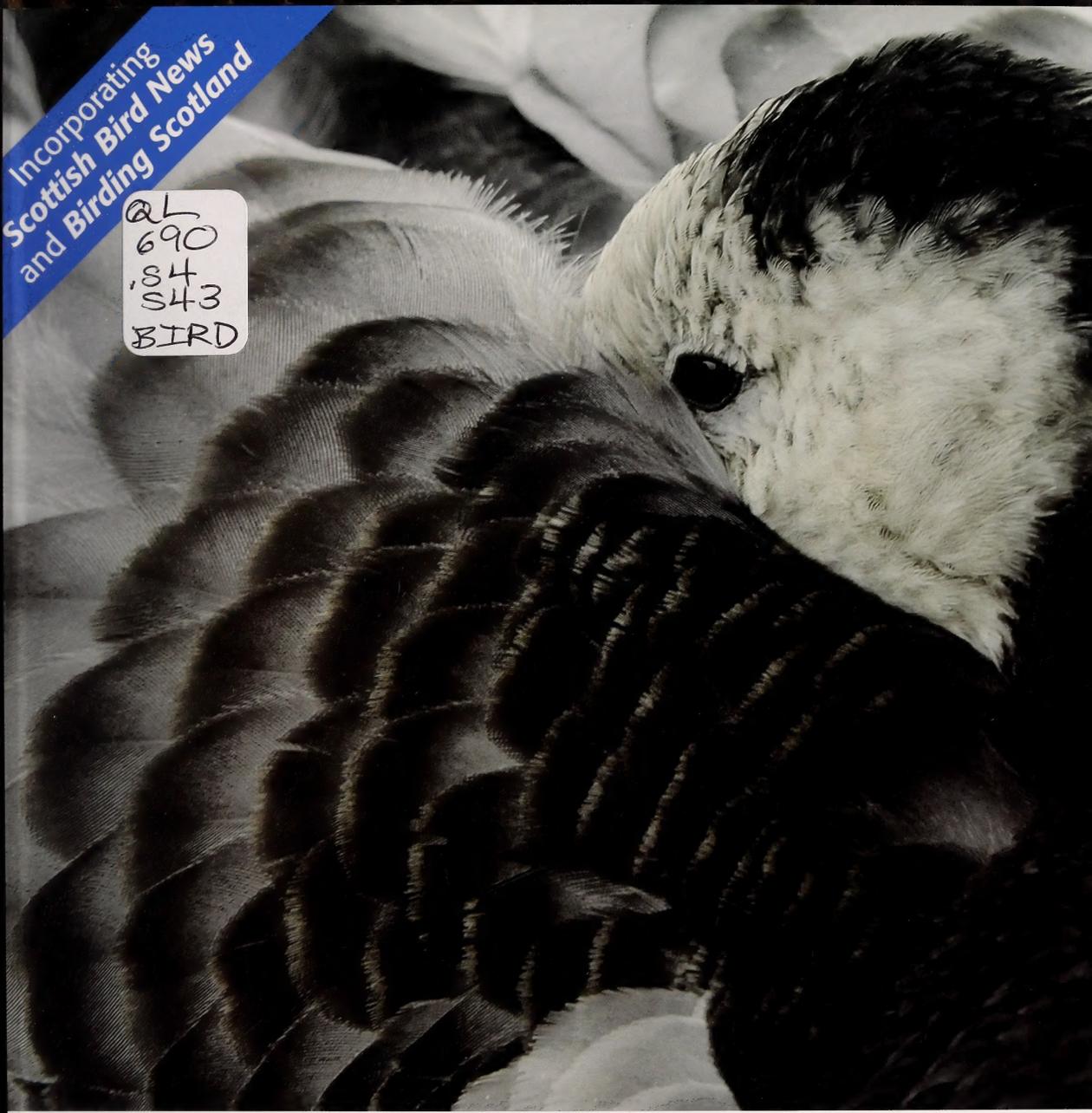


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# Scottish Birds

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# Scottish Birds

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*Scottish Birds*, the official publication of the SOC, comprises four sections: original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, short notes on bird observations, topical articles and Club-related news (*Scottish Bird News*) and reports of rare and scarce bird sightings and birding sites (*Birding in Scotland*).

Four issues of *Scottish Birds* are published each year, in March, June, September and December. The SOC also publishes an annual *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme* Report, which is produced on behalf of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group with grant aid from Scottish Natural Heritage. It is sent to all members.

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# Editorial

The editorial team hopes you enjoyed the June issue of the re-formatted *Scottish Birds* and would like to thank all those who have contacted us with feedback. Incorporating the comments from our subscribers will help shape the new journal and we hope that the start of volume 30 will see the journal settling down into its new form.

The Club now has a journal with the highest of production standards, but filling its pages falls to its readers. We would like to take this opportunity to put forward our views on the breadth and depth of information that will be considered for inclusion, and to encourage everyone to contribute – this is now a journal for all our members, and hopefully new ones too.

There is a basic division in the journal between papers and short notes that are peer-reviewed, and articles and Club items that are not. This split in content is differentiated by font, paper colour and the number of columns on the page.

