males) have been accepted by BBRC for the three years under review: one in 2008 (Portland, Dorset, 26th June), two in 2009 (Portland, 9th May; North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 16th–18th May) and two in 2010 (Trondra, Shetland, 2nd–3rd May; Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, 23rd–30th May) (Hudson *et al.* 2012, 2013). It seems likely that a higher proportion were in fact Easterns, but that the descriptions fell short of the threshold set by BBRC.

With 33 records, 2008 was the second-best year on record but both 2009 and 2010 were unexceptional, while the ten-year means have shown rather little change for 30 years, nor has the pattern of occurrence changed in any significant way. Although birds were recorded in 17 areas in Scotland, England and Wales, as with so many scarce migrant passerines the majority were in the Northern Isles and southwest England, with 12 in Shetland, nine in Cornwall and seven in Scilly (fig. 17).

Also typically, spring records outnumbered those in autumn by 55 to nine (fig. 18). The earliest arrived on 2nd April 2009 at Porthgwarra (Cornwall) but most spring birds were in May,

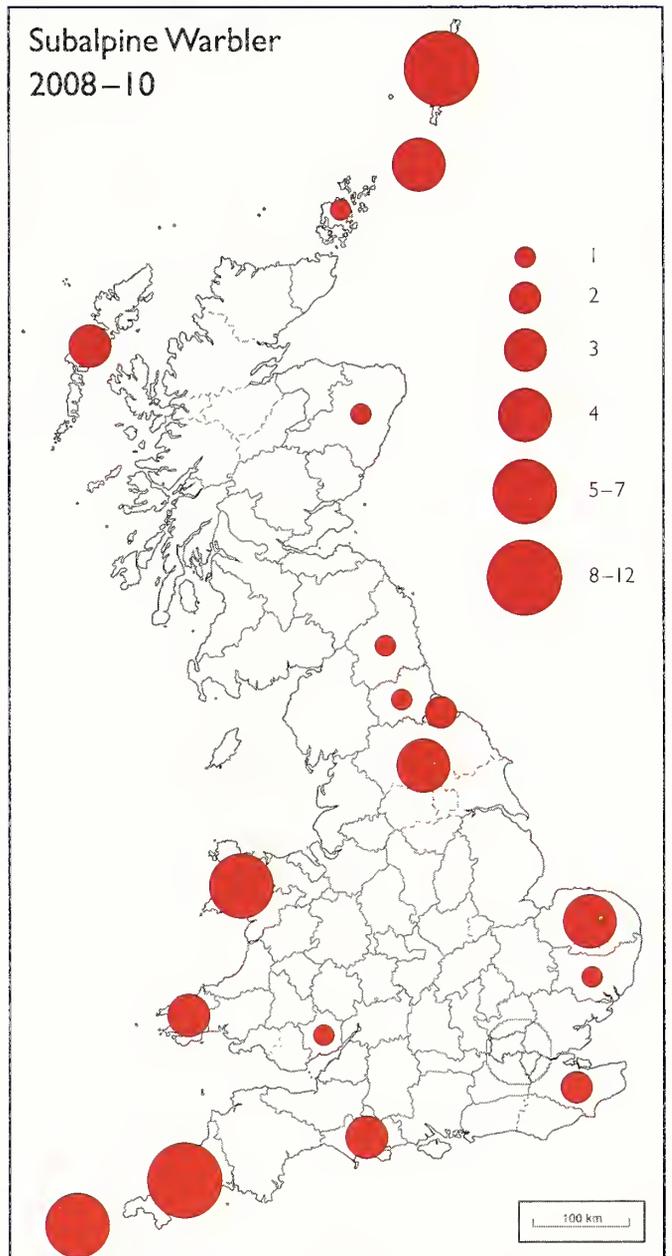


Fig. 17. Distribution of Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans* (all races) in Britain, 2008–10.

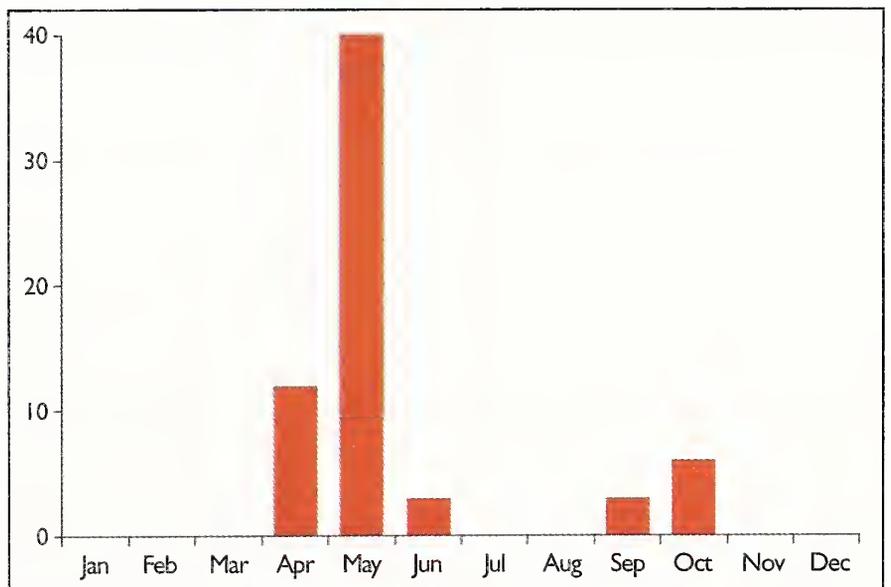


Fig. 18. Arrival dates of Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantillans* (all races) in Britain by month, 2008–10.

while the latest record was on 26th June 2008 at Portland. Twenty-six spring males were reported and 13 females. The first in autumn was at Trow Quarry (Co. Durham) on 6th–14th September 2008 and the last was at Bempton Cliffs (Yorkshire) on 31st October 2008.

**Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina***

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
4,429	177 (3)	127 (11)	95 (19)	1997/286/1    1992/281/2	Slight decline	High

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 35
1970–79 81
1980–89 104
1990–99 139
2000–09 87

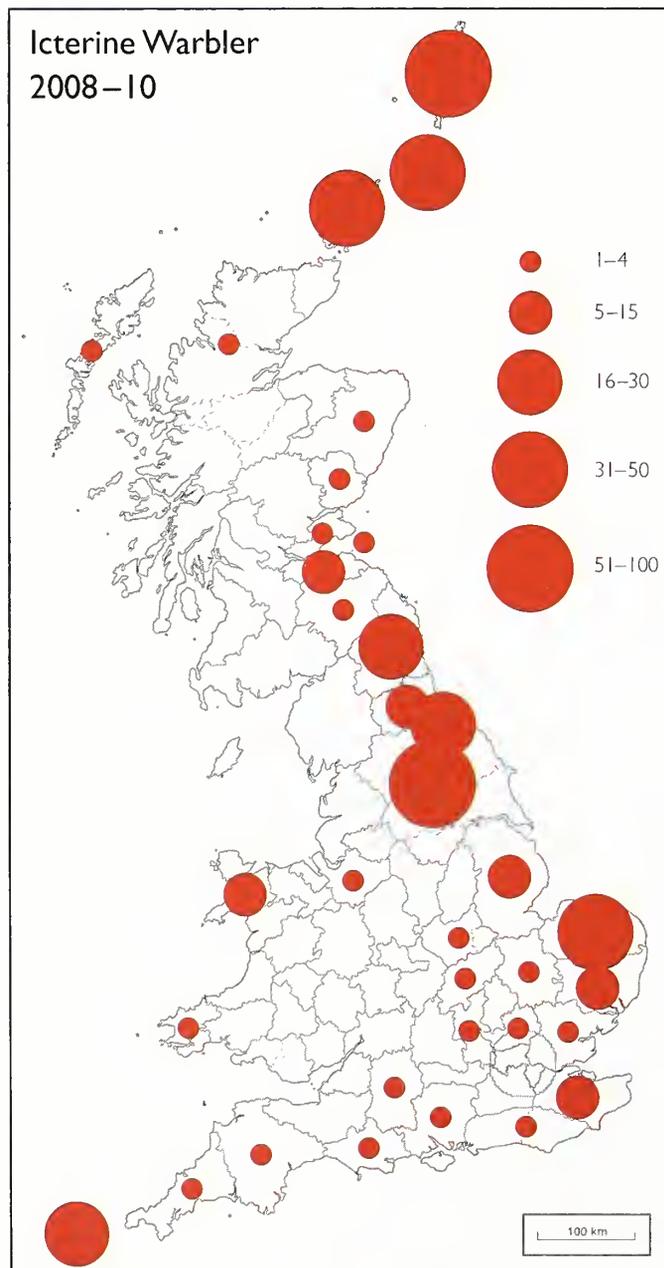
After four decidedly mediocre years in 2004–07, numbers bounced back to the third-highest total in 2008 and above-average scores in both 2009 and 2010. Although the ten-year mean for 2000–09 was well below that for the 1990s, it is impossible to say whether this apparent 37% decline foretells a long-term trend.

Icterine Warblers were recorded in 35 areas but with a distinct bias towards the Northern Isles and the North Sea coast: the largest totals were 80 in Shetland, 57 in Yorkshire, 44 in Norfolk, 40 on Fair Isle and 35 in Orkney (fig. 19).

Fraser (2013) commented on a possible increase in the proportion of spring Icterine Warblers – the species is traditionally regarded as a predominantly autumn migrant in Britain – and this trend was confirmed during 2008–10

when 201 were recorded in spring (May–June) compared with 198 in autumn (July–October). Some 40% of all spring records were in the Northern Isles, where they arrived about a week or so later than in England (the earliest was in Cornwall, at Land’s End on 3rd–4th May 2008). There were four spring records in inland counties, all in June 2008: singles at Wilstone Reservoir, Tring (the first record for Hertfordshire), Longwick (Buckinghamshire), Witchford (Cambridgeshire) and Stanford Reservoir (on the border between Leicestershire & Rutland and Northamptonshire).

The autumn records were more widely scattered, although a third were in the Northern Isles: totals elsewhere included 25 in Yorkshire and Norfolk and 16 on Scilly. The seven Welsh records in autumn included six on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire), while the only other western records to the north of Devon were singles at Longbridge Deverill (Wiltshire) on 19th August 2009, St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 13th September 2009 and Hoylake (Cheshire & Wirral) on 2nd September 2010. The earliest was on the Farnes (Northumberland) on 26th July 2008 and the latest on Bryher (Scilly) on 19th October 2010, but the main passage movement took place between mid August and mid September, although on average slightly earlier in the Northern Isles.



**Fig. 19.** Distribution of Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina* in Britain, 2008–10.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
1,290	32 (18)	27 (24)	15 (39)	1981/60/1	1996/59/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 15
1970–79 32
1980–89 39
1990–99 30
2000–09 23

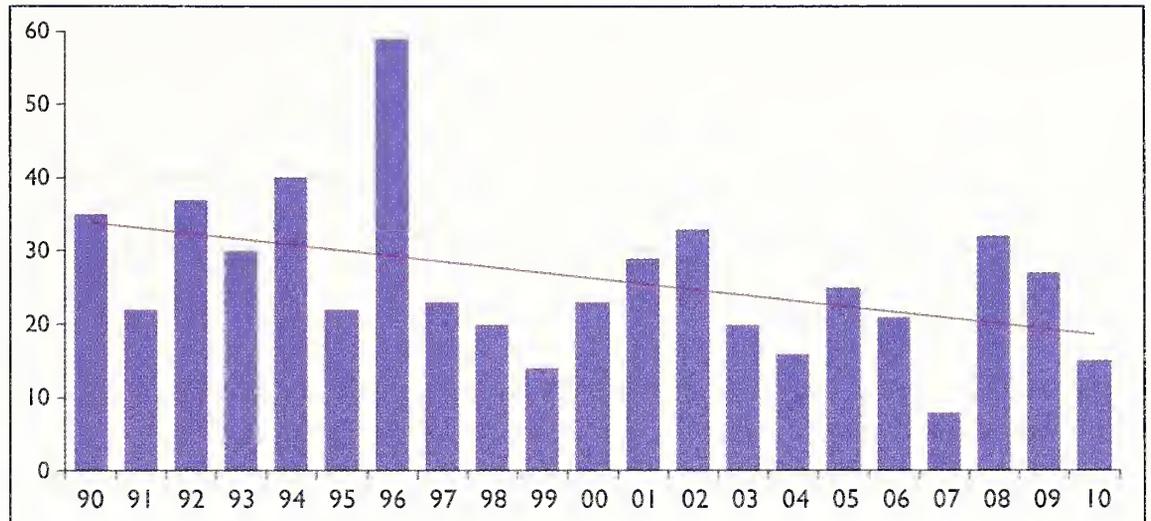


Fig. 20. Annual totals of Melodious Warblers *Hippolais polyglotta* in Britain, 1990–2010.

Melodious Warblers have followed a slow but steady downward trend over the past 20 years or more, which the years 2008–10 did little or nothing to ameliorate (fig. 20).

Birds were recorded in 16 counties, all in England and Wales apart from two records in Scotland, both in Shetland (at Sumburgh on 6th August 2008 and on Unst on 19th September 2010). Southwest England accounted for 65% of all records, including 22 on Scilly, 15 in Cornwall and nine in Dorset. Eleven were seen in Wales, including nine in Caernarfonshire, with a remarkable run of eight records on Bardsey, but there were only eight records in England away from the south coast: singles in Lancashire & North Merseyside (a singing male near Oswaldtwistle on 7th–21st June 2008), Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and Northumberland, and three in Suffolk.

The earliest of the ten spring records was at Portland (Dorset) on 24th April 2008, while the Lancashire bird was the only June arrival, the remainder occurring in May. Most were recorded in autumn, with two in July, 22 in August, 35 in September and five in October – the latest on 22nd October 2010 on St Martin’s (Scilly).

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
1,298	7 (47=)	7 (47=)	9 (42)	1976/102/1	1991/62/2	Large decline	High

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59 14
1960–69 9
1970–79 40
1980–89 23
1990–99 42
2000–09 13

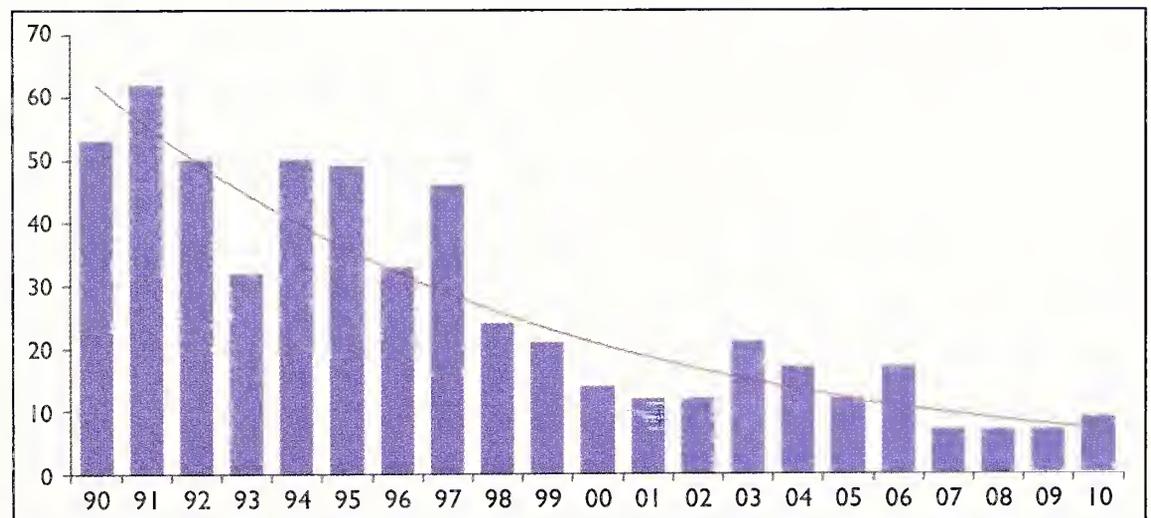


Fig. 21. Annual totals of Aquatic Warblers *A. paludicola* in Britain, 1990–2010.

The decline of the Aquatic Warbler has been apparent since the early 1990s but has accelerated since the late 1990s – numbers in Britain have fallen by around 80% since 1990 (fig. 21). Not since 1968 has an annual total been lower than those during 2008–10, despite an increase in skilled observers and ringing effort since then. This is a species of international conservation concern and the numbers in Britain reflect major declines in the species’ core breeding range. The ten-year total to 2010 stands at just 121. Aquatic Warbler records were last assessed by BBRC in 1982, but these data surely present a compelling case for a return to national rarity status.

Eleven of the 23 birds reported here were trapped and the Aquatic Warbler is certainly now a major rarity as far as most field birders are concerned. Records came from 12 recording areas but one on Unst (Shetland) on 4th August 2008 was the only record in northern Britain. Devon topped the list with five records (two at Thurlestone Marsh and singles at Slapton Ley, South Milton Ley and Dawlish Warren), followed by Sussex with three, all trapped in the Pannell Valley. There were six in Wales: two at both Teifi Marshes (Ceredigion) and Llangorse Lake (Breconshire), and singles at Uskmouth and Newport Wetlands (both Gwent). Other English counties reporting this species were Hampshire and Somerset (both with two), Essex, Gloucestershire, Scilly and Warwickshire. None was reported from the once-regular Cornish site of Marazion nor from the well-watched coastal marshes in Norfolk and Suffolk.

A juvenile at Salford Priors GP from 27th September to 1st October 2009 was the second record for Warwickshire, while a bird at Slapton Ley on 20th–29th September 2008 was the longest-stayer. First sightings occurred between 4th August and 27th September and all but four were seen only on the day they were found. Nine were reported as juveniles and three as adults.

### Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Total 1986–2010	No. 2008 (rank/25)	No. 2009 (rank/25)	No. 2010 (rank/25)	Other annual maxima 1986–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
1,149	105 (2)	68 (3)	36 (16)	1992/106/1	Fluctuating	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2009
1986–89 30
1990–99 53
2000–09 47

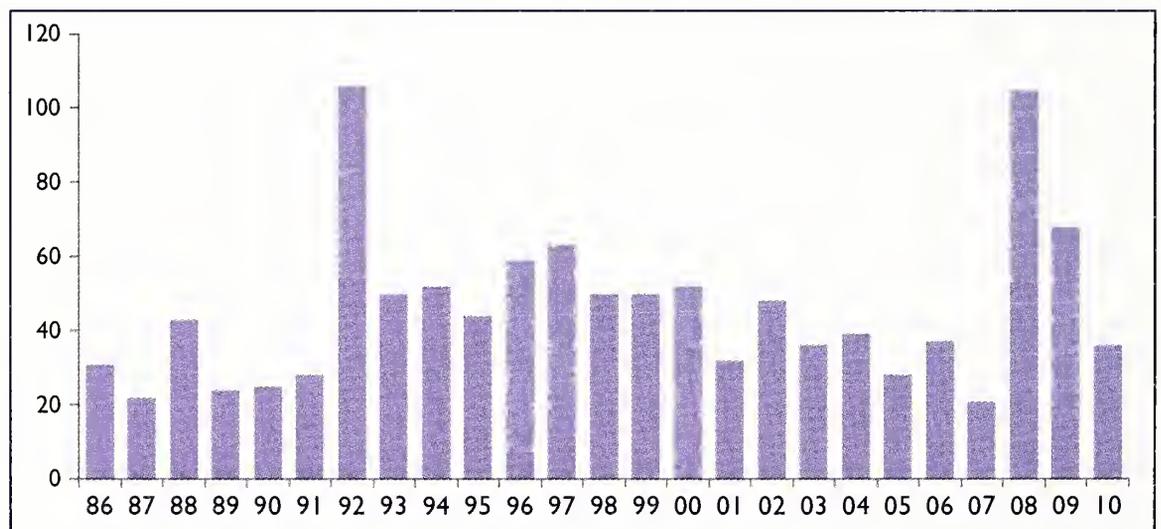


Fig. 22. Annual totals of migrant Marsh Warblers *A. palustris* in Britain, 1986–2010.