The 'Papers' section will continue to accept manuscripts on the status, distribution and population of birds in Scotland and, particularly, changes in these over time. Accounts of census work find a natural home in this section, as do the culmination of research topics and updates to information in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Original work and observations are encouraged, but summary papers will be considered and we may occasionally commission key-note papers of a more general nature. As a general rule we aim to keep statistical analyses to a minimum and to encourage the papers to be as readable as possible to a non-scientific audience. Papers should be fully referenced as in any scientific work, and our house style should be followed (see previous articles and guidance soon to be available on the SOC website\*). Articles less than 700 words are generally considered as 'Short Notes', which differ in having references within the text rather than at the end.

The 'Scottish Bird News' part of *Scottish Birds* welcomes informal as well as more serious contribution about any aspect of birds and their habitats in Scotland. It is not peer reviewed, has minimal editing and contributions can be descriptive, anecdotal, controversial, humorous or quirky. They can report on surveys, express opinions, describe birds and places, look back into history, speculate as to the future and represent organisations or be the work of private individuals. We welcome photographs, maps, cartoons, and will accept basic graphs and tables when relevant. Meeting reports or field trip accounts are all welcome, but our main aim is to focus on Scottish birds in Scotland or abroad. We will occasionally include articles from other parts of the world and sometimes about other wildlife. In terms of length, we accept anything from short notes up to articles of around 2,000 words. There are no strict guidelines as to format, but we would encourage contributors to follow our house style shown in the excerpts from a recent issue soon to be provided on the SOC website\*. Book reviews are organised through the Librarian at Waterston House.

There is still some catching up to do in the 'Birding in Scotland' section as we feel it is important to document, for historical purposes, the key events from 2007 and 2008. It is anticipated that we should be up-to-date with articles and bird sightings by the latter half of next year. At that time, this section of *Scottish Birds* aims to revert back to documenting the occurrence of rare and scarce birds in Scotland, plus a wide range of identification, site and species related information. It will continue to be lavishly illustrated by high quality colour photographs, even more so than the other sections. During 2010 it will combine with 'Scottish Bird News' material to become the non peer-reviewed part of the journal.

**Ian J. Andrews on behalf of the editorial team** \* [www.the-soc.org.uk/publications.htm](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/publications.htm)

## Greenland Barnacle Geese in Scotland in 2008

C. MITCHELL, C. HALL & A. DOUSE

*Between 1959 and 2008, 12 full international censuses of the Greenland population of Barnacle Geese have been conducted at wintering sites in Scotland and Ireland using a combination of aerial survey and ground counts. Here we present the results of the 2008 census, conducted primarily between 16–18 March 2008, which checked a total of 328 islands and mainland sites along the west and north coasts of Scotland and Ireland. In Scotland, 40 sites were found to hold 58,269 geese and 12,232 geese were found in Ireland. Following standard rounding conventions, the total wintering population was estimated at 70,500 birds. This represents a 25.0% increase on the 2003 census total.*

*Numbers on Islay have increased in recent years. An increase of 23.3% has occurred since the census of spring 2003 compared to a previous increase of 3.7% from 1999 to 2003. Likewise, numbers of geese throughout the remainder of Scotland have increased by 23.5% compared with 7.9% between the censuses of 1999 and 2003.*

*In Scotland several key sites held the majority of geese. A comparison of the number of occupied sites in each of the census years indicates that the number of occupied sites in 2008 (40) was the second highest. Combined numbers at the key sites have continued to increase, whereas numbers at outlying sites have stabilised following an initial increase up to the early 1970s.*

*The 2008 census found eight sites that exceeded the threshold for national importance; seven of these also exceeded the threshold for international importance. Oronsay, Isle of Danna and South Walls all held more than one percent of the international total in 2008, but are not classified as SPAs, although the principal roost site of the South Walls flock, on Switha, is an SPA. However, as the population has increased, the number of sites exceeding nationally and internationally important thresholds has decreased since 1959/60.*

*The suite of SPA/SSSIs which have Greenland Barnacle Goose as a qualifying species held 94.9% of the national population in Scotland. The number of Barnacle Geese has increased on six of the nine SPAs in Scotland. The six sites are close to relatively large areas of managed grassland, particularly on Islay. Three remote offshore island SPAs in Scotland have shown a decline in usage, despite the increase in the overall population.*

*The current monitoring strategy of one international census every five years, whilst providing accurate population estimates, is inadequate in terms of fully understanding distribution and use of sites throughout the wintering range. Although counts at key sites such as Islay, Coll, Tiree and South Walls are carried out throughout the winter, there is a need to increase the frequency of population censuses to meet the international timetable (every three years) for the revision of waterfowl population estimates.*

### Introduction

The world range of the Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* comprises three distinct populations: the North Russian/Eastern Baltic breeding population which winters in the Netherlands and north Germany; the Svalbard breeding population which winters on the Solway Firth, Scotland/England; and a third population which breeds in north-east Greenland (Ogilvie *et al.*

1999). The Greenland population winters almost exclusively in north and west Scotland and west Ireland. In Scotland, the wintering range extends throughout the Inner and Outer Hebrides and north to Orkney. On the west coast of Ireland, the main concentrations occur between the Dingle Peninsula, County Kerry, and Inishowen in north County Donegal.

The first full census of wintering sites was undertaken in 1959/60 (Boyd 1968), since when there have been 12 full international censuses, conducted at approximately five-yearly intervals (see Worden *et al.* 2004). Some of the wintering sites can be surveyed by ground counts, but because of the inaccessible nature of most sites (many are uninhabited, comparatively remote islands), aerial survey is required to achieve complete coverage of the population. This paper presents the results of the 2008 census which was coordinated in Scotland by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). Count data from Ireland has kindly been provided by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

## Methods

The methodology employed for the international census has been described previously (Walsh & Merne 1988). Aerial surveys were conducted using a high-winged aircraft flying at approximately 150–200m above ground or sea. Counts were undertaken as the geese were flushed by the approaching aircraft. One observer made a visual estimate of flock size while the second attempted to photograph the geese. The photographs were examined later and, if of good quality, were used to derive the count for the census total. The visual count was used where the quality of the photograph was poor or where there were difficulties photographing the entire flock. All islands where Barnacle Geese have previously been recorded were surveyed, as were all other islands and adjacent mainland coast where suitable vegetation was present.

Ground counts were made on several key sites in Scotland where large flocks occur and where access is possible. The first ground counts on Islay were made in 1952/53 and these have continued annually since. In recent years, two or three counts have been undertaken on Islay each winter in late autumn, mid-winter, and early spring by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) as part of the Islay Goose Management Scheme. The international census of Greenland Barnacle Geese was timed to coincide with the spring 2008 count. Islay counts are usually repeated on two consecutive days and the mean of these, the 'adopted' count, unless one is deemed inaccurate, is used as the island total. SNH and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) undertake at least two counts each winter on both Tiree and Coll and sites in south-west Argyll, coordinated with those on Islay. SNH also carries out monthly ground counts on South Walls, Orkney as part of the Barnacle Goose Refuge Scheme and have done so since winter 1994/95. As part of the international census, ground counts were also undertaken at other known sites where accessible, eg the Sutherland coast and on North Uist.

## Results

The aerial survey was conducted between 16–17 March 2008. A total of 15 hours flying was undertaken, checking 216 islands and remote areas along the west and north coast. Surveys were conducted only when weather conditions were suitable.

Ground counts at the following sites were used to calculate the total population estimate: Oronsay (5 March), Eilean Trodday (7 March), Floday (10 March), Aird Mhic Caoilt, Grenitote, Goula/Balranald, Balemore and Kirkibost, North Uist and Tolsta and Port of Ness, Lewis (all 16 March), Coll & Tiree (17 March), Machrihanish and the Isle of Danna (18 March), Islay (18/19 March), South Walls (19 March), Eilean Hoan/Balnakeil (20 March), Summer Isles (24 March) and Staffin Island (25 March). Overall, 82.5% of the counts were undertaken in the three-day period 16–18 March, 2008.

Forty of the 216 sites in Scotland were found to have birds present. Counts at all sites holding Greenland Barnacle Geese during the 2008 census are given in Table 1 and their locations are shown in Figure 1.

The Scottish total was 58,269 geese, while that of Ireland was 12,232 geese. A flock of 232 Greenland Barnacle Geese was recorded at the Dyfi Estuary, Wales, in October to December 2007 (R. Jones pers comm), but the flock left the site in late December 2007 and, in March 2008, at the time of the census, no geese were present. It is recommended that the population estimate for Greenland Barnacle Goose is revised, following standard rounding conventions (see Kershaw & Cranswick 2003), to 70,500 birds.

Overall, 99.6% of the census total comprised estimates from ground counts (93.9%) and from photographs obtained during aerial survey (5.7%). Five small flocks, with an average flock size of c. 44 birds, were counted by visual estimation during aerial survey (0.4% of the count total, Table 1). The relatively small flock sizes of geese estimated in this way minimised potential errors. The accuracy of visual counts has been shown to be acceptable when numbers have been compared to those derived from photographic verification of individual flocks (Delany & Ogilvie 1994, Cranswick *et al.* 2000). Likewise in 2008, a comparison of counts where both estimates and photographs were available gave good correlation ( $r=0.90$ ,  $t=10.1$ ,  $P<0.001$ ).

## Discussion

Total numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese wintering in Scotland have continued to increase (Figure 2). The

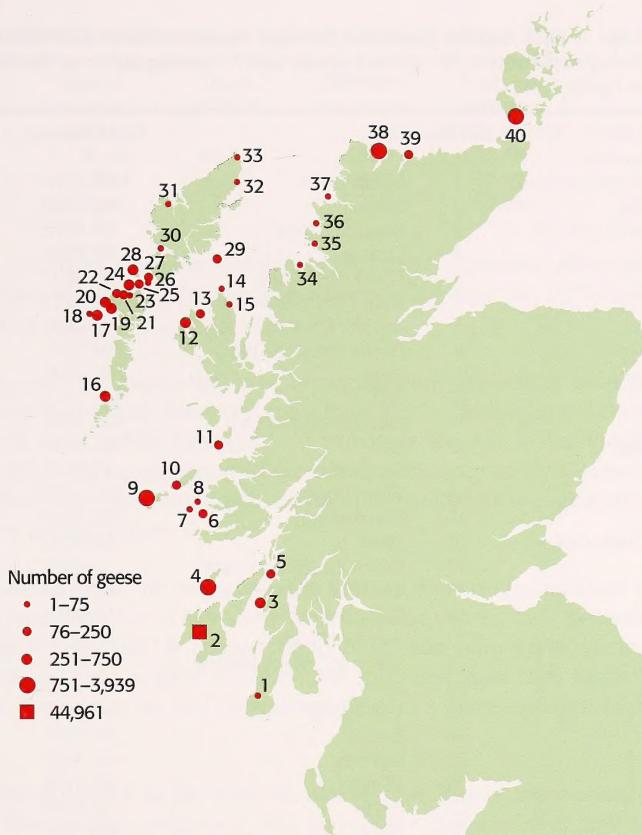


Figure 1. Sites in Scotland holding Barnacle Geese in March 2008 (see Table 1 for key to sites).