The migrant status of Marsh Warblers was last reviewed in 2003; figures

for the intervening period (year/number/rank) were as follows: 2004/39/14, 2005/28/20, 2006/37/16, 2007/21/25. These were very low totals, including (in 2007) the lowest-ever since records were first collated, in 1986. In contrast, the numbers in 2008 and 2009 were much higher, the second- and third-best on record, emphasising the fluctuating pattern of records over the past 25 years (fig. 22).

The British breeding population has continued to decline throughout this period and now numbers fewer than ten pairs (Holling *et al.* 2013) but all records thought likely to relate to breeding birds have been excluded from the totals above.

The earliest record was at Minsmere (Suffolk) on 14th May 2009, but most of the 174 spring arrivals came in the last ten days of May and the first ten days of June, with no significant difference in dates between southern England and the Northern Isles. After three in July, the first

John Grist



Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

autumn migrant ‘proper’ was on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 18th August 2008. Eight other August records followed, 19 in September, three in October and one on 2nd November 2009, on Skomer, Pembrokeshire, one of just four seen in Wales during the period).

Overall, Shetland was the top area with 64, followed by Yorkshire with 39, Fair Isle with 26, Norfolk with 15 and Orkney with 11 (fig. 23). There was a handful of records in landlocked counties, including Amwell (Hertfordshire) on 20th–23rd June 2009, Otmoor (Oxfordshire) from 23rd June to 6th July 2009, Baydon (Berkshire) on 12th–13th June 2010 and Cotswold Water Park (Wiltshire) on 5th September 2010.

Most records were of single birds but at least 21 arrived on 28th May 2008 on the east coast between Yorkshire and Shetland, including five on Fair Isle and six in the Spurn area (Yorkshire).

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
937	57 (4)	22 (12)	21 (13)	2002/195/1 2001 & 2003/67/2	Increasing	Very high

The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a three-fold increase in Rose-coloured Starling numbers (compared with the 1990s), a trend that seems likely to continue.

Although the majority of Rose-coloured Starlings occur in autumn, records are spread throughout the year. Some 35 were found in spring, 25 of them aged as adults and three as first-summers, and there was a clear-cut bias towards northern Britain – with 18 individuals in all parts of Scotland but only six in southwest England. Almost all arrived during June with just one in April and three in May, marking this species out as one of our latest migrants; the eight in July may include late spring migrants too.

Autumn passage was equally protracted. August produced five records, followed by 24 in September, 20 in October and six in November. The first juveniles arrived on 31st August and

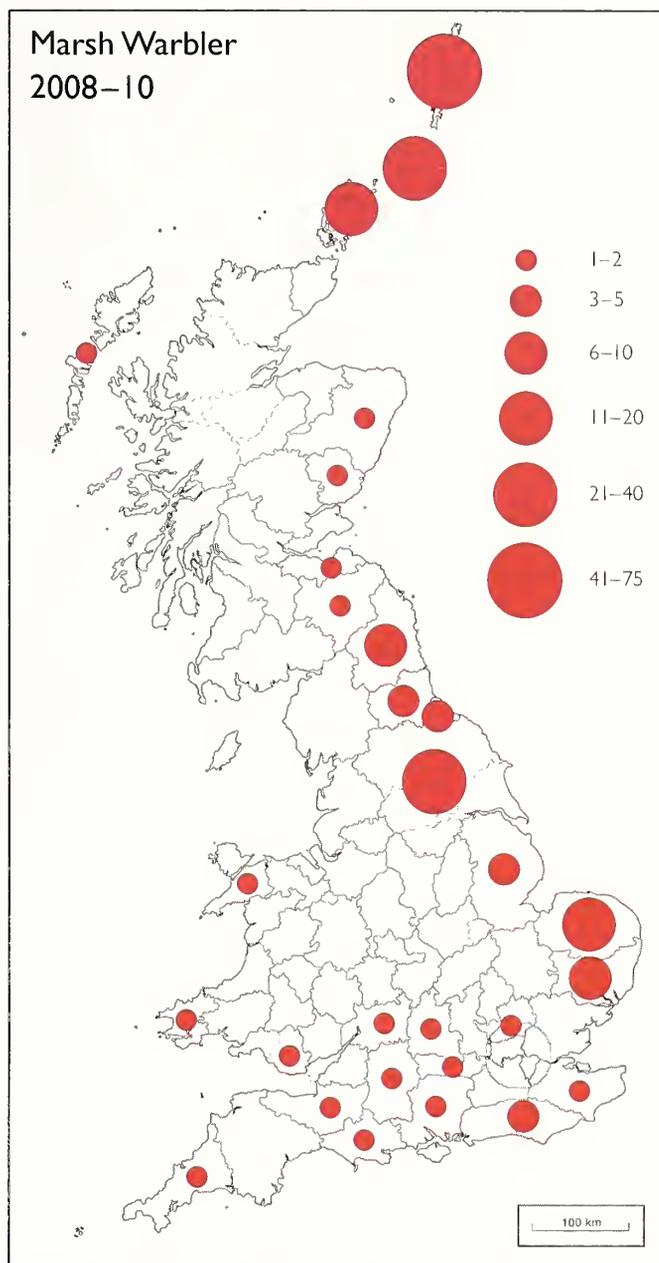


Fig. 23. Distribution of Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* in Britain, 2008–10.

Annual means 1958–2009
<u>1958–59</u> 6
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 6
<u>1980–89</u> 8
<u>1990–99</u> 18
<u>2000–09</u> 56

from September onwards they outnumbered adults by 43 to seven. In contrast to the northern bias in spring, 31 of the 55 autumn records were on the south coast, including 14 in Cornwall, while only 14 reached Scotland. Three of these autumn birds



Gary Jenkins

116. Adult Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*, Inskip, Lancashire & North Merseyside, June 2008.

remained well into winter during 2009: Shapinsay (Orkney) from 15th October to 23rd December, Forest Hill (Oxfordshire) from 7th November to 14th December and Pembroke from 18th November to 2nd December, while a juvenile was

at Newquay (Cornwall) from 12th November 2008 to 2nd February 2009. There were two other winter records: at Haverfordwest (Pembrokeshire) from 26th February to 1st May 2008 and on Scilly from 21st December 2010 until at least the end of the year.

**Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica***

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
5,092	101 (17)	141 (9)	68 (30)	1985/622/1    1981/333/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
<u>1968–69</u> 128
<u>1970–79</u> 92
<u>1980–89</u> 186
<u>1990–99</u> 116
<u>2000–09</u> 82

Bluethroat numbers continued their long-term decline despite two reasonable years in 2008 and 2009. In contrast to 2004–07, significantly more were seen in spring (March–June) than in autumn (August–November): 190 and 120 respectively. Four were found in March, two in both Suffolk and Norfolk, all occurring in the last week. Eight followed during April but the majority of spring migrants appeared during May, with stragglers into June, the latest on the Isle of May on 22nd June 2009. Five of the ten in March and April were male ‘White-spotted Bluethroats’ *L. s. cyanecula* and it seems likely that most if not all of the earliest records were of this race, consistent with the established pattern of spring overshooting by continental breeders. No white-spotted birds were reported in May but there were two in June, including one in North-east Scotland for three days in 2009. The first red-spotted bird was found on North

Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 14th May 2009.

During May and June all but nine records were in Scotland or northern England, with 70 of the 126 in the Northern Isles, mainly in Shetland. Most spring records were singles but there were a few larger falls, including ten on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 15th May 2009. Singles in Pembrokeshire in April 2008 and May 2010, and one in Anglesey in April 2009 were the only records in Wales.

The first autumn birds were at West Bexington (Dorset) on 15th August 2009 and Blakeney Point (Norfolk) on 26th–28th August 2010. Some 65 followed in September, 45 in October, and eight in November with the latest on 15th November 2009 at Port Allen (Perth & Kinross).



Roger Riddington

117. Male Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*, Quendale, Shetland, May 2009.

Shetland again predominated and, as in spring, the majority of birds were on the east coast, although there were marginally more in southern England, including five in both Scilly and Sussex. There was no discernible difference in autumn arrival dates between the north and south.

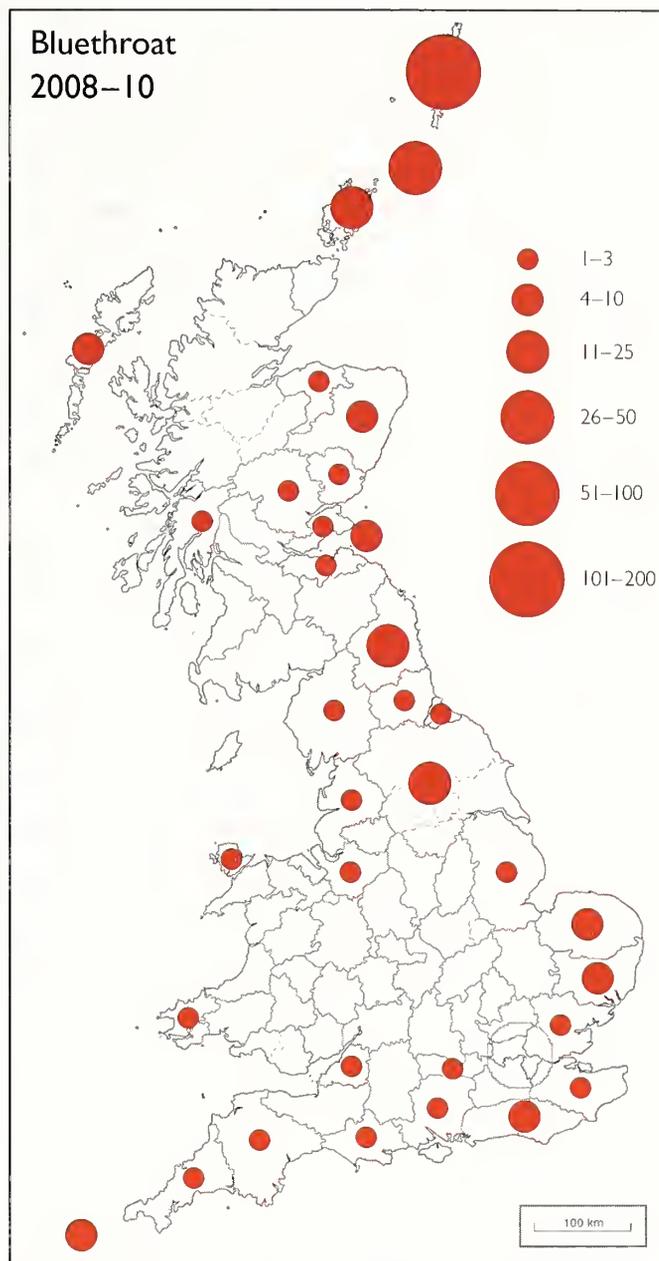


Fig. 24. Distribution of Bluethroats *Luscinia svecica* in Britain, 2008–10.

### Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
3,996	147 (3)	62 (38)	120 (7)	1984/196/1	1976/174/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69 59
1970–79 79
1980–89 115
1990–99 88
2000–09 94

There has been little indication of change in the occurrence patterns of Red-breasted Flycatchers in Britain since records were first collected systematically, in 1968. The period under review produced one rather poor and two very good years, the 2008 total being the best since 1984.

Rather few are seen in spring and most autumn records are of presumed juveniles. The 27 spring records were distributed fairly evenly between the Northern Isles and the English east coast (mostly in Yorkshire) but also included two on South Uist (Outer Hebrides) and in North-east Scotland in 2008, together with singles in Kent and Dorset; limital dates were 7th May (in 2008, at Holkham, Norfolk) and 24th June (2009, Fair Isle), with most passing through during May.

Autumn distribution was markedly different. Although the Northern Isles and the east coast still predominated, with 63 in Shetland, 57 in Yorkshire, 32 in Norfolk and 21 in Northumberland, there were proportionately more in the south-coast counties of England, notably 50 on Scilly. Red-breasted Flycatchers remain rare away from the east and south coasts;

the only records during 2008–10 were two in Argyll and singles in Warwickshire, Anglesey and Pembrokeshire. The earliest autumn record was on 6th September 2010 and the latest on 16th November 2008, one of only eight November records.

**‘Grey-headed Wagtail’ *Motacilla flava thunbergi***

No. 2008
103
No. 2009
50
No. 2010
52

This Fennoscandian and north Russian subspecies is included in this report for the first time, in an attempt to establish its status as a British migrant. Rather variable numbers were reported during these three years but at first sight it appears that it should be regarded as a scarce migrant nationally, being relatively frequent in the far north and along the east coast but rare elsewhere. Records will continue to be gathered for the time being at least.

Almost all records included here were of males so it is likely that the real totals are considerably larger, since females and autumn birds are not always readily assigned to subspecies. Another confounding issue is that not all recording areas publish details of the different races of Yellow Wagtail passing through.

Bearing all these caveats in mind, this is a first stab at analysing the records. Grey-headed Wagtails appear to have a restricted migratory range in Britain, being recorded in only 13 areas during 2008–10, one of the smallest number of areas of any taxon in this report. The only records away from the east coast were of one at Ogston Reservoir (Derbyshire) on 18th May 2008 and two singles in Cornwall in September 2009. Of the remainder, almost twice as many were in Scotland as in England, counties with double-figure totals being Shetland with 69, Fair Isle with a minimum of 50, Norfolk with 42, Yorkshire with 16 and Orkney with 14.

More than 70% occurred in spring but it is far from clear whether this reflects a genuine seasonal difference or, more likely, is simply the result of identification difficulties in autumn. The earliest, at Blakeney (Norfolk) on 28th April 2009, was one of only two in that month; 140 arrived during May and just five in the first six days of June, suggesting an extremely restricted passage period.

All of the 58 autumn records were in Scotland with the exception of two in Cornwall and one in Lincolnshire; one at Girdle Ness (North-east Scotland) on 9th October 2010 was the only October record.

**Richard’s Pipit *Anthus richardi***

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
4,153	81 (26)	124 (9)	87 (22)	1994/353/1    2005/202/2	Stable	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
6
1960–69
40
1970–79
51
1980–89
65
1990–99
130
2000–09
119

After doubling between the 1980s and 1990s, the number of Richard’s Pipits fell slightly during the 2000s but it is too soon to say whether this apparent decline is real.

Richard’s Pipits were recorded in more than half of all recording areas but Norfolk was once again the leading county, with 62 records, followed by Cornwall and Scilly both with 37, Yorkshire with 25, Shetland with 23 and Lincolnshire with 15. Birds appeared in seven Welsh counties, including a remarkable ten on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire), six of which were in autumn 2009, but relatively few were recorded in western Scotland (three in the Outer Hebrides and one in Ayrshire) or northwest England (three in Cheshire & Wirral and one in Lancashire & North Merseyside). Birds were also found in six inland counties in England: Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire & Rutland, Warwickshire and Wiltshire.

This species is overwhelmingly an autumn migrant with nearly 90% arriving between mid September and early November. Most records were of single birds with a handful of

sightings of two on the same day but there were three on Fair Isle on 7th October 2008 and at Grainthorpe Marsh (Lincolnshire) on 30th September 2010, and four on Bardsey on 12th October 2008. The longest-stayer was on Fair Isle from 16th September to 10th October 2009.

Spring records are rare and some if not most March birds seem likely to have overwintered, but eight birds discovered between the last week of April and mid May had stronger credentials as migrants. Wintering birds, although still scarce, are far from unusual; 25 individuals were first recorded between December and February during 2008–10, all south of the Humber–Mersey line with the exception of one at Auchmithie (Angus & Dundee) from 17th January to 12th March 2008.



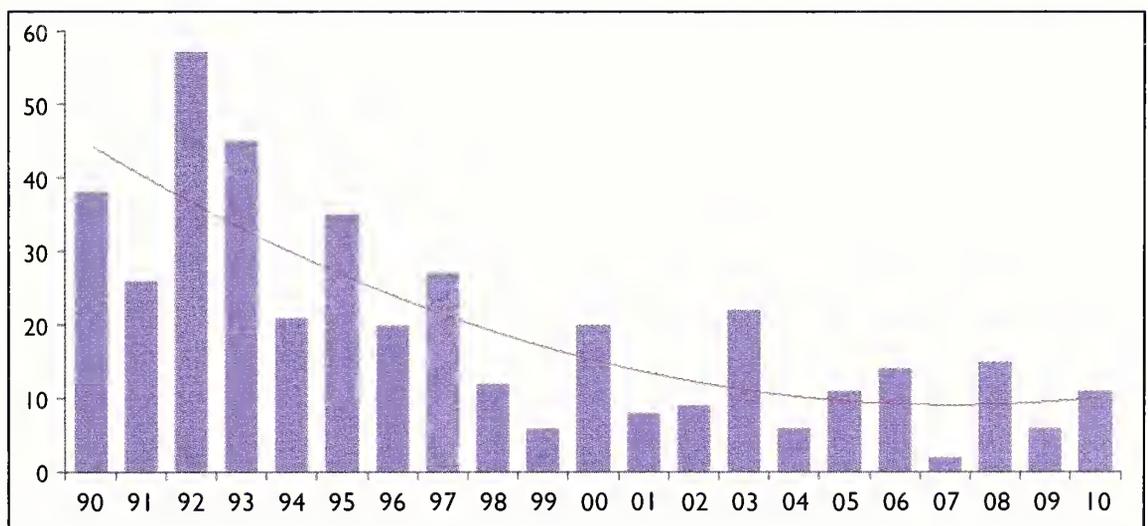
Richard Stonier

**118.** Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*, St Mary's, Scilly, October 2009.

**Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris***

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
1,189	15 (33)	6 (49=)	11 (38)	1992/57/1	1983/56/2	Large decline	High

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
10
1960–69
14
1970–79
27
1980–89
36
1990–99
29
2000–09
11



**Fig. 25.** Annual totals of Tawny Pipits *Anthus campestris* in Britain, 1990–2010.

Fraser (2013) highlighted 2007 as the first ever blank year for any scarce migrant but since the publication of that report two confirmed records of Tawny Pipit have come to light: singles on South Uist (Outer Hebrides) in June and at Uwchmynydd (Caernarfonshire) on 10th October. Nevertheless, totals in 2008 and 2010 have to be regarded as a marked improvement, although the six in 2009 was disappointing. Average numbers have declined by more than 60% since the 1990s, however, and are now lower than in the 1960s; the ten-year total to 2010 stands at just 104 (fig. 25).

Stef McElwee



**119.** Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, Dalsetter, Shetland, May 2008.

Fifteen recording areas logged at least one in the three years, but half of the 32 records were in the southwest, with six in Cornwall, four each in Dorset and Scilly, and singles in Avon and Devon. Thirteen of the remainder were in east- or south-coast counties of England (three in Norfolk, two each in Hampshire, Kent, Suffolk and Yorkshire, and singles in Lincolnshire and Sussex), with more unusual records at

Dalsetter (Shetland) on 24th–26th May 2008, North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 23rd–26th June 2010 and Cotswold Water Park (Wiltshire) on 13th September 2010.

All records were singles and 19 were recorded for one day only, although it is not clear how many of these were flyovers. The longest-stayers were both in Norfolk in 2008: at Waxham from 22nd May to 2nd June and Blakeney Point on 8th–28th August.

There were 15 spring records, the earliest at Polgigga (Cornwall) on 20th April 2008 and the latest on North Ronaldsay (above). The earliest of 17 autumn records, most of which were in September, was on Blakeney Point (Norfolk) from 8th August 2008 and the latest on St Martin’s (Scilly) on 11th October 2010.

### Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
473	11 (15)	15 (10)	19 (3)	1992/47/1	1995/21/2	Declining	High

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59 2
1960–69 3
1970–79 7
1980–89 8
1990–99 18
2000–09 9

Red-throated Pipit is one of the most difficult species to assess, since a proportion of reports involve birds flying over and calling. Eight of the 45 reported here were definitely flyovers but it is likely that a much larger proportion were. As Fraser (2013) pointed out, some county records panels no longer accept records of flyovers, which makes a consistent approach to presenting national totals extremely difficult. As more than one recorder has commented, it is often more a case of assessing the observer rather than the details of the observation.

For this reason, only records that have been passed on by the relevant records panels are used here; two from Essex have been excluded from the analysis. Bearing these caveats in mind, it is perhaps better that record assessment stays a local matter rather than reverting to BBRC, despite the species’ current status – the total of only 95 records in the past ten years suggests that it remains very much a national rarity.

Red-throated Pipits were recorded in 14 areas during the period under review, almost two-thirds of them from just three areas: Scilly (16), Cornwall (six) and Fair Isle (five). Others were seen (or heard) in Norfolk and Shetland (both with three), Cleveland, Devon and

Northumberland (all with two), and Highland, Lancashire & North Merseyside, Lincolnshire, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Pembrokeshire (all with just a single record).

There were 13 spring records, between 15th April and 30th May, and 31 in autumn, between 19th September (one of only four records in that month) and 23rd October. Most remarkable, however, was a winter record at Periglis (St Agnes, Scilly) on 6th December 2009.



Joe Cockram

120. Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Farne Islands, Northumberland, May 2009.

### Common Rosefinch *Erythrina erythrina*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
4,285	160 (7)	88 (23)	236 (2)	1992/248/1	1995/180/3	Small decline	Low

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59 6
1960–69 11
1970–79 37
1980–89 76
1990–99 151
2000–09 129

Fraser (2013) noted ‘a gentle decline in numbers... since the peak years in the mid 1990s’ and attributed this to a marked decrease in spring records. Although the spring (April–June) total of 90 in 2008 was the largest since 105 in 1995, spring passage was again very poor in both 2009 and 2010, with 19 and 35 birds respectively (fig. 26). One on the Isle of May on 2nd April 2009 was the earliest and the only one in that month and the main spring arrival was (typically) in late May and early June.

Autumn (July–November) totals included two that were about the recent average – 69 in 2008 and 68 in 2009 – but also the highest ever in autumn, of 201 in 2010. A few adults began to appear in July and the first juveniles in late August, but the main autumn passage came in September, with arrivals tailing off from early October and only a handful remaining in November.

There were two winter records, both on garden feeders: an adult male in Longridge (Lancashire & North Merseyside) on 9th February 2008 and a first-winter in Whitburn (Co. Durham) from 17th November 2008 to 15th January 2009.

Common Rosefinches were reported in 33 areas during the three years but about 40% were in the Northern Isles (98 in

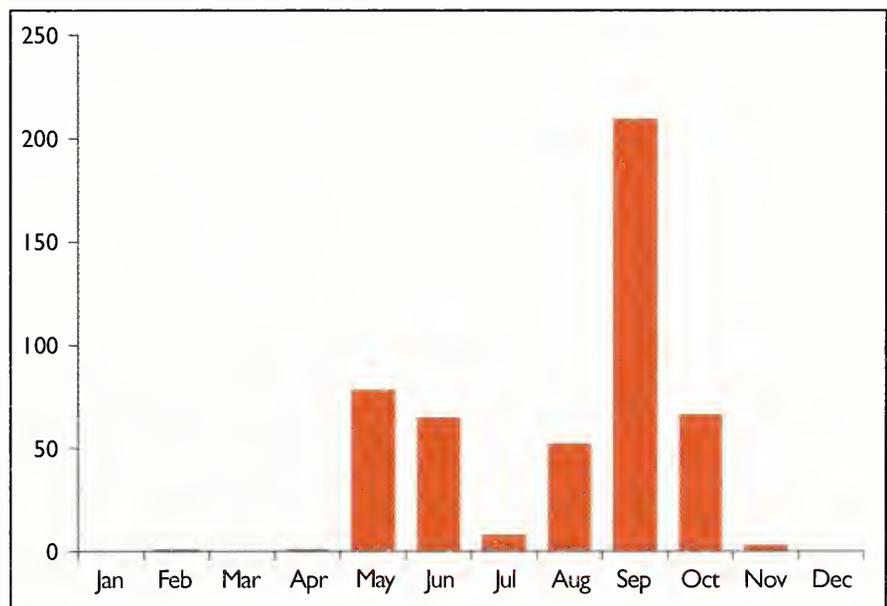


Fig. 26. Arrival dates of Common Rosefinches *Erythrina erythrina* in Britain by month, 2008–10.

Reston Kilgour



**121.** Common Rosefinch *Erythrina erythrina*, Bradwell, Essex, June 2009.

Shetland, 72 on Fair Isle and 29 in Orkney). Elsewhere, the only other double-figure totals were 47 in Yorkshire, 21 in Scilly, 14 in the Outer Hebrides and 13 in Northumberland. Most other recording areas that notched up more than five in the three years were on the east coast – Isle of May (nine), Norfolk and Lincolnshire (both eight) and Co. Durham (seven) – while Devon also managed seven and Highland six. A paltry 14 were recorded in Wales and just one in an English inland county: the first for Leicestershire & Rutland, at Thornton on 26th–27th September 2009.

**Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni***

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
881	8 (19)	26 (6)	25 (7)	1996/266/1	1995/195/2	Stable *	Very high

\* excluding irruption years

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59 0
1960–69 2
1970–79 4
1980–89 10
1990–99 60
2000–09 10

The problems of redpoll identification were reviewed by Stoddart (2013), who highlighted the many continuing difficulties in distinguishing some examples of the two Arctic Redpoll subspecies, in particular from each other but also from some Common Redpolls *A. flammea*.

The figures above include the nominate subspecies, ‘Hornemann’s Arctic Redpoll’, which remains on the BBRC list, and ‘Coues’s Arctic Redpoll’ *A. h. exilipes*, which is more prone to large irruptions and has been

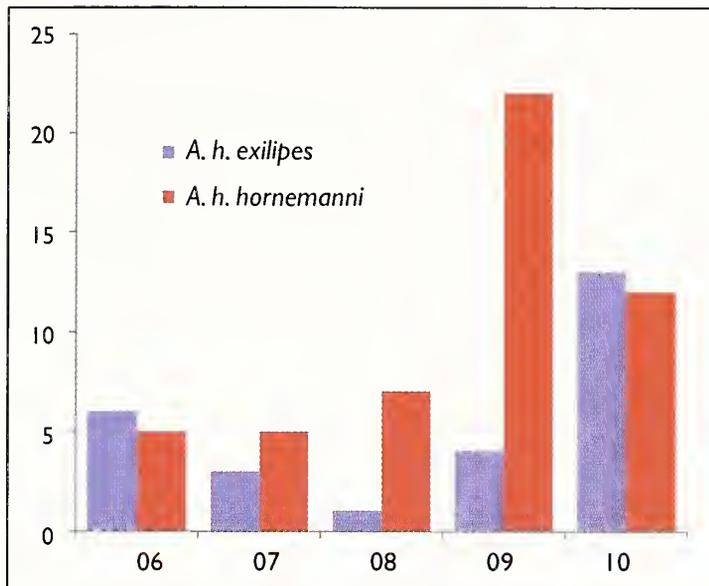
treated as a scarce migrant since 2006, and records of both are shown in the distribution map (fig. 28).

The occurrence of the two races has diverged in recent years, with 51 records of *hornemanni* and just 27 of *exilipes* since 2006, and *hornemanni* either outnumbering or more or less matching *exilipes* in each year (fig. 27). It seems that, other than in ‘invasion years’, of



Hugh Harrop

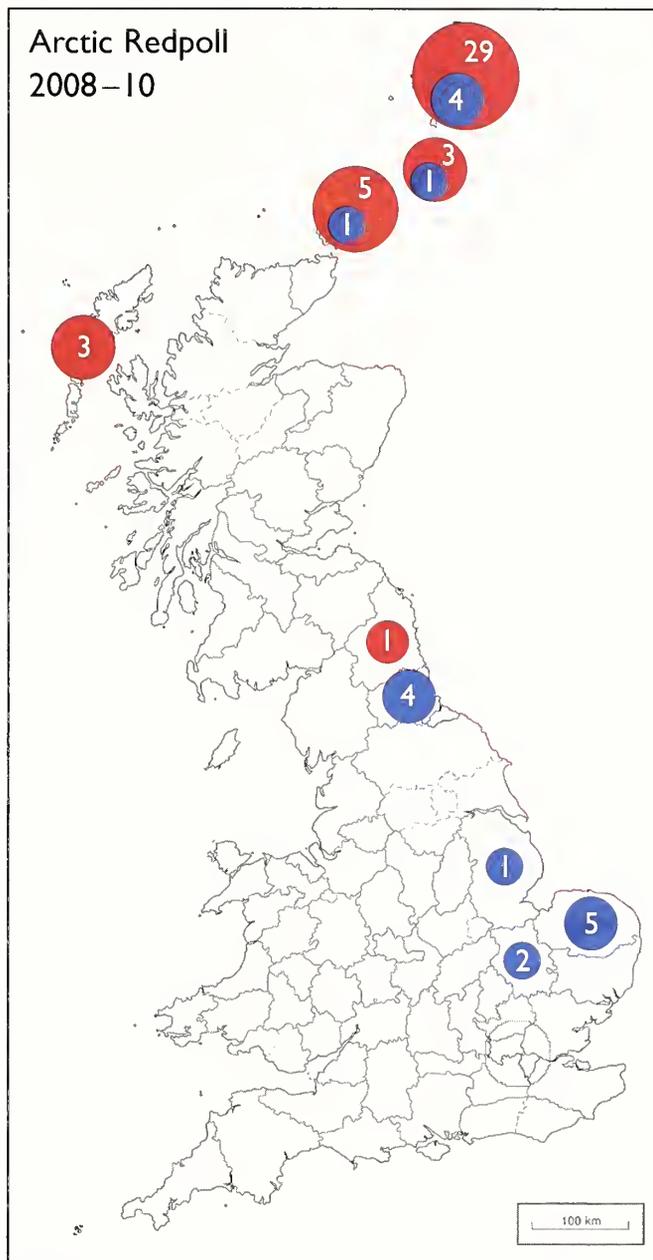
**122.** Hornemann’s Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis h. hornemanni*, Cunningsburgh, Shetland, October 2009.



**Fig. 27.** Annual totals of Arctic Redpolls *Acanthis hornemanni* in Britain, 2006–10.

which the last was in winter 1995/96, *exilipes* arguably has a stronger claim to national rarity status. The figures for accepted records of *hornemanni* were 7, 22 and 12 in the three years under review, compared with 1, 4 and 13 for *exilipes*. Indeed, the single record of *exilipes* in 2008 now becomes the lowest annual total for any scarce migrant species. It seems that both races may qualify for rarity treatment at present as, indeed, they may do even when lumped together – with just 121 records in the ten years to 2010. The distribution of *hornemanni* shows a marked concentration in the Northern Isles, which accounted for all but four of the 41 records, while most of the *exilipes* were in eastern England (fig. 28).

The remainder of this account deals only with *exilipes* and those reported as being of uncertain race. All were in the east of the country, in seven recording areas: five in Norfolk, four in Co. Durham (together, at Rainton Meadows, from 19th December 2010 into 2011, which was the only multiple occurrence anywhere) and in Shetland, two in Cambridgeshire (first-winters at Woodwalton Fen on 31st January 2009 and 13th November to 4th December 2010) and singles at East Halton Skitter (Lincolnshire) on 12th–22nd February 2009, on Fair Isle on 12th–13th October 2010 and on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 21st November 2010.



**Fig. 28.** Distribution of Arctic Redpolls in Britain, 2008–10 (actual count numbers shown). Red dots: *A. h. hornemanni*. Blue dots: *A. h. exilipes*.

### Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
481	0	0	0	1990/210/1	1982/84/2	None	Very high

Although very few are reported to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (Holling *et al.* 2013), it is estimated that about 50 pairs of Parrot Crossbills breed in the Caledonian Forest (Summers & Buckland 2010). For this reason, the species was removed from the BBRC list after 2008, although it remains an extremely rare bird elsewhere in Britain other than in occasional invasion years. During 2008–10, there were no confirmed records of migrants, indeed none has been recorded away from the breeding area since 1995.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
1,901	41 (19=)	38 (25)	41 (19=)	1996/99/1	2004/89/2	Declining	Low

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
0
1960–69
10
1970–79
19
1980–89
37
1990–99
68
2000–09
52

Although the high total of 89 in 2004 helped to boost the decade average a little, three mediocre years during 2008–10 appeared to reinforce the slow decline that began in the mid 1990s.

Typically, records were heavily concentrated along the Channel coast, with Dorset alone contributing 58 (almost half of the total); 30 of

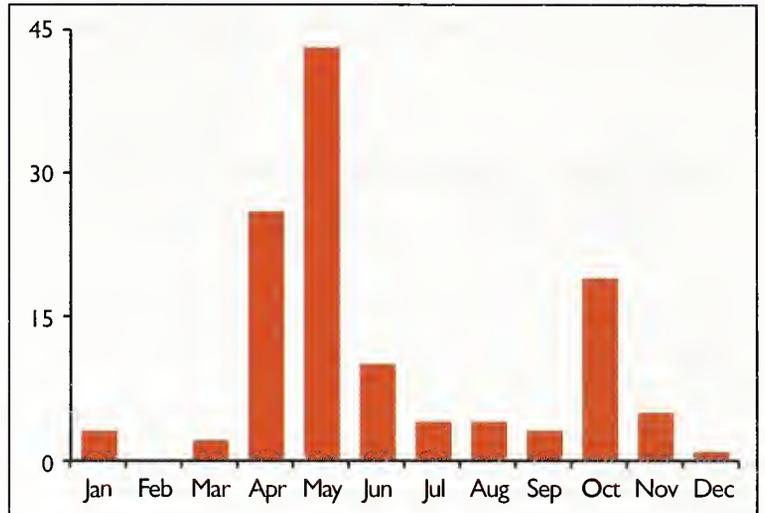


Fig. 29. Arrival dates of European Serins *Serinus serinus* in Britain by month, 2008–10.

these were at Portland, the highest proportion of any scarce migrant species recorded at a single site. Kent weighed in with 18 records but the next highest total was nine on Scilly. Five in Yorkshire were the most northerly records along the east coast but a singing male at Ambleside (Cumbria) on 5th May 2008 was the northernmost in Britain. Other unusual locations were Woolston Eyes (Cheshire & Wirral), where a single bird was recorded on 31st December 2009, and Fen Drayton Lakes (Cambridgeshire), with a single on 17th April 2010. None was seen in either Scotland or Wales.

There were seven winter records in addition to the one in Cheshire: two birds overwintered at Rainham Marshes (Essex/Greater London) in both 2008/09 and 2009/10, while others were at Langton Herring (Dorset) on 5th–21st January 2009, Burnham-on-Crouch (Essex) on 14th December 2008 and Margate (Kent) on 5th December 2010.

Spring overshoots began to appear in the last ten days of March, preceding the main spring passage in April and May, while the bulk of autumn migrants were seen in October (fig. 29).

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

Total 1968–2010	No. 2008 (rank/43)	No. 2009 (rank/43)	No. 2010 (rank/43)	Other annual maxima 1968–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
2,405	30 (39)	37 (31)	56 (22)	1996/119/1	1969/114/2	Declining	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2009
1968–69
87
1970–79
46
1980–89
57
1990–99
72
2000–09
42

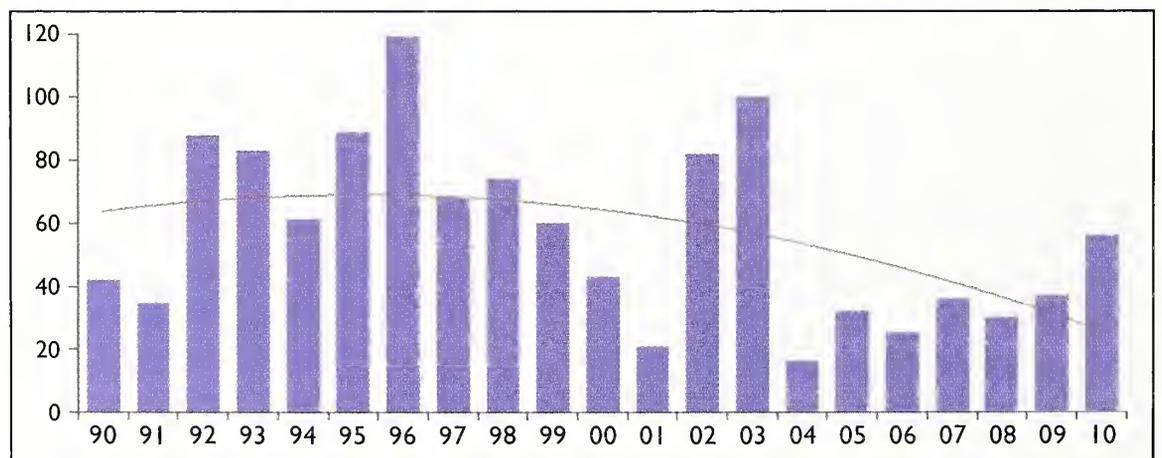


Fig. 30. Annual totals of Ortolan Buntings *E. hortulana* in Britain, 1990–2010.

Although 2010 was the best year since 2003, it was still only close to the medium-term average. There has been no clear trend over the longer term, with decade averages fluctuating, although there was a dramatic decline between the 1990s and 2000s (fig. 30).

A little over half of all records in 2008–10 came from southwest England, with 21 in both Cornwall and Dorset and 16 on Scilly. Most of the remainder were in counties along the east coast, including 15 in Yorkshire and eight in Shetland (fig. 31).

One on Gugh (Scilly) on 27th April 2010 was the only record in that month but 15 followed in May, including a singing male on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 21st–23rd May 2008, while one on 10th June 2009 at Spurn (Yorkshire) was the latest spring arrival. The earliest sign of autumn migration was also in Yorkshire, at Flamborough on 14th August 2010. Another ten arrived in August but most (87) occurred during September; there were seven in October, while one on Skokholm (Pembrokeshire) on 15th November 2010 was the only record in that month. Of the 29 autumn records where the age was specified, just one was an adult, the rest juveniles.