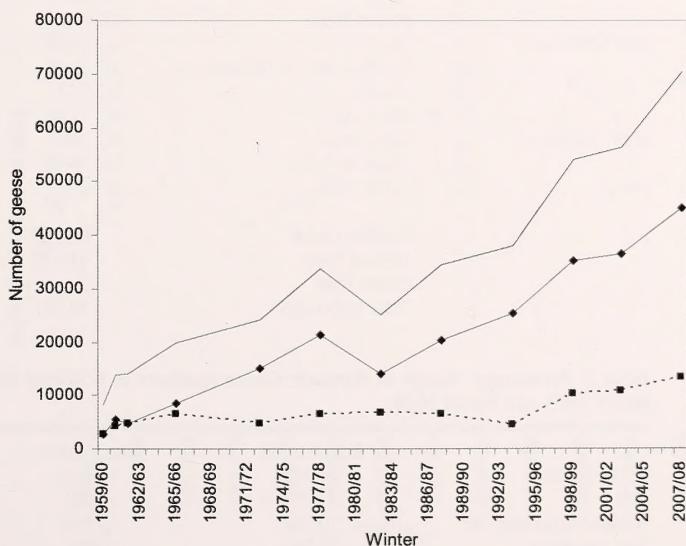


Figure 2. Census totals for the Greenland population of Barnacle Geese, 1959/60–2007/08 (—Total population, ◆Islay, --- Scotland excluding Islay)

**Table 1. Sites holding Greenland Barnacle Geese in March 2008 (counts were derived from E - estimates during aerial survey, G - ground counts and P - photographic verification). Site numbers refer to those used in Figure 1.**

County	Site No.	Site	Grid reference	Number of geese	Method	
Scotland						
Kintyre peninsula	1	Machrihanish	NR 6719	33	G	
Islay	2	Islay	NR 3060	44,961	G	
Inner Hebrides	3	Island of Danna	NR 6978	711	G	
	4	Oronsay	NR 3588	1,200	G	
	5	Garbh Rèisa, Luing	NR 7597	113	P	
	6	Staffa (Treshnish Isles)	NM 3235	130	P	
	7	Bac Mór (Treshnish Isles)	NM 2438	10	P	
	8	Fladda (Treshnish Isles)	NM 2943	67	E	
	9	Tiree	NL 9645	3,393	G	
	10	Coll	NM 1553	167	G	
	11	Muck/Eilean nan Each	NM 4279	102	P	
	Skye	12	Islay	NG 2157	316	P
		13	South Ascrib	NG 3063	79	P
14		Eilean Trodday	NG 4479	56	G	
Outer Hebrides	15	Staffin Island	NG 4969	70	G	
	16	Fiaray	NF 7010	342	P	
	17	Ceann Ear (Monach Isles)	NF 6562	470	P	
	18	Ceann Iar (Monach Isles)	NF 6063	50	P	
	19	Balemòre/Paible	NF 7466	360	G	
	20	Balranald/Goula	NF 7070	620	G	
	21	Grenitote/Sollas/Malacate	NF 8175	236	G	
	22	Vallay	NF 7776	175	G	
	23	Trumisgarry	NF 8675	32	G	
	24	Boreray	NF 8581	750	P	
	25	Berneray	NF 9182	120	G	
	26	Killegary	NF 9783	64	P	
	27	Ensay	NF 9786	193	P	
	28	Shillay	NF 8891	300	P	
	29	Garbh Eilean (Shiants)	NG 4198	224	P	
	West Sutherland	30	Soay Beg	NB 0505	9	E
31		Floday	NB 1033	10	G	
32		Tolsta	NB 5447	36	G	
33		Port of Ness	NB 5463	14	G	
34		Gruinard	NG 9494	40	E	
35		Summer Isles/Achiltibuie	NC 0308	60	G	
36		Soyea	NC 0421	42	E	
North Sutherland	37	Meall Mor	NC 1238	65	E	
	38	Eilean Hoan	NC 4467	832	G	
Orkney	39	Eilean nan Ròn	NC 6365	205	P	
	40	South Walls	ND 3189	1,612	G	
Scotland total			58,269			
Ireland total			12,232			
Wales total			0			
Total population			70,501			

**Table 2. Percentage change in Barnacle Goose numbers in Scotland and in the whole population between March 2003 and March 2008.**

	March 2003	March 2008	Change (%)
Scotland total	47,256	58,269	+23.3%
Islay	36,478	44,961	+23.3%
Scotland excluding Islay	10,778	13,308	+23.5%
Total population	56,386	70,501	+25.0%

**Table 3. Counts of Greenland Barnacle Geese from three sites in Scotland in spring 2007 and 2008.**

Site	Date of count in 2007	Count in 2007	Date of count in 2008	Count in 2008	Difference in numbers	% change between 2007 and 2008
Islay	17/21 Mar	51,485	17/18 Mar	44,961	-6,524	-12.7%
Tiree	22/23 Mar	4,323	17/18 Mar	3,393	-930	-21.5%
Coll	25/26 Mar	2,456	17/18 Mar	167	-2,289	-93.2%