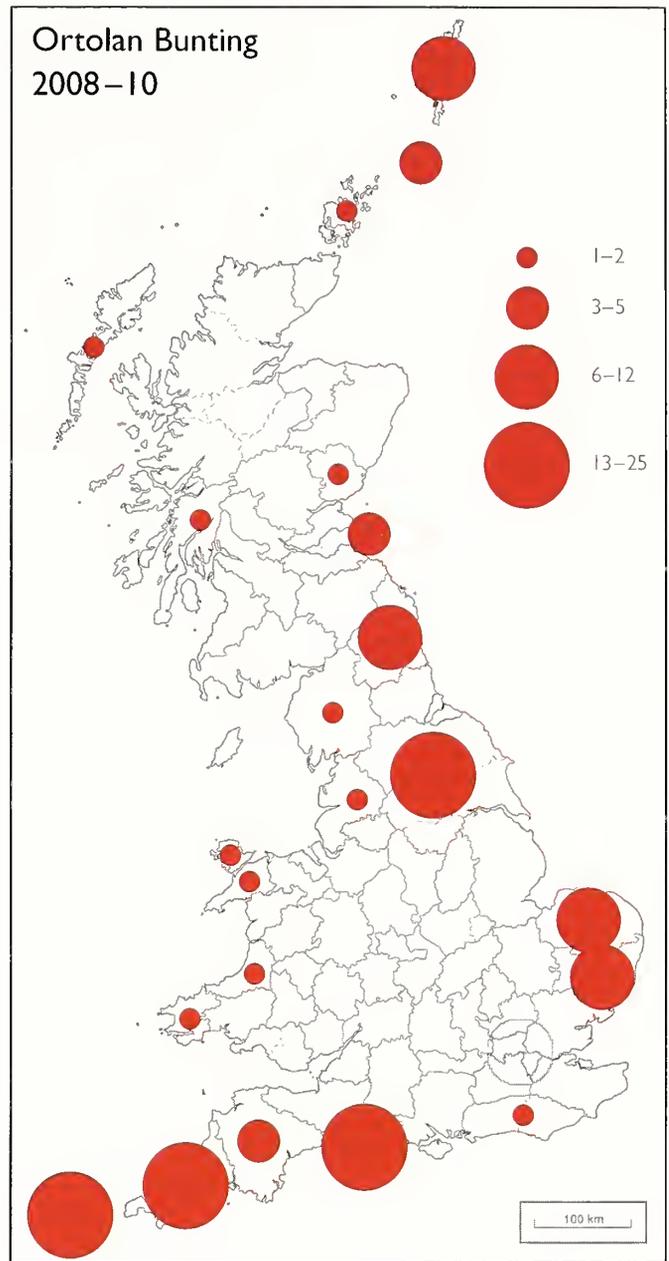


Fig. 31. Distribution of Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana* in Britain, 2008–10.

### Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
475	15 (5)	5= (34)	13= (11)	1993/50/1	1998/41/2	Declining	Very high

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59
3
1960–69
3
1970–79
6
1980–89
8
1990–99
20
2000–09
8

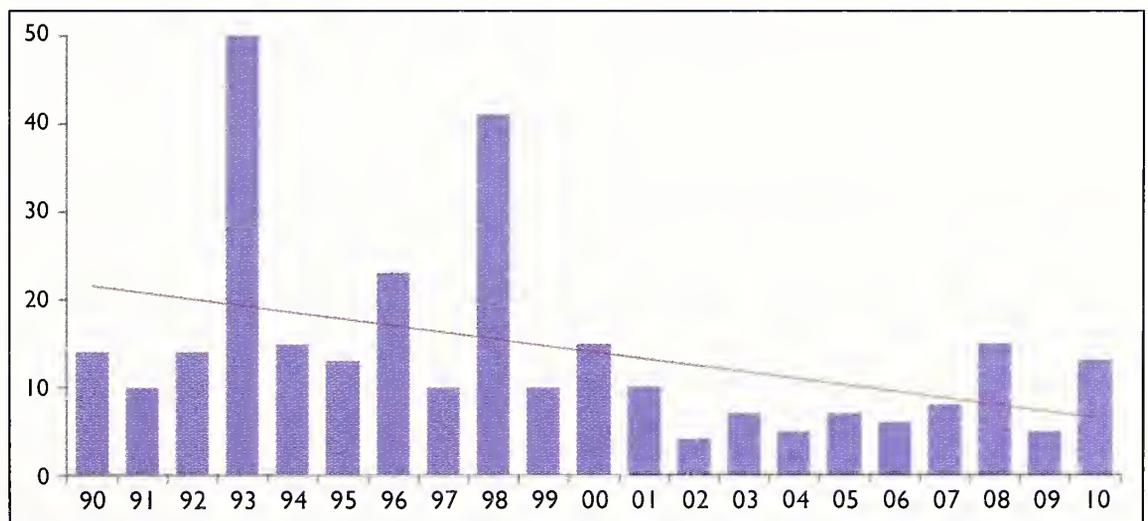


Fig. 32. Annual totals of Rustic Buntings *Emberiza rustica* in Britain, 1990–2010.

The surge of Rustic Bunting records during the 1990s now appears to be well behind us (fig. 32). Although the numbers in 2008 and 2010 were the best since Rustic Bunting was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005, the decade mean has fallen back to where it was in the 1980s and the annual mean since removal from the list of national rarities is just 9.6. At the end of 2005 the most recent ten-year total of Rustic Buntings stood at 138 but that has now fallen to 81.

During 2008–10 the Northern Isles accounted for almost 60% of all records, with nine on Fair Isle, six in Shetland and four in Orkney. Four were also seen in Yorkshire – at Spurn on 8th June 2008, 18th September 2009 and 8th October 2010, and one at Flamborough from 28th September to 3rd October 2010; and two in Cleveland – at Hummersea on 3rd November 2008 and Coatham Marsh on 9th October 2010. Eight other areas recorded one apiece and these are listed below.

- 19th May 2008, Bardsey (Caernarfonshire)
- 23rd–24th September 2008, Landguard (Suffolk)
- 28th September to 2nd October 2008, South Walney (Cumbria)
- 12th November 2008, Pannel Valley (Sussex)
- 26th September 2009, Swingates (Cornwall)
- 20th–21st March 2010, Brockenhurst (Hampshire)
- 4th–5th October 2010, St Agnes (Scilly)
- 21st November 2010, Seasalter (Kent)

Thirteen of the 19 records in the Northern Isles were in spring (May and June), the other six in autumn (September to November), in stark contrast to the situation in England where all but two were in autumn.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

Total 1958–2010	No. 2008 (rank/53)	No. 2009 (rank/53)	No. 2010 (rank/53)	Other annual maxima 1958–2010 (year/number/rank)		Trend 1990–2010	Annual variability 1990–2010
1,057	19 (22)	36 (10)	37 (8)	2001/59/1	2005/55/2	Stable	Low

Annual means 1958–2009
1958–59 5
1960–69 5
1970–79 10
1980–89 24
1990–99 30
2000–09 32



Gary Thoburn

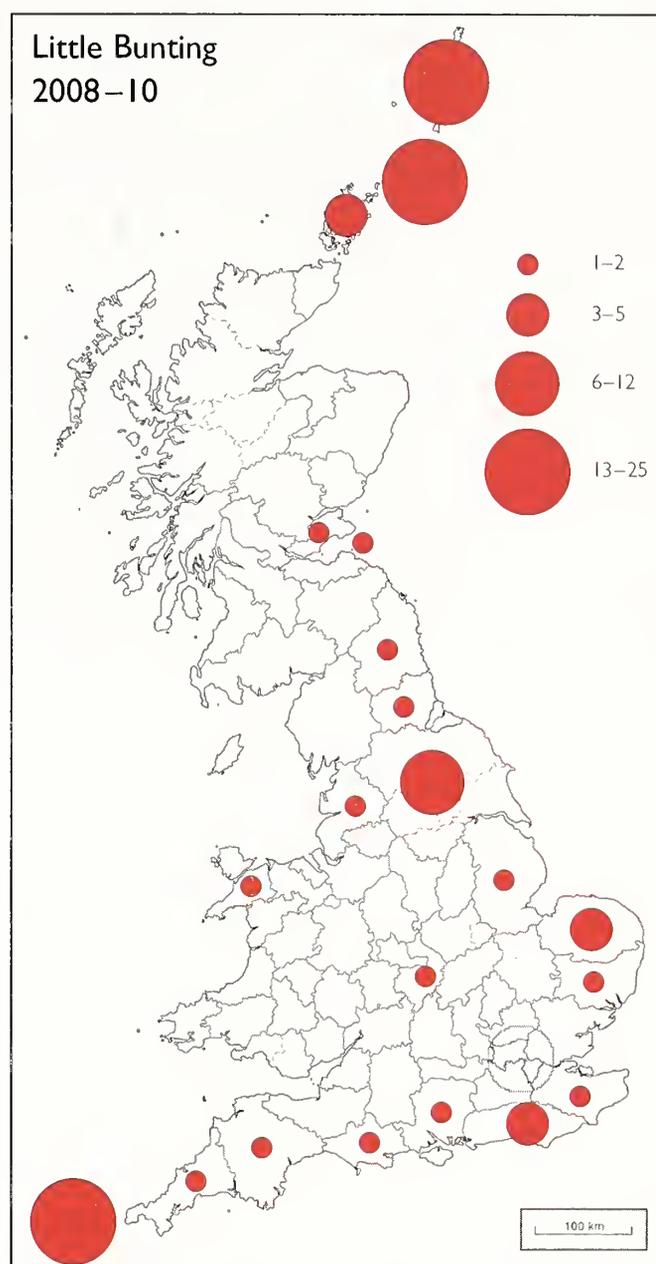
123. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, St Martin’s, Scilly, October 2009.

Little Buntings have occurred with increasing frequency in Britain from the 1980s, a rise perhaps linked to a growing Finnish population, but recently it appears that numbers have begun to stabilise.

Records in 2008–10 followed a typical pattern with birds seen in 21 recording areas but the majority were at island birding hotspots – and almost half in the Northern Isles (20 in Shetland, 15 on Fair Isle and five in Orkney). Other significant totals included 18 on Scilly and eight in Yorkshire (fig. 33).

There were ten spring records from widely scattered locations, between 5th March (the second for Warwickshire, at Grandborough, which lingered until 3rd April 2009) and 30th May (on Fair Isle in 2008), the latter in the company of a Rustic Bunting.

No more were seen until mid September; 24 during that month were followed by 50 in October and three in November. There was a slight bias towards more first arrivals in September in the Northern Isles and in October in Scilly. Five birds were located during the winter months (December to February), in Cornwall, Devon, Suffolk, Caernarfonshire and Fife. All except the Welsh bird hung around for at least a few days, most notably at Polbathic (Cornwall) from 18th February to 19th March 2010.



**Fig. 33.** Distribution of Little Buntings *Emberiza pusilla* in Britain, 2008–10.

#### Acknowledgments

Thanks to Peter Fraser who set up the national database of scarce migrants and produced all the previous reports. Without the many birders who have submitted their records for publication in county bird reports none of this would have been possible. The role of county recorders and local records committees is absolutely vital in ensuring that reports are scrutinised and that only confirmed records make it to publication. Especially, thanks are due to the Scottish Birds Records Committee and the Welsh Records Panel, who adjudicate records in their respective countries of most of the species considered here; their publications can be accessed at [www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee) and [www.birdsinwales.org.uk/rare/wrp.htm](http://www.birdsinwales.org.uk/rare/wrp.htm)

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# Short papers

## First British records of ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ Subalpine Warblers

**Abstract** The recent proposal to reorganise the taxonomy of the Subalpine Warbler complex, and the identification of the first British ‘Subalpine Warbler’ (St Kilda, June 1894) as a Moltoni’s Warbler, led the BOU to review other early records and determine the first British records of both Eastern and Western Subalpine Warblers. DNA analysis together with morphological criteria showed that the first Eastern Subalpine Warbler was shot on Fair Isle in May 1908 and the first Western Subalpine Warbler on the Isle of May in May 1924.

Current BOU taxonomy treats the Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* as one species with four subspecies, which fall into three distinct groups: a western group, including *S. c. cantillans* of France and Spain with *S. c. inornata* of North Africa; a central Mediterranean taxon, ‘Moltoni’s Warbler’ *S. c. moltonii*; and an eastern taxon *S. c. albistriata*. Svensson (2013a) proposed a revised taxonomy for the Subalpine Warbler complex. On the basis of plumage and biometrics, and review of the genetics of the complex, its nomenclature and the data surrounding the type specimen, he proposed a three-way split:

### Eastern Subalpine Warbler

*S. cantillans*, with two subspecies: *S. c. cantillans* of southern Italy and *S. c. albistriata* of southeast Europe and western Turkey.

### Moltoni’s Subalpine Warbler

*S. subalpina* (thus renamed) of the western Mediterranean islands and northern Italy.

### Western Subalpine Warbler

*S. inornata*, with two subspecies: *S. i. inornata* of North Africa and *S. i. iberiae* of France, Spain and extreme northwest Italy. (For full details, see Svensson 2013a.)

Svensson (2013b) reidentified the first British record of Subalpine Warbler (from St Kilda, Outer Hebrides; male, 13th June 1894, specimen at Natural History Museum, accession number BMNH 1901.1.4.1, formerly accepted as ‘Western’) as a Moltoni’s Subalpine Warbler and the taxon has now been added to the British List by BOURC (BOU

2014). As a result, BOURC was required to review subsequent records of Subalpine Warbler from Britain to identify the first occurrence of one of the Western Subalpine Warbler taxa.

The second British record of Subalpine Warbler was an adult male shot on Fair Isle on 6th May 1908, the specimen now mounted at National Museums Scotland (NMS), accession number NMSZ 1908.94.17 (Clarke 1909; Forrester *et al.* 2007). It had previously been accepted as Western Subalpine Warbler, formerly *S. c. cantillans* (*S. inornata* under the taxonomy proposed by Svensson 2013a). The plumage of this bird, including the intense brick-red throat contrasting with paler breast and belly, and the spiky wedges of white on the 5th tail feathers, was diagnostic of an Eastern Subalpine Warbler (fig. 1). DNA analysis (outlined below) showed conclusively that it was genetically identical to some birds from the south-east European/Turkish populations (*S. c. albistriata*). This bird pre-dated the previous accepted first *albistriata* (also from Fair Isle, in 1951).

The third British record of Subalpine Warbler was another adult male, shot on the Isle of May on 30th May 1924. The specimen is also at NMS (NMS.Z 1925.35; Forrester *et al.* 2007). The plumage, including the tail pattern, was consistent with the bird being a Western Subalpine Warbler (fig. 2). This was confirmed by DNA analysis showing that it was aligned to multiple individuals from the French and Spanish populations – nominate *cantillans* under current BOU taxonomy, *S. inornata*



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**Fig. 1.** Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans albistriata*, Fair Isle, May 1908. Temporarily removed from mount. The brick-red throat and upper breast contrasts sharply with the white belly. T5 (the second tail feather from the right) is probably a retained juvenile feather and has a white wedge now shown to be diagnostic for this taxon. National Museums Scotland, accession number NMS.Z 1908.94.17.

*iberiae* according to Svensson (2013a).

These two birds were assessed by BOURC. There were no issues of provenance. The Fair Isle bird was recorded by William Eagle Clarke as part of the early programme of systematic recording on Fair Isle (Clarke 1909). The Isle of May bird was shot by Evelyn Baxter and Leonora Rintoul (Baxter & Rintoul 1924). In both cases the credibility of the records is beyond doubt. They were therefore accepted as the first Eastern and Western Subalpine Warblers respectively for Britain.

In the event of the proposed three-way split being adopted by BOU (which requires a recommendation from the Taxonomic Subcommittee of BOURC), these birds, and the St Kilda record referred to above, will represent the first records of the three newly recognised Subalpine Warbler species. The 227 bp stretch of DNA obtained from the 1908 Fair Isle bird did not formally rule out the possibility that it was from a population in southern Italy, but strongly suggested that it would be assignable to *S. c. albistriata*.



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**Fig. 2.** Western Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans cantillans* or *S. c. inornata* (*Sylvia inornata iberiae* or *S. i. inornata* under the proposed taxonomy of Svensson 2013a), Isle of May, May 1924. The Isle of May bird is the third from the left (marked with an asterisk), with two Eastern Subalpine Warblers (the two birds on the right) and three other Western Subalpine Warblers. The underpart coloration and the extent of the red-orange plumage on the belly of the Isle of May bird is a good match for the western birds but is distinctly different from the two eastern birds. T5 (the second tail feather from the right) has a blunt white tip typical of Western and Moltoni's Subalpine Warblers. National Museums Scotland, accession number NMS.Z 1925.35.

**Table 1.** Current and proposed scientific names of Subalpine Warbler taxa.

English name	Current taxonomy and scientific name	Proposed taxonomy (following Svensson 2013a) and range
Western Subalpine Warbler	<i>S. cantillans cantillans</i>	<i>S. inornata iberiae</i> (France, Spain, NW Italy)
	<i>S. cantillans inornata</i>	<i>S. inornata inornata</i> (NW Africa)
Moltoni's (Subalpine) Warbler	<i>S. cantillans moltonii</i>	<i>S. subalpina</i>  (W Mediterranean islands, N Italy)
Eastern Subalpine Warbler	<i>S. cantillans albistriata</i>	<i>S. cantillans albistriata</i> (SE Europe, W Turkey)
		<i>S. cantillans cantillans</i> (S Italy, Sicily)

A previous DNA sample, from a bird on Fair Isle in 2012 (Collinson *et al.* 2013), was shown unequivocally to belong to *S. c. albistriata* and not the southern Italian population (*S. c. cantillans*). Birds from the population in southern Italy have not yet been shown to have occurred in Britain, but the occurrence of *albistriata* is firmly established. North African populations of Western Subalpine Warbler have not yet been genetically sampled, so although the Isle of May bird was genetically identical to French and Spanish birds (*S. inornata iberiae* under the proposed new taxonomy) the remote possibility that it was of North African origin cannot be discounted. Until this situation can be resolved, any future full species listing of Western Subalpine Warbler on the British List, should it be split under the taxonomy proposed by Svensson (2013a), would have to be 'subspecies undetermined, almost certainly *iberiae*'.

Unexpectedly, therefore, the first three records of Subalpine Warbler in Britain, specimens collected from three different Scottish islands, have proved to be individuals of the three proposed new species. Further work is required to determine whether birds from the populations in southern Italy or North Africa, which should be diagnosable, have occurred in Britain. The genetic techniques applied here may help to resolve the occurrence of these taxa as extralimital vagrants in other European countries, and to refine our understanding of their distribution on the wintering grounds.

## Methods

### Genetic analysis

A single toepad was removed from each specimen, and DNA was isolated using the QIAGEN DNA Micro Kit according to the manufacturer's instructions, with the addition of 0.1 M dithiothreitol to the proteinase K digestion, and elution in 80 µl of buffer AE. Next, 2 µl of DNA solution was subjected to PCR to amplify a 227 bp fragment of the *cytb* gene. Primers used were: CytbSylcanF1 5'-CTAGGCCTTTGCTTAATCACACA-3' and CytbSylcanR1 5'-GTTTCTTTGTTTAGTAGTATCCGT-3'.

For the PCR a touch-down program was used: initial denaturation at 95°C for five minutes followed by two cycles of 95°C for 30 s, 56°C for 30 s, and 72°C for 30 s, two additional two-cycle phases where the annealing temperature was reduced to 54°C and 52°C, respectively, 32 cycles at 95°C for 30 s, 50°C for 30 s, and 72°C for 30 s, and ending with an extension at 72°C for five minutes. Bands were extracted from a 1.5% agarose gel using the QIAGEN Gel Extraction Kit, eluted into 30 µl of buffer EB and sequenced by Source BioScience LifeSciences sequencing service, Cambridge, UK. Resulting sequences were analysed using nucleotide BLAST (<http://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi>).

The sequence of the Fair Isle 1908 bird (226 readable bp) was identical to the sequence corresponding to *Sylvia cantillans albistriata* haplotype a5 (accession number EU760674) from Brambilla *et al.* (2008) – a

sequence previously found in three birds from Lesvos. It was also 100% identical to that of a Greek bird sequenced independently by Voelker *et al.* (2011). In addition, it was 1–3 bp different from 36 other samples taken from Lesvos, Dalmatia and southern Italy, all included in Eastern Subalpine Warbler by Svensson (2013a). A further 4 bp changes separate it from any French or Spanish breeding bird and it is 10 bp different from any Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler. Over 227 bp of sequence, the Isle of May bird was 100% identical to 12 sequences from sites in France and Spain, including haplotypes c6, c11, 12, 13, 16 and 18 from Brambilla *et al.* (2008). It is 1 bp different from four other sequences from France and Spain, 8–10 bp different from 35 'eastern' sequences from southern Italy and southeast Europe and 11 bp different from any of 30 Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler sequences.

Sequences were uploaded to the European Nucleotide Database, accession numbers HG932492 (Fair Isle, 1908) and HG932493 (Isle of May, 1924).

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## When do falls rush in? Notes on the timing and frequency of falls in north Norfolk and on Fair Isle

James McCallum



Thrushes arriving on Blakeney Point, Norfolk, 11th November 2013.

**Abstract** Records of falls of thrushes in north Norfolk in autumn, and falls of all passerine species on Fair Isle in both spring and autumn, were analysed to establish dates and frequency of falls. A total of 106 days of recorded thrush falls in north Norfolk during autumn, for periods dating back as far as 1880, shows that these occur most frequently in the second half of October. A total of 839 falls over a 60-year period for Fair Isle shows that falls occur throughout both spring and autumn but are more than twice as frequent in autumn. The timing of falls involving different species on Fair Isle clearly shows the sequence of migration in spring and autumn for different species.

### Introduction

In recent issues of *BB*, Porter *et al.* (2013), Roadhouse & Taylor (2013) and Mould (2013) reported an exceptional fall of thrushes and other species along the east coast of England on 22nd October 2012. *British Birds* has a long record in publishing accounts of spectacular events (Brown 2007), including falls. Generally, these are accounts of individual falls that occurred across wide areas of the UK (e.g. Jenkins 1953a,b; Williamson 1959; Davis 1966). In material published during the 1950s

and 1960s, falls were described under the heading of 'drift migration' (Williamson 1955, 1959; Lack 1960a,b), as efforts were made to understand their nature and their relation to weather conditions and bird migration more generally (e.g. Southern 1938, 1939, 1941; Browne 1953; Owen 1953; Davis 1954, 1964a,b; Lack 1954, 1959, 1962; Williamson & Butterfield 1954; Cornwallis 1955; Davis & Weaving 1955; Peakall 1956; Murton 1959; Barry 1960; Williamson 1965; Elkins 2005). The relationship between falls and weather

patterns (and of the role of weather in bird migration generally) remains a subject of interest today (Bairlein 2008); indeed, an understanding of that relationship has been used to reconstruct daily weather patterns in the eighteenth century from reports containing weather information as well as information on the arrival and movement of birds (Kington 1975a,b). Using radar, Lack (1959) showed that falls had a variable relationship to bird migration – large movements of birds observed by radar could lead to any of large, medium or no falls observed on the ground.

Falls have regularly been noted by bird-watchers and are often summarised in county and other bird reports, yet there has been no systematic review of the timing and frequency of falls. Those annual reports provide useful information for an examination of falls, notably their timing during the year and their long-term frequency (in days per year). In this short paper, I review historical published records of falls involving thrushes in north Norfolk in autumn, and all falls reported on Fair Isle, focusing particularly on the timing and frequency of these events.

### Descriptions of falls

There appears to be no fixed definition of a fall, other than that it generally applies to an exceptionally heavy arrival of migrants between one day and the next; is associated with weather conditions that disrupt migration patterns (Elkins 2005); and is followed by the rapid departure of grounded individuals when weather conditions allow. In a study of drift migration of warblers, flycatchers and chats at three east-coast bird observatories – Spurn, Gibraltar Point and Cley – David Lack calculated the number of arrivals for each species each day at each observatory as the excess of that day's number over the number the previous day (or two days earlier, whichever was greater; Lack 1960a,b). This gave widely different counts for 'arrivals' of different species, ranging from one (Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*) to over 400 (Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*) (Lack 1960b), showing that what qualifies as 'exceptional' varies for different species.

Even in the absence of a rigorous definition, it is clear that falls, when encountered, are both remarkable and memorable. In this

sense, falls pass the 'I know it when I see it' test. This recognition is apparent in both the language used in their description and the way they are described. Sometimes, even when the report does not identify a fall as a 'fall' per se, presumably to avoid repetition in the narrative, the terminology used and the underlying description – typically of 'birds everywhere', as in the example from Fair Isle quoted below – makes it clear that the reports are of falls. As with the recent notes on the fall on 22nd October 2012 on the east coast of England, the excitement and scale of the event is characteristically evident in the accounts.

A variety of words appear to be used to describe the fall itself, including fall, rush, avalanche, arrival, influx and wave (table 1). These terms seem to be used interchangeably, and sometimes are used together, for example in two descriptions of the same fall on Fair Isle at the end of March 1958, one in the Observatory's annual report and one in the *FIBO Bulletin*:

'The approach of an occlusion and a great SE gale on the 30th ended the dry, cold spell, and brought one of the biggest avalanches of birds in the whole history of Fair Isle. Migrants poured into the isle all day on the 30th.' (Davis 1958a)

'On March 30th the long-awaited front arrived, and with it the birds; the start of what several islanders described as the biggest spring bird-rush within living memory. There were only a few extra Blackbirds in the trapping-area before breakfast; afterwards the place suddenly became alive with these and Song Thrushes and Robins, with a sprinkling of other migrants including three Ring Ouzels and a Wheatear. The thrushes and Robins were everywhere by afternoon, but all rushing to the shelter of the west cliffs or skulking in the lee of the walls, for the gale was armed with huge stinging raindrops. I found the west cliffs swarming with birds, Song Thrush and Robin predominating.

'We were out early on the 31st and with reason. There were twenty or thirty Blackbirds at the hostel, nearer 70 at Dutfield, and so it was all over the isle. It was obviously a pure Blackbird rush – the other species were virtually unchanged in numbers.' (Davis 1958b)

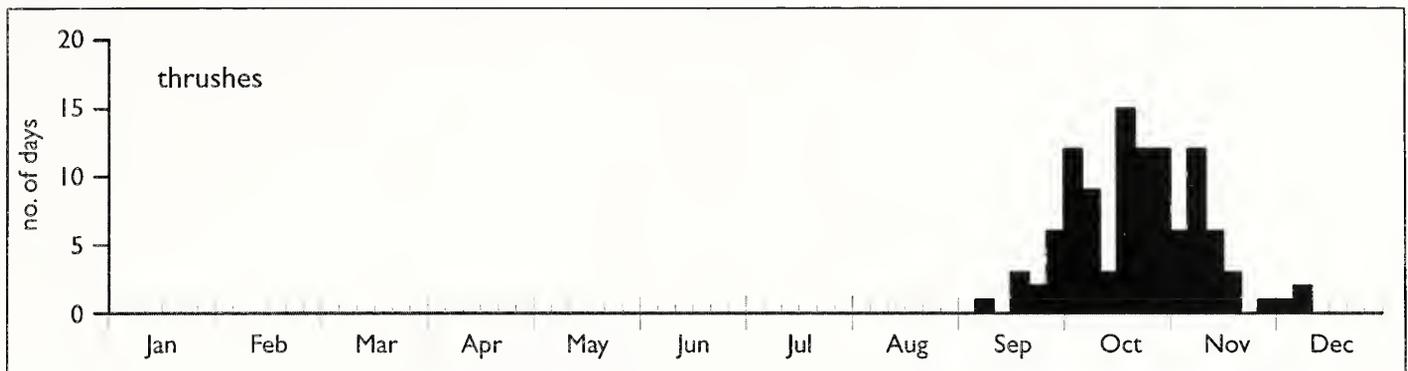
**Table 1.** Terminology used to describe falls.

Term	Example
Fall	‘Overnight easterlies and rain on 14th accompanied the first large-scale <b>fall</b> of the autumn.’ (Riddiford 1987)
Rush	‘The first big “ <b>rush</b> ” of late-autumn migrants, also coinciding with anticyclonic conditions over western Europe, was observed at the Lynn Well light on October 7th, 8th and 9th [1927] and consisted of Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Linnets, Bramblings, Robins, Skylarks, Blackbirds, Redwings, thrushes, Hooded Crows and Lapwings (W. Sharman).’ (Riviere 1928)  ‘The main feature of the early autumn was a tremendous <b>rush</b> of Wheatears in anticyclonic weather from 27th–29th August [1955].’ (Williamson 1956)
Avalanche	‘This migration became (in Swedish parlance) an “ <b>avalanche</b> ” when an occluded front crossed the Skagerrak on the morning of September 4th [1956], the ENE wind suddenly veering to SE as the rain belt passed across the isle. We were deluged with Whinchats, Redstarts, and Willow Warblers, which began to arrive about 10 am and increased phenomenally during the day.’ (Williamson 1956)  ‘The breeze set south-easterly on 11th May [1960], and the next five days saw the biggest May migration in the Observatory’s time. Birds <b>avalanched</b> shortly before nightfall on the 11th, and the next day the island was alive with Willow Warblers, Redstarts, and other small birds. Most birds peaked on the 13th, when we counted 120 Redstarts, 50 Robins, 250 Willow Warblers, 40 Pied Flycatchers, 100 Tree Pipits, and 30 Reed Buntings; but after a decrease on the 14th, another overnight fall gave us 25 Fieldfares, 30 Ring Ouzels, 50 Whinchats, over 300 Willow Warblers, many hirundines, and the first Swifts on the 15th.’ (Davis 1960)
Influx	‘The <b>influx</b> of Redwings on October 17th [1916] was steady, numerous flocks, some of them numbering as many as a hundred birds, passing west and northwest in the vicinity of Cromer and Holt. Fieldfares and other well-known species were also to be seen dropping in.’ (Gurney 1916)  ‘A major <b>influx</b> of 1,500 Redwings, 600 Bramblings and 200 Song Thrushes on 5th [October 1986] brought with them the autumn’s second Little Bunting and another Yellow-breasted Bunting.’ (Riddiford 1986)
Arrival, Wave	‘The north-western passerines began their main movements with a fall of White Wagtails and Iceland Wheatears on August 23rd [1959], followed by a larger <b>arrival</b> of these species, with many Atlantic Meadow Pipits, three Merlins and two Greenland Redpolls on the 26th. Wheatears and pipits increased further on the 27th, with two Great Northern Divers, 30 Wigeons, two Pintails and the first Lapland Bunting, and the passerines peaked again on 30th and 31st. Greenland Redpolls numbered at least five by 31st, and Lapland Buntings at least ten, increasing to 26 by September 4th. Further waves of Wheatears, Meadow Pipits and White Wagtails passed on September 7th–8th and 12th.’ (Davis 1959)

### Timing of falls including large numbers of thrushes in north Norfolk

From 1916 to 1934 inclusive, *BB* published ‘Ornithological Notes from Norfolk’, authored first by J. H. Gurney and then by B. B. Riviere, continuing a long series of annual reports dating from the nineteenth century written by Gurney and published in the *Zoologist*. Between 1916 and 1934 these Notes in *BB* report a total of 55 days in autumn (from September to early December) with falls that include large numbers of thrushes *Turdus* in the

Norfolk–Lincolnshire area, including from light vessels at Dudgeon and Lynn Well off the north Norfolk coast and in the Wash. This is, on average, about three days with falls of thrushes each year. There are also accounts of falls in north Norfolk for years between 1880 and 1924 from *Notes on the Birds of Cley* (Pashley 1925). In addition, further days with falls of large numbers of thrushes are reported in various journals and books (e.g. Jenkins 1953a,b; Davis 1966; Golley 1997; Taylor *et al.* 1999; Stoddart & Joyner 2005; Porter *et al.* 2013) and in the 25 years (1972–2008) of the annual *Bird and*



**Fig. 1.** Frequency of the number of days with falls involving thrushes *Turdus* in north Norfolk during autumn. The data are summarised for six periods in each month.

*Mammal Report for Norfolk* that I searched. The total number of days on which thrush falls were reported in north Norfolk is 106, from reports covering 84 of the 133 years from 1880 to 2012. Only ten accounts of falls in spring, of any species, were found in the reports searched. Spring migration records from the early twentieth century appear mostly to be of the date of first sighting for each species; summarising early reports, Riviere noted that less is known of the spring migration in Norfolk for the period before the 1930s (Riviere 1933, p. 319).

The dates of all those autumn falls are shown in table 2. Fig. 1 shows the dates summarised into five-day periods during September, October and November (note that the last period in October is six days long). One fall of thrushes, in 1925, was reported in the second week of September, but 94 (89%) have been between 23rd September and 15th November. Sixty-three (59%) of the days with falls of thrushes are in the period between 16th October and 15th November, and the single five-day period with the largest number of falls is 16th–20th October (15 falls, 14%). The mean date of falls of thrushes in north Norfolk, from these data, is 22nd October.

Many reports also include discussion of the synoptic weather conditions associated with falls. For example, Riviere's account of a fall of Robins *Erithacus rubecula* in Norfolk on 27th September 1933 describes the pattern of pressure systems and weather, with a published weather map almost identical to that in Porter *et al.* (2013):

'The outstanding feature of the autumn migration as observed on the coast was the extraordinary immigration of Robins which took place on September 27th. The weather conditions were favourable both

for the occurrence of such a migration and for bringing it within view, these being: an anticyclone covering Scandinavia and the eastern shores of the North Sea, a NE wind, and a thick mist covering the whole Norfolk coast (*vide* weather chart, p. 310).' (Riviere, 1934, p. 314)

Although these records illustrate the long-term pattern of timing for autumn thrush falls in north Norfolk, a more systematic dataset is needed to examine timing and frequency of falls more generally.

### Timing and frequency of falls on Fair Isle

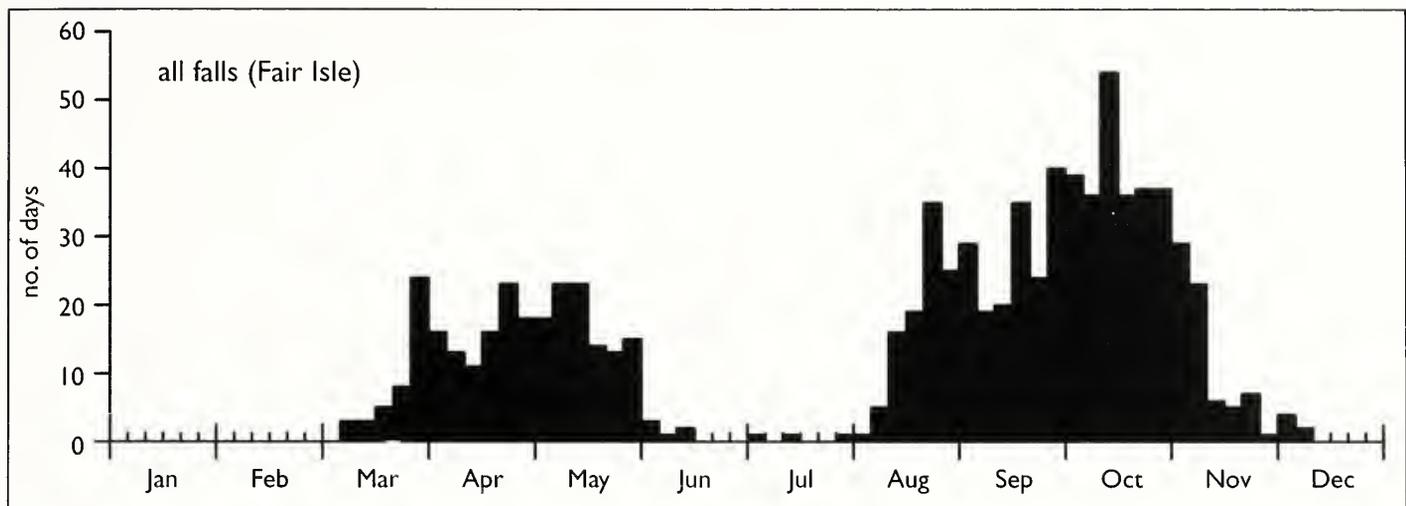
The study of migration on Fair Isle has been carried out systematically, with the Observatory staff following a basically similar census routine since the Observatory was established in 1948. Dymond (1991) described the recording effort on Fair Isle in more detail, the main feature of relevance to records of falls being the lower effort over the winter period and in March, when the Observatory is closed to visitors and, in the early years, not always occupied, although this period is outside the main migration season. The census results are summarised in FIBO annual reports. I searched a total of 60 of these reports, covering the years from 1949 to 2011 (three years were missing from my collection), together with 41 issues of the *FIBO Bulletin* (out of a total of 47 published between 1950 and 1967) for references to falls. This provided a set of reports of falls on 839 days (on average, about 14 days each year). I also noted the species reported in each fall.