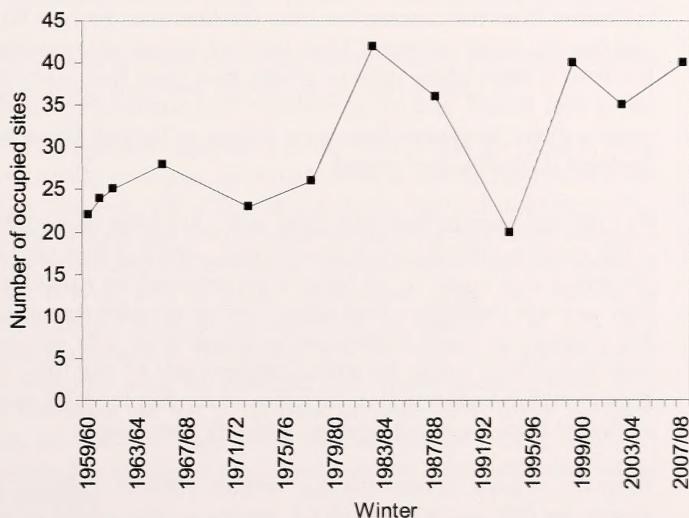
increase on Islay since the 1960s, except for a drop in numbers in the 1980s, continued. Although overall numbers elsewhere in Scotland remained relatively constant throughout the 1970s and 1980s, numbers have increased since 1994.

It has been suggested previously that the population was becoming concentrated at a small number of sites while outlying sites away from these key areas have seen a decline in numbers (Delany & Ogilvie 1994, Cranswick *et al.* 2000). Changes in distribution and use of individual islands has occurred since 1959, although a comparison of the number of occupied sites in each of the census years does not indicate any clear trend and, overall, the number of occupied sites in 2008 was the second highest on record (Figure 3).

Results of recent censuses have indicated that the increase in the Scottish wintering population is largely dictated by increases at a small number of key sites. Currently, Islay, Tiree, Coll, Oronsay and South Walls hold the majority of geese (88.1% of the total in 2008) with Islay alone holding 77.2% of the Scottish total. Overall, numbers at these key sites have increased more than six-fold since 1959. Total numbers outside these areas are still increasing, albeit at a lower rate (less than a three-fold increase).

Census data indicate that use of some sites, such as the Treshnish Isles and the Shiantis, has decreased since the late 1970s/early 1980s. This has been coincident with an increase in use of sites such as Boreray, Eilean Hoan and South Walls. Delany & Ogilvie (1994) suggested that many uninhabited islands have seen decreases in numbers of geese owing to habitat deterioration brought about by the cessation of grazing. In contrast, habitat changes caused by movement towards more intensive farming methods, and the establishment of goose management schemes, have attracted geese to alternative sites.

There was a 23.3% increase in numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese in Scotland between 2003 and 2008 and an increase of 25.0% in the total population (Table 2). This increase may be influenced by changes in survival and breeding success within the population. The annual percentage of first-winter birds recorded on Islay has decreased since the mid to late



**Figure 3.** Number of sites occupied by Greenland Barnacle Geese in Scotland in spring censuses 1959/60–2007/08.

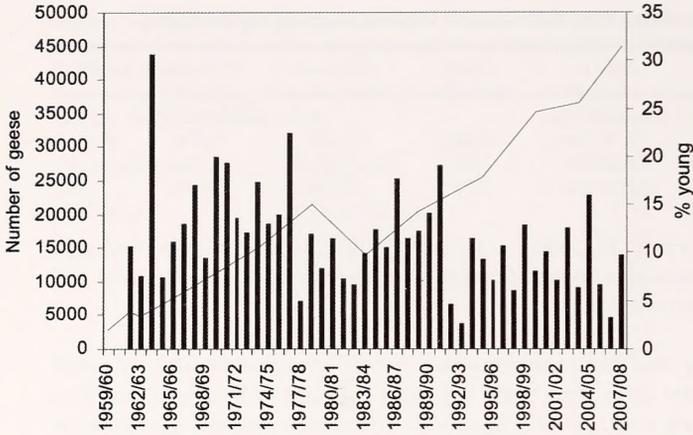


Figure 4. Population size (→) and percentage of first-winter birds (columns) of Greenland Barnacle Geese on Islay, 1959/60 to 2007/08.

1980s ( $r=0.39$ ,  $t=-2.84$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), although numbers of geese on Islay have continued to increase throughout this period (Figure 4). Potential decreases in mortality and the introduction of goose management schemes, aimed in part to benefit geese, may have supported the continued population growth within this period. Pettifor *et al.* (1999) showed that the population is more susceptible to changes in mortality than productivity.

#### Winter season 2006/07

Counts collated from three key sites in Scotland in winter 2006/07 suggest that higher numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese were present in that season than in spring 2008 (Table 3). On the most important site, Islay, some 6,524 more birds were counted in spring 2007 compared with spring 2008. There was no indication from any other sites in Scotland, or Ireland, that counts at the major sites there in spring 2008 were any lower than the previous year, so the apparent decline was not universal. In addition, breeding success in 2006 was very low, at 3.2% young, so a large increase in the winter population was not expected.

The mid-winter count on Islay, carried out in December 2006 found 47,053 Barnacle Geese, some 4,432 fewer than recorded in March 2007. It is possible that the late March 2007 count was an overestimate, or conversely the March 2008 count was an underestimate, although there was no indication from the counters on Islay that this was the case (M. McKay pers comm). Less likely was that the count contained birds that had started spring passage, although if this was the case it is hard to know where these birds may have come from. The only flocks further south than Islay are in west Ireland, and recent evidence from satellite tracking shows that tagged Barnacle Geese made a direct movement from west Ireland to Iceland during spring migration, not via sites in Scotland (L. Griffin pers comm).

On Coll, the count in December 2006 was 1,415 birds, some 1,041 geese fewer than the count of 2,456 geese recorded on 25/26 March 2007, some 8–9 days later than the count on Islay. On Tiree, the spring 2007 count (4,323 birds) was carried out on 22/23 March some 2–3 days later than on Islay and was also higher than regular counts recorded throughout the winter (by c. 2,500 birds). The presence of newly arrived colour-ringed birds seen on Tiree in late March, that had been recorded on Islay during the winter, suggests that by that time, Barnacle Geese had started spring passage within Scotland. It is, therefore, likely that the large numbers recorded on Coll and Tiree contained birds on spring passage, probably from Islay.

However, regular counts through winter 2006/07 indicate that c 1,415–2,456 birds were present on Coll that winter and the decline on that island in winter 2007/08 (maximum count 167 birds) was real.

### Internationally and nationally important sites

A site is internationally important if it regularly supports one percent or more of the individuals in a population (following criterion five of the Ramsar Convention, Wetlands International 2006). In Britain, a site is considered nationally important if it regularly holds one percent or more of the British total. Assessments of site importance are usually made on the basis of a minimum of three years' data, but in the absence of regular counts at many of these sites, we have here assessed the 2008 count against one percent of the international and British estimates obtained during this census (705 and 582 Greenland Barnacle Geese respectively).

The 2008 census found eight sites that exceeded the national threshold, and, of these, seven sites that exceeded internationally important numbers. The number of sites in Scotland exceeding internationally important numbers shows a long term decline although it has increased slightly since 1994 (Figure 5).

Those sites exceeding the threshold for national importance in the 2008 census are listed in Table 4. Many of these sites are protected wholly, or in part, by classification as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the EC Birds Directive. Oronsay, Isle of Danna and South Walls all held more than one percent of the international total in 2008, but are not classified as SPAs. The latter is omitted from the current SPA boundary, despite consistently exceeding internationally important numbers since the 1980s, on the basis that it is an area of largely agricultural rather than natural or seminatural habitat. However, the principal roost site for this flock, on Switha, is an SPA. It is important to note that the site boundaries used in this census may not match site boundaries of SPAs, so the numbers quoted are indicative only. For example, over 44,000 Barnacle Geese were counted on Islay in March 2008, and some, but not all, of these use three SPAs where the geese are a qualifying species. Similarly on Coll and Tiree, geese counted there roost and feed both within and outwith the SPA boundary. The number of Greenland Barnacle Geese wintering within and outwith SPAs merits further analysis.

The suite of protected areas in Scotland that have Greenland Barnacle Goose as a qualifying species, the proportion of the population that they support, and the current level of monitoring

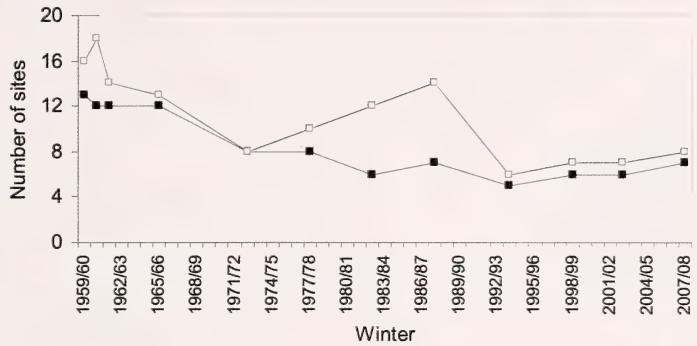


Figure 5. Number of sites in Britain (Scotland) holding nationally (□) or internationally (■) important numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese in census years, 1959/60–2007/08.

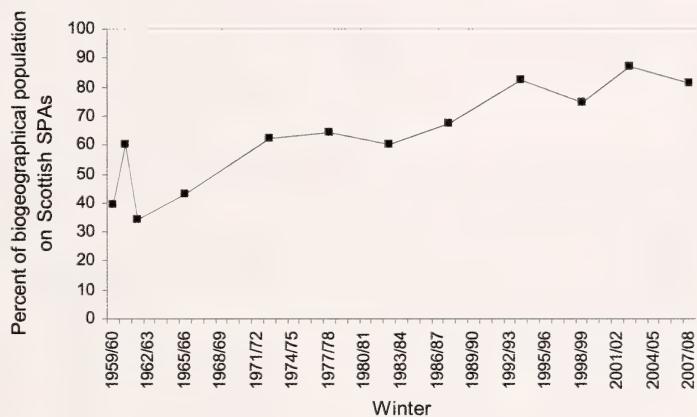


Figure 6. The percentage of the total (biogeographical) population of Greenland Barnacle Geese using SPAs in Scotland, 1959/60–2007/08.