Fig. 2 shows the timing of falls on Fair Isle in five-day periods (each month was divided into six periods – thus in each 31-day month, the sixth period has six days while in February

**Table 2.** Autumn dates of 'thrush' falls in north Norfolk.

Date	Years	Reference
10th September	1925	Riviere 1926
17th–19th September	1903	Pashley 1925
21st September	1892	Pashley 1925
23rd September	1978	Seago 1979
27th September	1933	Riviere 1934
28th September	1933	Riviere 1934
29th September	1907, 1933	Pashley 1925; Riviere 1934
30th September	1920, 1980	Gurney 1921; Seago 1981
1st October	1897, 1926, 1998	Pashley 1925; Riviere 1927
2nd October	1899, 1926	Pashley 1925; Riviere 1927
3rd October	1926, 1951	Riviere 1927; Jenkins 1953a,b
4th October	1902, 1926	Pashley 1925; Riviere 1927
5th October	1891, 1922, 1926	Riviere 1924, 1927; Pashley 1925
6th October	1922, 1926	Riviere 1924, 1927; Pashley 1925
7th October	1922, 1926, 1927	Riviere 1924, 1927, 1928
8th October	1926, 1927	Riviere 1927, 1928
9th October	1920, 1927	Gurney 1921; Pashley 1925; Riviere 1927
12th October	1922, 1980	Riviere 1924, Seago 1981
15th October	1923	Riviere 1924
16th October	1908, 1914, 1922, 1988, 1994	Pashley 1925; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999; Stoddart & Joyner 2005
17th October	1908, 1916, 1922	Gurney 1916; Riviere 1924; Pashley 1925
18th October	1908, 1990, 1994	Pashley 1925; Easy 1990; Stoddart 1990; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999; Stoddart & Joyner 2005
19th October	1908, 1980	Pashley 1925; Seago 1981
20th October	1923	Riviere 1924
21st October	1891, 1908, 1923	Riviere 1924; Pashley 1925
22nd October	1908, 1923, 1992, 1996, 2012	Riviere 1924; Pashley 1925; Seago 1993; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999; Porter <i>et al.</i> 2013
23rd–24th October	1923	Riviere 1924
25th October	1921, 1923, 1925	Pashley 1925; Riviere 1926
26th October	1923, 1926, 1963	Riviere 1924, 1927; Davis 1964b
27th October	1923, 1963	Riviere 1924; Davis 1964b
28th October	1923, 1925, 1978	Riviere 1926; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
29th October	1963, 1996	Davies 1964b; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999; Seago 1997a
30th October	1925, 1963	Riviere 1926; Davies 1964b
1st November	1995, 1998	Seago 1997b; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
2nd November	1987	Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
3rd November	1994	Seago 1995; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
4th November	1963	Davies 1964b
5th November	1961	Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
6th November	1923	Riviere 1924
7th November	1912, 1923, 1927, 1963	Riviere 1924, 1928; Davies 1964b
8th November	1923, 1928, 1992, 1996	Riviere 1929; Seago 1997a; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
9th November	1929, 1996	Riviere 1930; Seago 1997a; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
10th November	1963	Davies 1964b
12th–15th November	1927	Riviere 1928
14th November	1899, 1927, 1996	Pashley 1925; Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
18th–20th November	1927	Riviere 1928
27th November	1923	Riviere 1924
1st December	1926	Riviere 1927
6th December	1953	Taylor <i>et al.</i> 1999
10th December	1928	Riviere 1929

Other years searched: 1880–1924 (Pashley 1925), 1917 (Gurney 1918), 1918 (Gurney 1919), 1919 (Gurney 1920), 1921 (Gurney 1922), 1924, 1931 (Riviere 1932), 1932 (Riviere 1933), 1934 (Riviere 1935)



**Fig. 2.** Frequency of the number of days with falls on Fair Isle. Data are summarised using a set of 72 periods, six in each month, from January to December.

it has three or four). These 72 periods allow the patterns in the graphs to be compared directly with those in *Birds of Fair Isle* (Dymond 1991), although it should be noted that Dymond's graphs are based on an analysis of the number of birds of each species on the island from the Observatory daily log, averaged across years for each of the periods (the graphs presented here show the number of falls, not the number of birds).

The spring and autumn migration periods are very clear in fig. 2. Of the 839 days with falls, 252 (30%) have been in spring and 587 (70%) in autumn. Falls during spring have peaks in the periods 26th–31st March (24 falls), 16th–25th April (23 falls) and throughout May (106 falls). In autumn, 553 falls (94%) have occurred between 11th August and 10th November. There are peaks in the periods 21st–25th August (35 falls), 16th–20th (35 falls) and 26th–30th September (40 falls), and throughout October. About 40% of autumn falls have occurred in October (239 falls) and no five-day period in the month of October has fewer than 36 records (equivalent to about one fall every two years for each five-day period). A total of 54 falls have occurred during 11th–15th October,

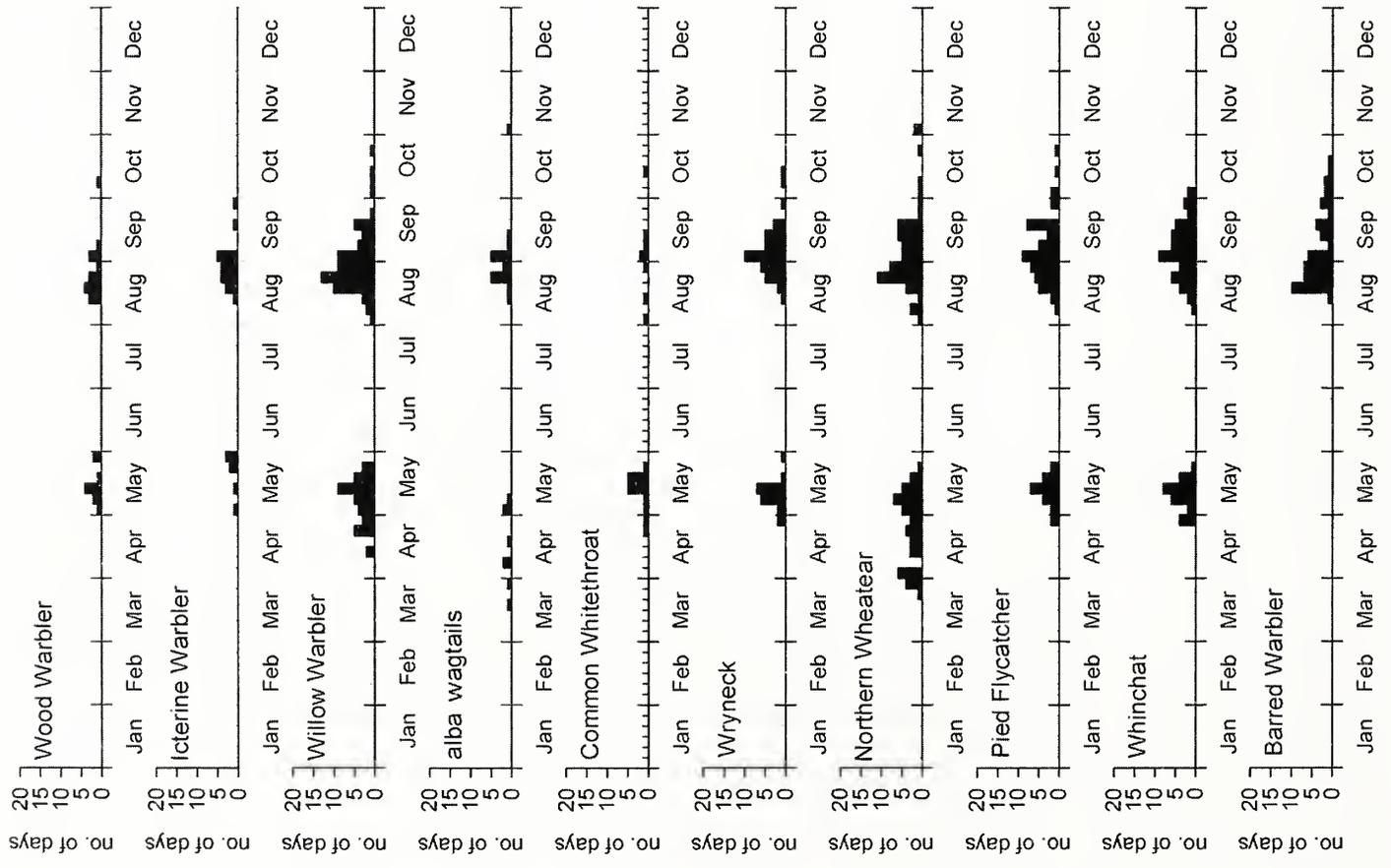
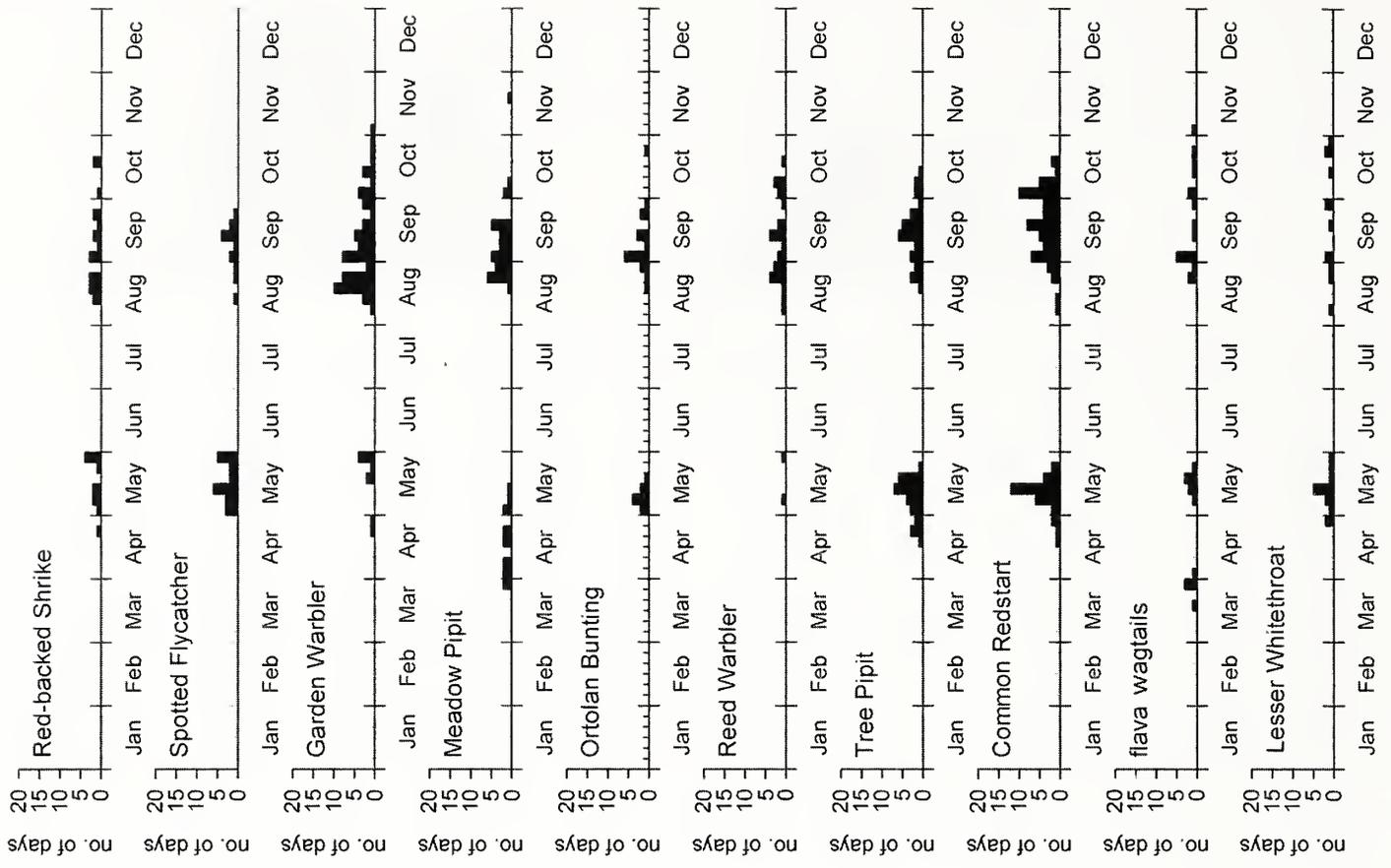
an average of almost one each year.

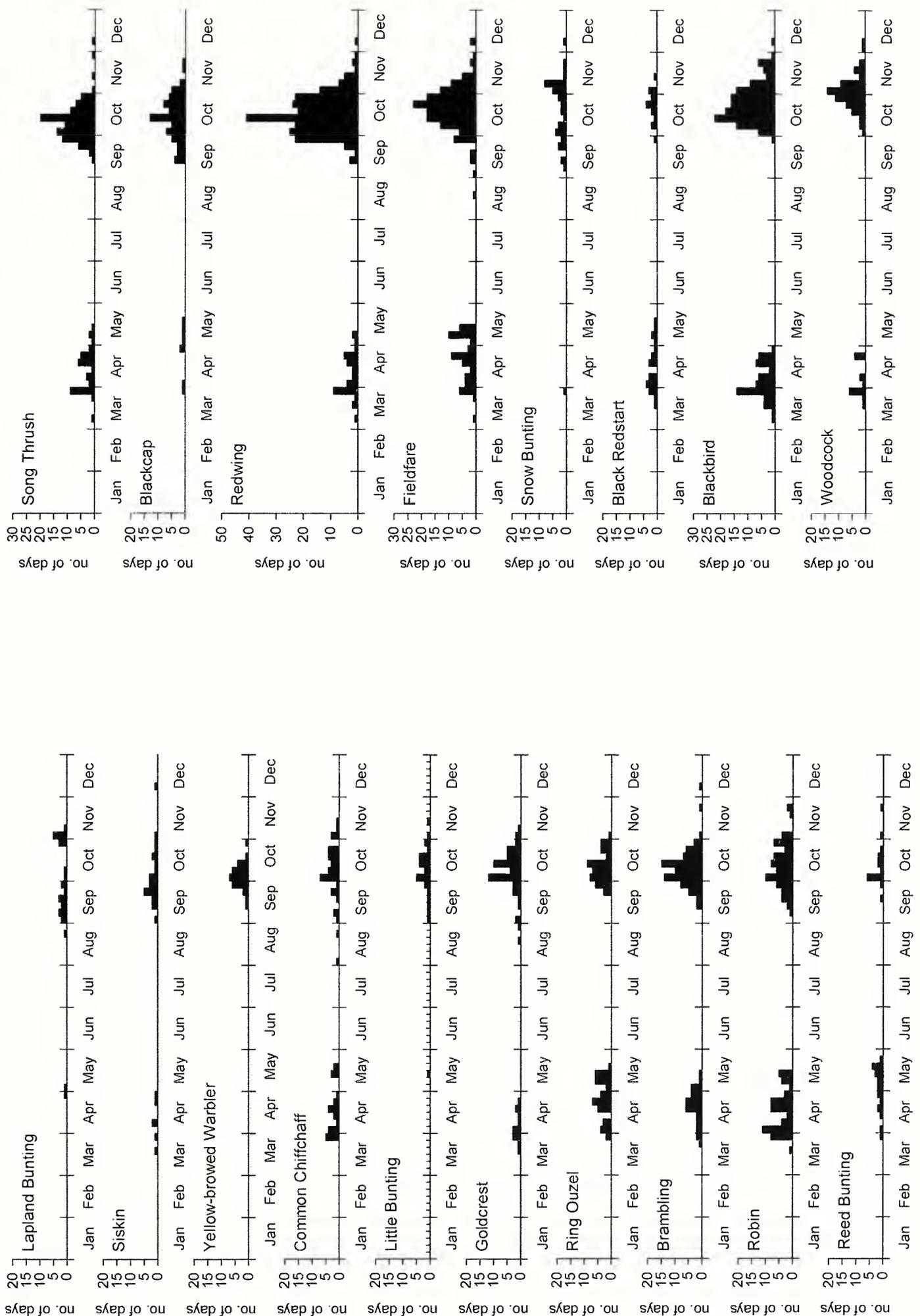
Fig. 3 shows the timing of falls that include the 38 species reported most frequently in falls on Fair Isle. The species, with additional species recorded less frequently in falls, are also listed in table 3. Fig. 3 shows the species in order, based on the mean date of autumn falls in which they occur. In spring, this sequence is more or less reversed, with the species that are earlier in autumn occurring later in spring falls. In general, the species to appear in falls during May and August–September are trans-Saharan migrants. Species wintering in Britain and Europe are recorded in falls in spring as early as March and in autumn as late as November. The patterns of the timings for these species are consistent with the records of species occurrence on Fair Isle, based on numbers (Dymond 1991), and also with more general



Migrants at Setter, Fair Isle, 16th September 2008.

James McCallum

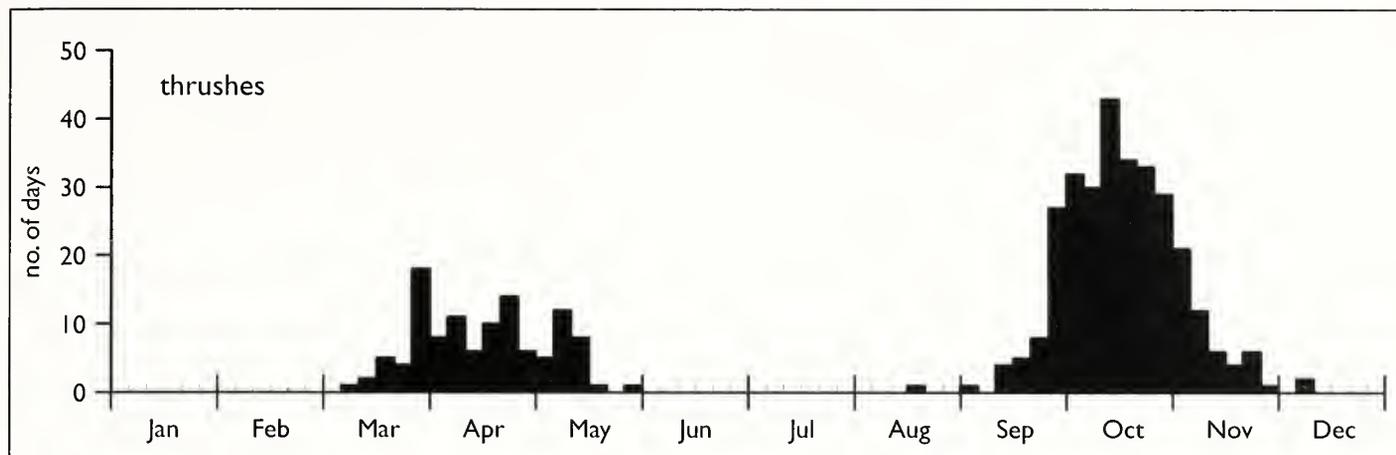




**Fig. 3.** Frequency of the number of days with falls involving the 38 species most frequently reported in falls on Fair Isle. Data are summarised using a set of 72 periods, six in each month, from January to December.

**Table 3.** Mean dates of days of falls with different species as components of the fall for spring and autumn for Fair Isle. (Species ordered according to the mean date of autumn falls in which they occur.)

Species involved in fall	Spring		Autumn		Total
	no. days	Mean date of days with a fall involving the species	no. days	Mean date of days with falls involving the species	
Wood Warbler <i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	10	14th May	16	26th August	26
Icterine Warbler <i>Hippolais icterina</i>	7	21st May	19	29th August	26
Willow Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	36	7th May	64	31st August	100
'alba wagtails' <i>Motacilla alba</i>	8	15th April	17	1st September	25
Common Whitethroat <i>Sylvia communis</i>	15	11th May	8	2nd September	23
Wryneck <i>Jynx torquilla</i>	19	9th May	40	4th September	59
Northern Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	45	25th April	57	4th September	102
Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	21	11th May	52	5th September	73
Whinchat <i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	25	9th May	50	5th September	75
Barred Warbler <i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	nil		49	5th September	49
Red-backed Shrike <i>Lanius collurio</i>	11	15th May	20	6th September	31
Spotted Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	21	16th May	13	7th September	34
Garden Warbler <i>Sylvia borin</i>	9	18th May	60	8th September	69
Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i>	14	17th April	31	8th September	45
Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	9	9th May	18	9th September	27
Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	2	18th May	26	10th September	28
Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	27	8th May	31	13th September	58
Common Redstart <i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	10	9th May	57	18th September	67
'flava wagtails' <i>Motacilla flava</i>	12	25th April	17	18th September	29
Lesser Whitethroat <i>Sylvia curruca</i>	13	11th May	12	20th September	25
Lapland Bunting <i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>	2	2nd May	25	2nd October	27
Siskin <i>Spinus spinus</i>	6	9th April	24	3rd October	30
Yellow-browed Warbler <i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	nil		29	3rd October	29
Common Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	24	17th April	37	6th October	61
Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	1	12th May	27	7th October	28
Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>	13	5th April	53	7th October	66
Ring Ouzel <i>Turdus torquatus</i>	40	24th April	44	9th October	84
Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	31	19th April	75	9th October	106
Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	55	15th April	65	11th October	120
Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	20	2nd May	16	12th October	36
Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	34	12th April	91	10th October	125
Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	8	27th April	69	13th October	77
Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	34	8th April	221	15th October	255
Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>	53	20th April	143	20th October	196
Snow Bunting <i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	1	26th March	40	20th October	41
Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	23	14th April	16	22nd October	39
Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	53	4th April	131	24th October	184
Woodcock <i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	15	4th April	61	1st November	76
All	252	25th April	587	30th September	839



**Fig. 4.** Frequency of the number of days with falls involving thrushes (Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Fieldfare *T. pilaris*, Blackbird *T. merula*, Song Thrush *T. philomelos*, Ring Ouzel *T. torquatus*) on Fair Isle. Data are summarised using a set of 72 five-day periods, six in each month, from January to December.

patterns of migration established through ringing data (Wernham *et al.* 2002).