**Table 4. Sites holding more than 1% of international or British totals of Greenland Barnacle Geese in March 2008 and their conservation status.**

Site name	SPA classification ( <i>italics denote those sites where Barnacle Geese are a qualifying feature of the SPA</i> )
<b>Sites holding &gt;705 birds:</b>	
Islay	<i>Gruinart Flats, Laggan, Bridgend Flats, Rhinns of Islay, Eilean na Muice Duibhe</i>
Tiree	<i>Sleibhtean agus Cladach Thiriodh</i>
South Walls, Orkney	<i>Switha</i> (the main roost of the South Walls flock is an SPA)
Oronsay	
Eilean Hoan	<i>North Sutherland Coastal Islands</i>
Boreray	<i>North Uist Machair and Islands</i>
Isle of Danna	
<b>Additional sites holding &gt;582 birds:</b>	
Balranald/Goula	<i>North Uist Machair and Islands</i>

**Table 5. Percentage of the national and international population of Greenland Barnacle Geese present in the protected area network in Scotland in March 2008, and their current level of monitoring. See text for discussion on site use by geese.**

Site Name	Site total in March 2008	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Level of monitoring
<b>SPA</b>				
Islay <sup>1</sup>	44,961	63.8%	77.1%	Annual
Coll <sup>2</sup>	167	0.2%	0.3%	Annual
Monach Isles	520	0.7%	0.9%	c. 5 years
North Sutherland Coastal Islands <sup>3</sup>	1,037	1.5%	1.8%	Annual (part)
North Uist Machair and Islands	1,870	4.0%	4.9%	Annual
Shiant Isles	224	0.3%	0.4%	c. 5 years
Switha <sup>4</sup>	1,612	2.3%	2.8%	Annual
Sleibhtean agus Cladach Thiriodh (Tiree Wetlands and Coast)	3,393	4.8%	5.8%	Annual
Treshnish Isles	207	0.3%	0.4%	c. 5 years
<b>SSSI</b>				
Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles	711	1.0%	1.2%	Annual
Pabbay <sup>5</sup>	0	0%	0%	Annual
Balranald Bog & Loch nam Feithean <sup>6</sup>	620	0.9%	1.1%	Annual
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55,322</b>	<b>78.5%</b>	<b>94.9%</b>	

1 Counts on Islay include the Gruinart Flats, Laggan and Bridgend Flats SPAs.

2 No Barnacle Geese were recorded on Gunna in March, 2008. The Coll figure (167 geese) will include all geese using southern Coll, Crossapol and Gunna.

3 Includes counts from Eilean Hoan/Durness (where monitoring is annual) and Eilean nan Ron/Kyle of Tongue (less than annual monitoring).

4 Barnacle Geese feed at South Walls, Orkney (non SPA) and roost on Switha.

5 Barnacle Geese are quite mobile within the Sound of Harris. In March, 2008 no Barnacle Geese were recorded on Pabbay, however they were probably feeding on Shillay (NF8891) where 300 geese were recorded.

6 Barnacle Geese are quite mobile along west North Uist. In March, 2008, 620 Barnacle Geese were recorded at Balranald, however this represents a minimum figure, since, an additional 360 geese were recorded at Paible/Balemore (NF7466) less than 5 km from Balranald.

are shown in Tables 4 & 5. In March 2008, four of the nine SPAs in Scotland (Coll, Monach Isles, Shiant Isles and Treshnish Isles) did not hold internationally or nationally important numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese, although overall, at the time of the census, the suite of SPAs in Scotland held 94.9% of the Scottish population, and 78.5% of the total population (Table 5). The overall proportion of the total biogeographical population using the Scottish SPAs is shown in Figure 6 and has shown a long term increase, although this is heavily affected by the inclusion of counts from Islay. The island supports five SPAs of which three have Greenland Barnacle Goose as a qualifying species (see Table 4). However, the geese occur over much of the managed grassland on Islay, both within and outwith the SPA boundaries.

The number of Greenland Barnacle Geese has increased at six of the nine SPAs in Scotland (Islay, Tiree Wetlands and Coast, Coll, North Sutherland Coastal Islands, North Uist Machair and Islands, and Switha (South Walls) (Figure 7a,b,c,e,f,i). All six sites either hold, or are close to, relatively large areas of managed grassland, particularly on Islay. Three SPAs have shown a decline in usage, despite a dramatic increase in the overall population (Figure 7d,g,h), namely the Treshnish Isles, Shiant Isles and Monach Isles, which are relatively small offshore islands with no