Fig. 4 shows the number of falls involving thrushes on Fair Isle. Thrushes are the most frequent component of falls, by both number of falls and number of birds, occurring in 411 falls (49%). Some 27% of falls involving thrushes have occurred in the spring (112 falls) and 73% in autumn (299 falls). This is an average rate of three days of falls every two years during spring, and more than four days of falls each year during autumn. Redwings *Turdus iliacus* are noted as a main component of more falls (255) than other thrushes, followed by Fieldfares *T. pilaris* (196), Blackbirds *T. merula* (184), Song Thrushes *T. philomelos* (125) and Ring Ouzels *T. torquatus* (83). This refers only to the species recorded in the accounts of falls, and it should be noted that few falls are of single species. Similarly, it does not refer to the numbers of birds, although the mean counts by 'five-day' period reported in *Birds of Fair Isle* suggest that numbers of the different species in falls follow the same trend. The mean dates of days with falls including thrushes in spring and autumn are shown in table 3. The mean date in autumn for falls involving thrushes on Fair Isle is 16th October, six days earlier than the mean date of 22nd October for similar falls in north Norfolk. Since north Norfolk is over 700 km south of Fair Isle, a later date of arrival in north Norfolk would be expected in autumn, but any significance in the apparent difference in timing cannot be assessed from the data used in this paper. It is clear from the reports of the October 2012 fall on Holy

Island (*Brit. Birds* 106: 233), Blakeney Point and Spurn (*Brit. Birds* 106: 114–117), and other work cited earlier, that falls occur synchronously across large stretches of the east coast of Britain, and that their timing, as well as their location, is strongly influenced by large-scale synoptic weather patterns. Further work comparing falls at bird observatories along the east coast of Britain may reveal more information on frequency and timing of falls.

### Conclusions

These data for falls in north Norfolk and Fair Isle provide some insights into timing of migration that complement information from ringing (Wernham *et al.* 2002). They provide a context for events such as the fall observed in north Norfolk, east Yorkshire and Northumberland on 22nd October 2012. The results for Fair Isle clearly show that falls can occur at any time throughout the spring and autumn migration seasons (fig. 2). The results also show that the timing of falls (fig. 3 and table 3) reflects the sequential migration periods during spring and autumn among the different species. Both of these results are entirely to be expected, even if they are not previously reported in the literature. Perhaps the main importance of falls lies in their being visible and, when encountered, memorable components of bird migration, reminding us that breeding and wintering habitats present only part of the challenge faced by birds, and that weather and habitats encountered over large areas of the earth's surface covered during those months of each year spent on migration are as critical to bird survival and conservation.

### Acknowledgments

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## Obituary

### John Joseph Buxton (1927–2014)

John Buxton, who died at his home – Horsey Hall, Norfolk – on 11th January 2014, was the central character in the protection of Common Cranes *Grus grus* when they returned to Britain to breed. Besides being the Cranes' guardian for more than three decades, he was an accomplished wildlife film-maker and made a great contribution to protecting wildlife in his corner of the Broads. Conservation runs in the Buxton family. In 1903, John's grandfather Edward North Buxton was a founder member of Fauna and Flora International (formerly the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society).

John was born in Geneva in 1927, as his father, Anthony, worked there for the League of Nations. Disenchanted, Major Anthony Buxton left Switzerland and bought the Horsey Estate in 1930. John's first memory of Horsey was as a four-year-old, and the water and the reedbeds there always fascinated him. His father's commitment to protecting the Horsey Estate led him to pass the freehold to the National Trust. The arrangement for the Buxton family to manage the estate on a 99-year lease continues today.

As a child, John saw damage to the Horsey area when the sea broke through in 1938,

when the impact was worse than in the floods of 1953. After three years with the army in post-war Germany, he was trained in agricultural management. When John took over the running of the estate in 1958, it became his life's work to manage and protect the area's freshwater marshes. Marsh Harriers *Circus aeruginosus* and Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* returned to breed.

John made films for Anglia's *Survival* series after he was asked – at three days' notice – to fly to Uganda to make a programme about White Rhinos *Ceratotherium simum*. Further overseas projects followed. In 1965 John made two wildlife documentaries for the RSPB about the Norfolk Broads: 'Broadland Winter' and 'Broadland Summer'. Later he filmed 'his' Cranes, and this wonderful archive footage features in recent Crane films.

In September 1979, a local farmer phoned John to report the 'biggest bloody herons I have seen in my life!' John suspected they might be Cranes, as they had moved through the area before, and so it proved. This time they stayed, albeit leaving for short periods. The first nesting attempt was in 1981, when one chick hatched but was lost to an

unknown predator. They nested again in 1982 and this time fledged one young – the first Crane to be fledged in the UK for some 400 years.

The Cranes arrived as immature birds and Horsey's coastal location, mix of reed and sedge beds, grazing marsh and arable played a part in attracting the birds and tempting them to stay and nest. Another crucial factor was that Horsey was remarkably free from disturbance by humans. This, and the fear of egg-collectors, meant that John was zealous in maintaining privacy for the Cranes' first decade there. Many birdwatchers will recall being firmly steered away. Glen Tyler, carrying out Bittern research, was one of these when John caught him canoeing along a ditch at 4.30 one morning. Yet I've never met anyone who holds a grudge on account of being asked to leave, based as it was on a passion to protect Cranes. Indeed, John was the perfect gentleman to anyone who got to know him.

Crane protection in the early years was shared between John, wardens from the Horsey Estate and, for ten years, a seasonal warden employed by the RSPB. The wardens stayed mostly at Horsey Hall: John's wife, Bridget, shared his enthusiasm, and her hospitality was vital for many who visited or

stayed. RSPB involvement was at arm's length, which suited both the Society and John. He had a slightly ambivalent view of the RSPB: he was quick to make friends with individual staff members, including me, but a little suspicious of the Society's size and influence. John was relieved that the Great Crane Project, reintroducing captive-bred Cranes, was in Somerset, well away from his own great Crane project in Norfolk, but he quite understood how the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust should be enthusiastic to see Cranes return. One of John's favourite mementos was a sketch of the 'Grey birds' made when Sir Peter and Lady Phillipa Scott came to see the Horsey Cranes in 1985.

Secrecy was top priority in the early years of the Cranes at Horsey, though in reality these large and noisy birds were never the best-kept secret. Rumours that one or more had escaped from collections helped to reduce birdwatcher interest, rumours that John did not discourage. In hindsight, it is clear that the Norfolk recolonisation was part of a westward spread into areas from which they'd been lost in historical times. Cranes bred away from Horsey for the first time in 2001, then at nearby Hickling in 2003 and in Yorkshire and at RSPB Lakenheath Fen soon after. This encouraged John to be relaxed about publicity and he became keen to tell their story.

John was a deputy lieutenant of Norfolk and was made an MBE for services to conservation in 2007. John and Bridget remained great travellers, visiting Scotland annually and Norway regularly. John's enthusiasm for wildlife never dimmed: he would twinkle like a schoolboy naturalist when talking about the progress of some captive Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* larvae. Countless people have fond memories as guests of John and Bridget to see Cranes, and this affection was evident when some 500 people, including a large and loving family, gathered at Winterton-on-Sea church to celebrate his life.

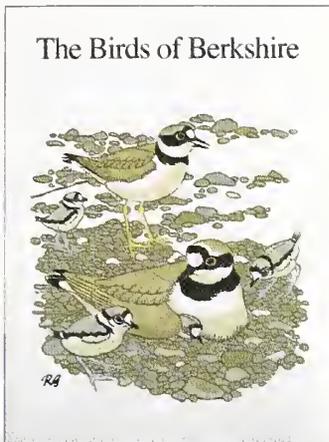


Paul Glendell/Natural England

124. John Buxton at Horsey in June 2005.

*Chris Durdin*

# Reviews



## The Birds of Berkshire

By Neil Bucknell, Brian Clews, Renton Righelato and Chris Robinson

Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group, 2013

Hbk, 520pp; numerous photographs, black-and-white vignettes, maps and tables

ISBN 978-0-9529297-1-0 Subbuteo code M04436

£35.00 **BB Bookshop price £31.50**

This is one of a tranche of new county atlases and avifaunas which report on the results of the recent *Bird Atlas 2007–11* at tetrad level. Perhaps more importantly, they compare county breeding distributions with those revealed in the previous atlas (of 1988–91).

The book is produced in a large-format style, slightly larger than A4, and is printed on a high-quality glossy paper with full colour throughout. Rob Still, who is responsible for many of the acclaimed WildGuides publications, produced the eye-catching design, which seamlessly blends two columns of text with superb photographs, distribution maps in orange, green and blue, a variety of tables and figures, and a vignette for every species.

Introductory chapters include a fascinating account of the history of bird recording in Berkshire, a scholarly essay on the physical geography, habitats and climate of Berkshire, a summary of the survey methods and data sources used to compile the book and, perhaps unusually for a county avifauna, an attractive 'where to watch birds' chapter describing 21 top sites in the county.

The systematic list forms the bulk of the book and comprises 380 pages. The species texts have been adapted from the previous *Birds of Berkshire*, published in 1996. Records of all the regularly occurring species have been updated to the end of 2012, while 2013 rarities are also included. Records of migrants are summarised by means of a variety of tables displaying monthly patterns and annual variations. I would have preferred a more consistent approach for all species, with records analysed by seven-day periods, which is far more effective in showing patterns of occurrence. Data for wintering birds are somewhat patchy – the text seems to concentrate on localities that were mentioned in the previous edition, while data from new sites such as Moor Green Lakes are largely overlooked.

The greatest interest is of course in the atlas results. Three types of map are employed: breeding

status, breeding-season abundance and winter abundance. The breeding status maps illustrate three levels of breeding evidence obtained in 1988–91, by means of different intensities of orange shaded in each tetrad; these are overlain by the 2007–11 results, which are displayed using three sizes of red dot. Totals for each level of evidence in both surveys are summarised under the maps. These maps do not give the immediate visual impression of change given by maps in other recent publications such as *Bird Atlas 2007–11* itself and the recent *Norfolk Bird Atlas* (see *Brit. Birds* 104: 401). You will need to explore the text further to read about declines in species such as Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*, Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*, Willow Tit *Poecile montana*, Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* and Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*, and to discover where they survive. The good news stories include the continued eastward spread of Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* and Common Raven *Corvus corax*, the gradual increase in Stone-curlews *Burhinus oedipnemus*, the successful reintroduction of Red Kites *Milvus milvus*, and increases in species often associated with lowland heath: European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, Hobby *Falco subbuteo* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*; the improving fortunes of the last two species fuelled by a spread into farmland.

The breeding-season and winter abundance maps use six shades of green and purple respectively to display the results of timed counts. Some of the shades are rather pale and difficult to see, and overall the maps have not worked particularly well. A reduced number of colour bands with graded dots might have displayed the results more effectively. Discussion of the results is confined to a small number of species. It is arguable how meaningful such data is at the tetrad level, especially for the more numerous species, where counts are probably more a reflection of observer ability and weather conditions.

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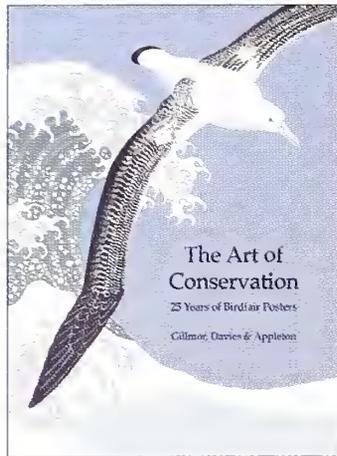


The book concludes with seven appendices, which include a gazetteer, bird population estimates for the county and the Berkshire bird list.

This is a superb book which will appeal to the whole spectrum of Berkshire birders, from beginners to seasoned experts, and to many living outside the county. What it lacks in detailed

analysis is made up for by the quality that emanates from every page. This volume certainly sets the bar at a very high level to which other counties should aspire. Well done Berkshire Bird Atlas Group!

*John Clark*



## The Art of Conservation: 25 years of Birdfair posters

By Robert Gillmor, Martin Davies and Tim Appleton  
Red Hare Publishing, 2013

Pbk, 64pp; many colour and monochrome illustrations

ISBN 978-0-9569976-8-5 Subbuteo code M20995

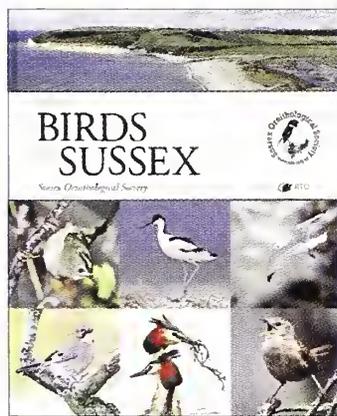
£15.00 **BB Bookshop price £13.50**

This slim book is, just as it says, a history of the British Birdwatching Fair posters over the first 25 years of the event, from the first two years when they featured line-drawings by John Cox, to the remainder (bar one) by Robert Gillmor. Each year has a spread with the poster on the right-hand page, and on the facing page details of that year's fundraising project with some insight into the design, concept and processes, and species choice of the poster. Robert Gillmor's designs are either paintings or linocuts and inevitably some succeed better than others – although by the time all the increasing clutter of essential poster information has been dotted all over them, it's often difficult to tell. Such is the challenge of poster design: even the very best of designs

get a thorough mauling, their 'punch' is eroded by sponsors' logos and such like, so Robert is to be congratulated for bringing some memorable images to the chaos. The simplest work best and the flying turaco from 2010 is my favourite. The linocuts impress me the most; when you look into them closely, some are ingeniously constructed.

But for most people looking at this book it will be the personal memories of individual fairs that will come flooding back. Love it or hate it, the Birdfair has grown and grown, and when you see the colossal amounts of money that have been raised for conservation and wildlife-related projects you realise just what a phenomenon the Birdfair is. This, then, is a nice souvenir.

*Alan Harris*



## The Birds of Sussex

Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS)

BTO Books, 2014

Hbk, 608pp; numerous coloured maps, photographs and tables

ISBN 978-1-908581-31-0 Subbuteo code M24218

£35.00 **BB Bookshop price £31.50**

This impressive book is the third recent publication from BTO Books, following the *Norfolk Bird Atlas* and *Bird Atlas 2007–11*. Like its two predecessors, it is a large-format volume, which permits the inclusion of superb colour photographs for most species, clear maps showing the results of the recent tetrad atlas survey in the county, and tables showing the patterns of occurrence of many species over

various time periods.

The book, which has been edited by Adrian Thomas, features contributions from 27 account writers, 56 photographers and three artists. The foreword by Tony Marr, one of the founder members of SOS in 1962, sets the scene superbly for the current volume, which is the seventh Sussex avifauna, following (among others) Walpole-Bond's seminal three-volume *A History of Sussex Birds*, published in 1938, and the most



recent *Birds of Sussex* (1996). The first chapter, Sussex Habitats and Climate, explains the importance of various habitats and includes some breathtaking images, most notably a full-page photograph of heathland on Ashdown Forest. It concludes with a succinct review of the effects of climate and weather on the county's birds. This is followed by Bird Migration and Ringing – which describes the importance of Sussex as a stopover for many species and the history of bird ringing in the county – and Bird Conservation in Sussex, which reviews developments since the early twentieth century and the part played by SOS in the creation of many important nature reserves.

The majority of the book is devoted to the species accounts. The introductory County Headlines lists new species recorded since the last avifauna was published, describes winners and losers (with a particular focus on breeding species), reviews previous atlas surveys and explains clearly how to interpret the species accounts and maps. Each account begins with its county status, UK conservation designation and a brief introduction. This is followed by various sections with headings such as Winter, Movements, Breeding and County Totals, which seem to have been somewhat inconsistently used, although every account concludes with Outlook, which principally summarises the future issues facing the species in the county (and farther afield) and suggests appropriate actions in some cases.

All the maps from the atlas survey were previously published by SOS on a CD. Here we get an interpretation of those results, although only a selection of the maps have been included. Most frequently utilised are Breeding Distribution and Winter Distribution, together with Winter and Breeding Relative Abundance and, most interestingly, Breeding Change, sensibly included only for species with clear trends since the 1988–91 atlas. The maps are mostly very clear, with red symbols used on breeding maps and turquoise on winter maps. The change maps would have benefited from different colours being used for gains and losses rather than upward-pointing bright red triangles and downward-pointing pale red triangles respectively. Unfortunately, the proof-checkers didn't notice that the Breeding Distribution map was included twice for Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* and the Breeding Change map omitted, although the text and captions do confirm a 17%

net increase in occupied tetrads between the two atlases.

Wintering and migrant birds are treated in detail, with tables displaying five-year means of peak WeBS counts for many species that occur in internationally important numbers in the county, such as Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta b. bernicla* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, and tables analysing the monthly and/or annual totals of migrant waders and seabirds such as the Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*, the spring passage of which is a major focus for the county's sea-watchers. Passerine migrants receive a rather more qualitative treatment, with, for example, no tables for either Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus* or Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*. Vagrants, which help to swell the county list to an impressive 397, have their recent records listed in detail and are placed in a national context.

Possibly the stand-out feature of the species accounts, apart from the wealth of detail included, is the collection of superb photographs, which the A4 format allows to be reproduced at such a large size. The detailed captions, with date and location, confirm that all have been taken within the county, and they present a wonderful pictorial display of Sussex birds, notwithstanding the bikini-clad young woman featured in the picture of the Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*! The book concludes with references, gazetteer and information about SOS.

Recent county and national publications seem to be showing a trend almost towards a coffee-table type avifauna, with a profusion of colour photographs and tables, brief headline extracts in bold text and perhaps a little less detailed analysis of the actual bird records. This is clearly an attempt to attract a wider readership, with sales to less serious birders as well as hardened county survey workers and listers. The present Sussex book certainly comes into this newly emerging genre; but it is still a superb book, which is testament to the expertise and talents of the members of SOS. It deserves to sell well to lots of extra buyers, and I'm sure that, with BTO promotion behind it, it will. It is tremendous value at £35 and comes highly recommended to Sussex residents and those from farther afield interested in the avifauna of this bird-rich county.

*John Clark*



## Vocalisations of Leaf-warblers and Spectacled Warblers (*Phylloscopus* and *Seicercus*)

By Jochen Martens

Syrinx Tonstudio, 2013

Two CDs plus booklet: CD 1, 78 tracks, 68 minutes; CD 2, 69 tracks, 68 minutes

Order code: SX 419726, available from [martens@uni-mainz.de](mailto:martens@uni-mainz.de)

€25.00 plus postage

Over the last 30 years our understanding of species diversity in the *Phylloscopus* and *Seicercus* warblers has snowballed. From a period of relative stability in the first eight decades of the twentieth century (established by Ticehurst in 1938 and reinforced by Williamson 30 years later), several traditionally recognised *Phylloscopus* 'species' have since been found to comprise two or three distinct species. And from the former 'Golden-spectacled Warbler', no fewer than six species have emerged. Most have been recognised initially by their differing vocalisations, and molecular methods have subsequently established that most forms with distinct vocal differences merited specific status.

In the vanguard of this development has been a modern generation of field ornithologists who ventured into the breeding areas of these warblers armed with sound-recording and photographic equipment and mist-nets, to document what they heard. In most cases, sound recordings provided clues to species diversity, with apparently identical taxa singing quite different songs in various parts of their ranges, or even at different altitudes on the same mountain. While most of the discoveries have come from the Himalayas and mountains of China, closer to home differences in vocalisations have been fundamental to unravelling species limits in the chiffchaff complex, and the separation of Western Bonelli's *Phylloscopus bonelli* and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers *P. orientalis*.

In this two-CD set, Jochen Martens, a pioneer who has done much to unravel the truth surrounding the complex relationships within these two groups, has brought together recordings of the calls and songs of most currently recognised *Phylloscopus* (53 species are included here) and *Seicercus* (nine) species which breed in Europe and mainland Asia, as well as many of the recognised races with differing vocalisations. The accompanying booklet provides brief distribution details of each taxon; a short description of the vocalisations on each track; the location, altitude and date of each recording; and the name of the recordist – there are 20 contributors, although Martens has provided the majority of recordings. Those *Phylloscopus* restricted to Africa are omitted, as are most

of the insular taxa confined to islands from south-east Asia to the Solomon Islands.

Recordings are of an excellent standard throughout, and reproduced clearly with few or no distracting background sounds. Most tracks are approximately a minute in length and contain a sequence of phrases that enables listeners to appreciate the variety and subtle variations within songs. The tracks are numbered but lack a spoken introduction.

These CDs highlight the vocal differences between many 'cryptic species' that led to their discovery. For example, the very different songs of Pale-legged *P. tenellipes* and Sakhalin Leaf Warblers *P. borealoides* reinforce the decision to treat them as two species. When their songs are compared, Green Warbler *P. nitidus* sounds much closer to Greenish Warbler in Europe *P. trochiloides viridanus* than either form does to Greenish from China and the Himalayas – and here Green is treated as a race of Greenish. Differences in songs and calls between Common *P. collybita* and Siberian Chiffchaff *P. c. tristis* are striking, far more so than those of other chiffchaff taxa now given species rank. Surprisingly, the various calls of Radde's Warbler *P. schwarzi* from the breeding grounds do not include the distinctive, soft 'chut' often heard from vagrants to Europe in autumn. The only slip-up I came across was that the sequence of the song and call of Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus* is reversed between CD and booklet.

The rather specialist nature of this subject area may limit its appeal to a wider audience, but this fine series of recordings will surely become the standard reference for this group for many years. Jochen Martens is to be congratulated for bringing together such a comprehensive collection of recordings into a single, readily accessible package.

*Peter Kennerley*



# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers the period from early March to early April 2014.

**Headlines** In a period dominated by high pressure and above-average temperatures there was a widespread early arrival of summer migrants, accompanied by Great Spotted Cuckoos in Devon and Pembrokeshire, Night Herons and Purple Herons in the southwest and Black Kites in Hampshire and Kent. A drake Baikal Teal in Cambridgeshire in late March had apparently been present for two weeks when discovered, while a Wood Duck on South Uist attracted considerable debate. The expected build-up of White-billed Divers began in northern Scotland, and a Pacific Diver appeared briefly in western Ireland.

**Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii* Long-stayers: Islay (Argyll), at least to 26th March; Ballyconnell (Co. Sligo), to 27th March. Also: Mutton Island, Quilty (Co. Clare), two, 12th–24th March. **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis* Loaningfoot/Mersehead (Dumfries & Galloway), two long-stayers to 15th March, one to 28th; Poole Harbour, 30th March, then Stanpit Marsh (both Dorset), 31st March to 3rd April, then past Seaford Head and Birling Gap (Sussex), also 3rd April. **Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa* South Uist (Outer Hebrides), 27th–30th March. **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* Long-stayers in Co. Armagh, Highland and Outer Hebrides; also Cambridgeshire, 14th March intermittently to 3rd April; Kent, 28th March. **Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* Fen Drayton Lakes (Cambridgeshire), 29th March to 4th April. **Black Duck** *Anas rubripes* Loch Sunart/Strontian (Highland), long-stayer to 25th March. **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors* Stanwick GP (Northamptonshire), 1st April. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Minsmere (Suffolk), 26th March to 1st April; Dagenham Chase (Greater London), 30th March and 2nd April. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Tittesworth Resr (Staffordshire), long-stayer to 27th March; Alturlie Point (Highland), 24th–30th March; Lough Gara (Co. Sligo), 29th March. **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* Long-stayers: Largo Bay (Fife), to 18th March; Gullane Bay (Lothian), to 29th March; Blacksod (Co. Mayo), to 4th April; Unst (Shetland), 15th–22nd March. Also, Narin Strand, 17th March, then Portnoo (both Co. Donegal), 19th–26th March; Burghead (Moray & Nairn), 2nd April; Loch Eriboll (Highland), 3rd April. **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata*

Long-stayers in Co. Cork, Cornwall, Denbighshire (up to five to 17th March), Dorset, Fife and Lothian. Also: Ballyvaughan (Co. Clare), 10th March; Rerwick (Orkney), 1st–3rd April; Campbeltown Loch (Argyll), 1st April.

**Pacific Diver** *Gavia pacifica* Kilcolgan Point, Tawin (Co. Galway), 5th April. **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* Portsoy (North-east Scotland), ten, 26th March, one to 27th; Point of Stoer (Highland), 30th March; Achnahaird (Highland), 30th March; Lewis (Outer Hebrides), two, 31st March; South Ronaldsay (Orkney), 1st April; Burghead, 2nd–4th April.

**Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* St Mary's (Scilly), 17th–20th March. Presumed **Chinese Pond Heron** *Ardeola bacchus* Saltwood (Kent), long-stayer found dead 25th March. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Long-stayers at Steeple Claydon (Buckinghamshire), to 4th April and Hillsborough (Co. Down), to 23rd March; also Newcastle (Co. Wicklow), 11th March; Southwold (Suffolk), 24th March; Mousehole (Cornwall), 31st March. **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* St Mary's, 25th March; Millbrook (Cornwall), 2nd–3rd April. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Many records of one or two from Co. Antrim, Co. Armagh, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire & Wirral, Cleveland, Co. Cork, Cornwall, Co. Derry, Co. Durham, Essex, Isle of Wight, Kent, Co. Kerry, Co. Limerick, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Orkney, Pembrokeshire, Perth & Kinross, Co. Sligo, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Sussex, West Midlands and Co. Wexford.

## Recent reports

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* North Uist (Outer Hebrides), long-stayer to 1st April.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Bridgemaury (Hampshire), 20th March; Dungeness (Kent), 23rd March. White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Wykeham Forest (Yorkshire), 21st–22nd March; Hollesley (Suffolk), 24th March.

Sora *Porzana carolina* St Mary's, presumed long-stayer from February again 4th April. American Coot *Fulica americana* Loch Flemington (Highland), long-stayer to 4th April.

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* Lepe CP (Hampshire), long-stayer to 1st April. Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* North Uist, long-stayer to 11th March. Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Pennington/Keyhaven Marshes (Hampshire), long-stayer to 31st March.

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Long-stayer, Nimmo's Pier (Co. Galway), to 30th March. Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Long-stayers: Loch Caolisport (Argyll), to 11th March, and Cardiff Bay (Glamorgan) to 3rd April, with two on 30th March. Also: Scrabster (Highland), 11th March. Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* Long-stayer, Ballycotton (Co. Cork), to 16th March. Also: Groomsport

(Co. Down), 23rd March, presumed same as Ballycotton. Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* Canna (Highland), long-stayer again 10th March. American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* Long-stayers at Campbeltown (Argyll), to 15th March, and Mullet Peninsula (Co. Mayo), to 23rd March; also, Portmagee (Co. Kerry), 9th–25th March.

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* Giltar Point (Pembrokeshire), 11th–23rd March; Branscombe (Devon), 4th April. Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* East Tilbury (Essex), 24th March. Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* North Uist, 28th March.

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* Long-stayers: Ramsgate to 29th March; Dungeness (both Kent) to 3rd April; Coleshill (Warwickshire), to 10th March. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Great Barr (West Midlands), long-stayer to 17th March; Oulton Broad (Suffolk), 19th March to 4th April. Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* Yarrow Valley (Lancashire & N Merseyside), 5th February; Fair Isle, 30th March. Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* Leiston (Suffolk), long-stayer intermittently to 27th March.

Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni* Macclesfield (Cheshire & Wirral), 8th–30th March, intermittently. Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* Long-stayers: Forest of Dean (Gloucestershire), 14 to 15th March, then 1–4 to 26th March; Hemsted Forest (Kent), to 24th March; Broughton (Lincolnshire), to 21st March; Lynford (Norfolk), five 23rd–27th March, 1–3 to 30th March; Postensplain (Shropshire), four to 16th March, three to 31st; Leith Hill (Surrey), to 18th March; Broomhead Resr (Yorkshire), six to 21st March, then 2–5 to 2nd April. Also: Farnham Heath (Surrey), 10th–26th March; Dove Stone Resr (Greater Manchester), 30th March to 1st April. Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* Holt, seven long-stayers to 11th March; Grimes Graves (both Norfolk), six, 19th March; Barnsmore (Co. Donegal), 28th March.



Richard Stonier

125. Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*, Giltar Point, Pembrokeshire, March 2014.

# Talking point

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## We are outnumbered – but we shouldn't give up!

In response to Iain Robertson's editorial in the March issue of *BB*, I contend that bird conservationists in the UK actually have a pretty good record of saving species, whether it be the return of the Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, the recovery of the Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* or the increase in numbers of Corn Crakes *Crex crex*. I can now see a Red Kite *Milvus milvus* from my Northamptonshire garden on any day of the year, whereas as a boy growing up in Bristol I had to make several trips to mid Wales before I saw my first. And when I was born, the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* was a rare and endangered species, whereas now I can see it regularly in central London. Add to that the land now purchased and managed for nature conservation and the sites that have been saved from destruction (such as the North Kent Marshes from an airport, the Flow Country from further afforestation) and that makes a sizeable legacy of success.

Conservationists' successes have been in protecting species from direct threats and protecting the very best sites from destruction or damage. A network of nature reserves and nest-guarding allowed Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* to recolonise the UK and reach their current rather impressive population levels. Even in farmland, for localised species such as Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus* and Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*, targeted conservation management, backed up by government grants, has turned around the fortunes of species that quite possibly could have been extirpated from the UK were it not for conservationists' actions. Add in a few reintroduction projects and the conservationists have much of which they can be proud.

Let's not ignore all these, and many other, successes just because there are plenty of things that are still going badly.

All this conservation activity costs money – quite a lot of money – and our largest wildlife NGO, the RSPB, has an annual budget of only about £100m. I'd say that wildlife NGOs, not just the RSPB (but

certainly including my former employer), have spent the money we gave them pretty well. If we all doubled our contributions, then they could do at least twice as much good work each year.

But the nature conservation successes are islands in a sea of economic activity that tends to sweep nature aside. My local environment has Red Kites but precious few Grey Partridges *Perdix perdix*, Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur*, Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* or Corn Buntings *E. calandra* and those losses are due to the way we farm. I say 'we' but most of us are not farmers so we can't fix this ourselves, and we can't expect wildlife NGOs to buy the countryside and turn it into a nature reserve. The only way to bring back farmland wildlife is to persuade thousands of farmers to do their jobs, and earn their livings, differently. Since we put billions of pounds of our taxes into the pockets of farmers each year, and billions more through our purchasing decisions, then we have quite a lot of leverage. You can try chatting up your local farmer in the pub but a more productive route is probably through changing the regulations and incentives that influence how all farmers behave.

NGOs have been reasonably successful (believe it or not) in influencing agricultural policy – things would be much worse were it not for political lobbying on behalf of wildlife. That said, the combined efforts of wildlife NGOs has only been to put some pressure on the brake pedal – the juggernaut of unsustainable farming is still moving forward.

What is true for agriculture is true for forestry, fisheries, the planning system, climate change and many other aspects of our lives. The pressures of a growing global human population, growing demands for food and an addiction to economic growth mean that nature conservation often comes head to head with economics and politics. And it is a bit of an unequal fight. The flip-side of the RSPB having a million members is that 62 million UK residents are *not* RSPB

members. We nature lovers are a minority and so it is bound to be difficult to get what we want. When I worked for the RSPB, I was often amazed by how much difference we did make considering the resources we had and the vested interests we challenged.

There have been plenty of political victories in the past. The Peregrines I see in central London are there because the world banned the pesticides that were poisoning them and thinning their eggshells – that was a political victory. We need more political victories.

Hardly a bird, a plant or an insect is threatened because people are deliberately nasty to it (the Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* is an exception). Most losses of species and habitats are because economic development is too blind to its environmental consequences. We could do much better at living on this planet if only we integrated environmental considerations into all other aspects of human activity. Wildlife would be better off if there were fewer of us, and if we reduced our ecological footprint by using less of the world's resources. But those are big political issues with powerful vested interests on the other side of the argument. It's not surprising that nature conservationists have been more successful at reintroducing Red Kites than stopping the decline of farmland birds – for the former you need some birds in a cage, for the latter you are trying to change society and its values. I'm amazed we have done as well as we have.

The future success of wildlife NGOs in saving nature will depend on how well they can mobilise both the arguments for a more sustainable approach and their members to speak out for change. That's what is needed to influence first the political landscape, and second the real landscape of singing Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* and humming insect life. It's quite a challenge. Will our wildlife NGOs rise to the challenge on behalf of wildlife?

I'm sometimes asked whether it's too late to save wildlife and I reply it's never too late. Those of us who care really can make a difference. But we'd better get on with it! Here are five things that you (yes, you!) could do to make the world richer in wildlife:

**Support the good guys.** Review your memberships of wildlife NGOs and increase your support overall but ditch any organisations that aren't doing well enough (and write and tell them that's what you have done).

**Be politically active.** Vote every time you get a chance and vote with wildlife in mind. Write to your MP each month about wildlife issues.

**Reduce your ecological footprint.** This is something you can start today – it's not up to anyone else and you don't have to wait for permission. You can use less energy and water, and create less waste right now if you give it some thought.

**Spend your money to do good.** Buy less 'stuff' but buy wisely to support good farmers, good energy suppliers and good land management. Eat Marine Stewardship Council-certified fish, organic locally produced meat and sign up to 'green' energy deals.

**Engage in the debate.** Talk to people, write to the papers and use Twitter and Facebook to amplify your voice. You can be a 'voice for nature'.

But don't forget to go out and enjoy the natural world too. When I feel down about the state of nature, then the sight of a Red Kite above my head can cheer me quite a lot. First, because it is a beautiful bird; second, because it is a symbol of hope; and third, because I played a small part in it being there. You can play your part too – be a 'player' not a 'bystander'.

*Mark Avery*

*Mark Avery worked for the RSPB for 25 years until he left in 2011 to become a freelance writer. He writes a blog on conservation issues ([www.markavery.info/blog](http://www.markavery.info/blog)) and his book, *Fighting for Birds* provides an overview of the UK nature conservation scene. His next book *A Message from Martha* is about the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon and is published by Bloomsbury in July this year (the year of the centenary of the Passenger Pigeon's extinction).*

What do you think? Join the debate at [www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/editorials](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/category/editorials)



# British Birds Bookshop

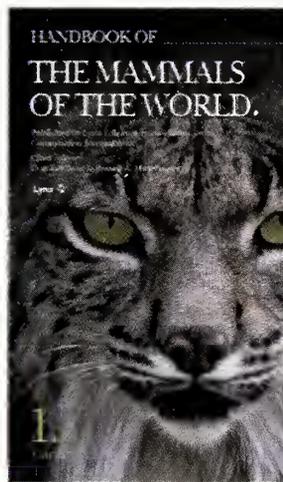
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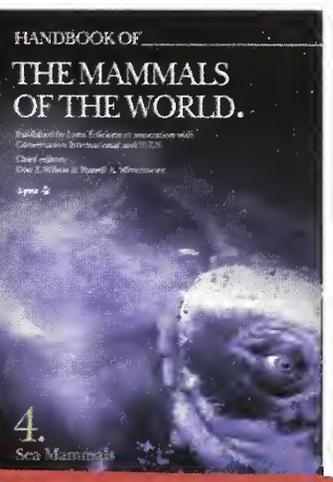
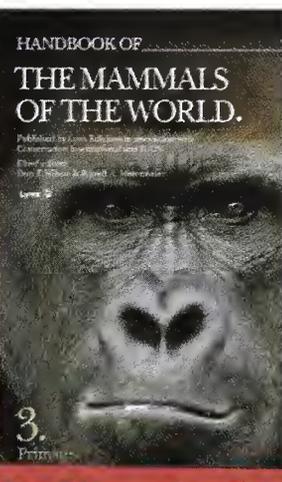
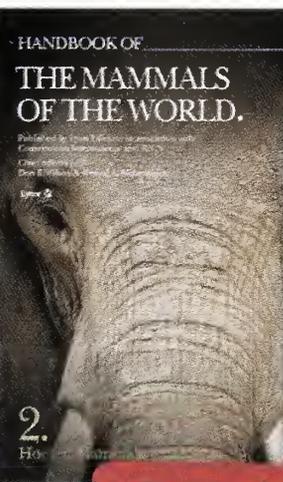
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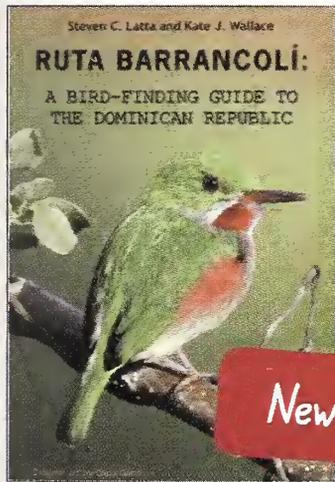


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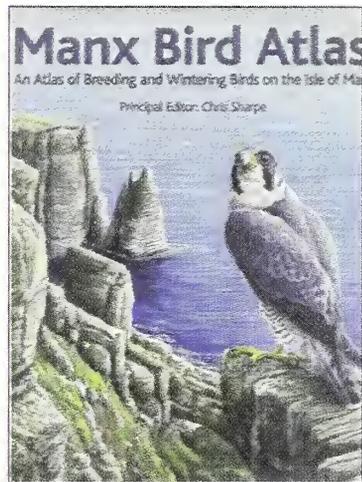
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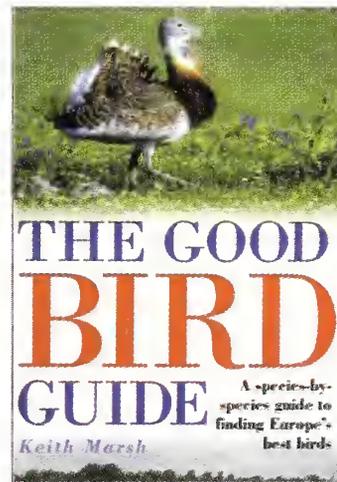


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