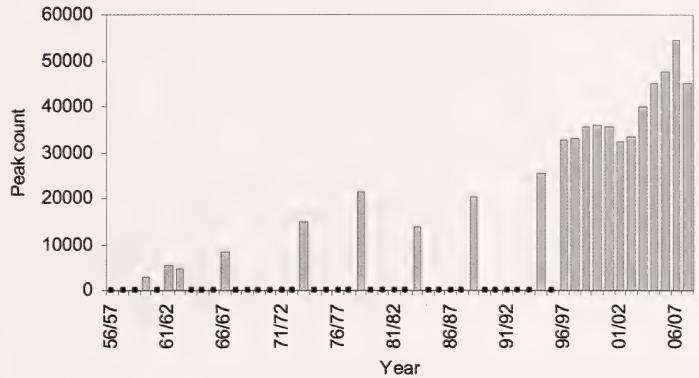
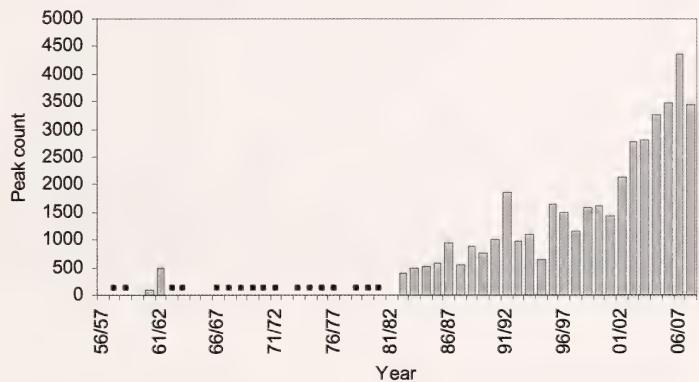
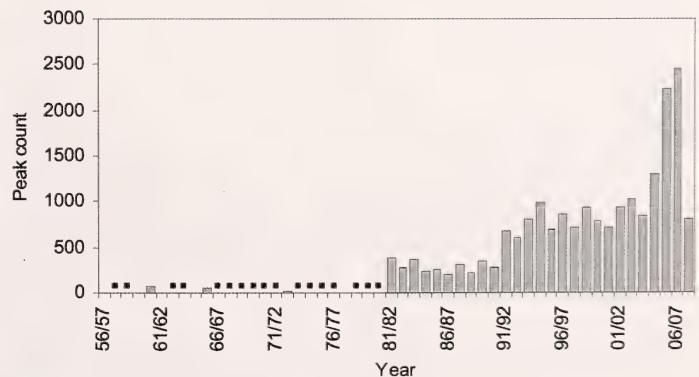
Figure 7a. *Islay*Figure 7b. *Tiree*Figure 7c. *Coll*

Figure 7a–c. Maximum winter numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese, 1956–2008, at SPAs in Scotland. Dots indicate years when no data were collected.

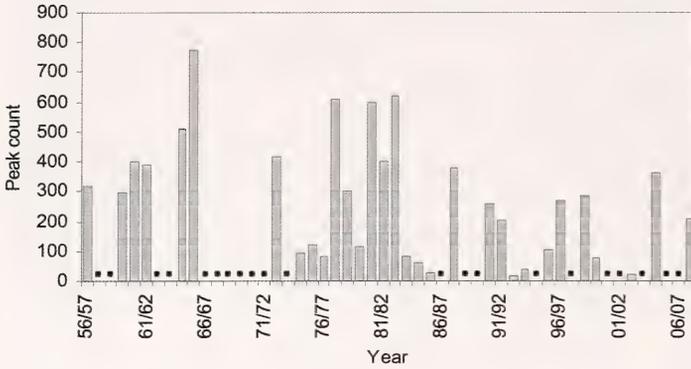


Figure 7d. *Treshnish Isles*

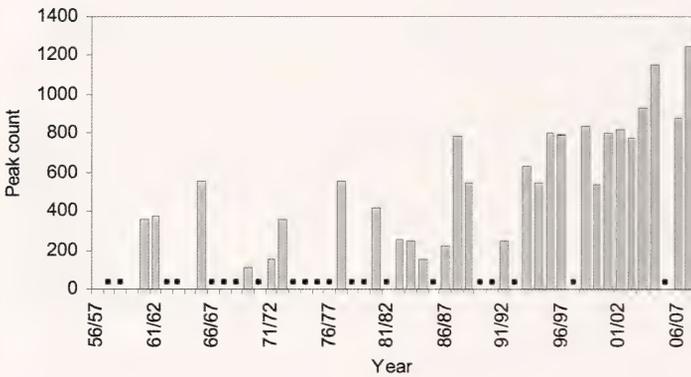


Figure 7e. *North Sutherland coast*

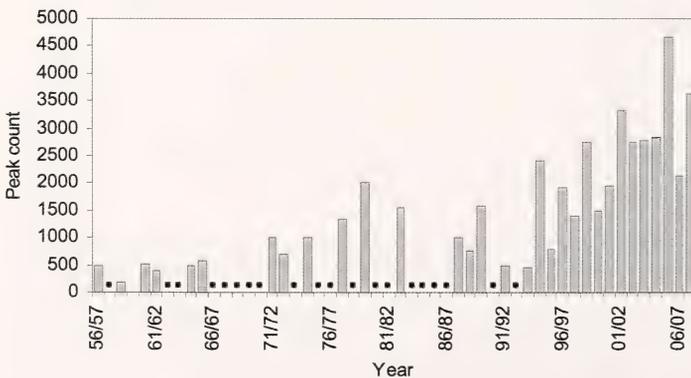


Figure 7f. *North Uist coast and islands*

Figure 7d–f. Maximum winter numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese, 1956–2008, at SPAs in Scotland. Dots indicate years when no data were collected.

areas of managed grassland, although to some degree, all have been summer-grazed by sheep. Summer-grazing has been identified as an important requirement for over-wintering Barnacle Geese (see Ogilvie *et al.* 1999). Any reductions in this management may be having a detrimental effect on numbers wintering at these sites.

The generally accepted international timetable for the revision of waterbird population estimates is every three years, with the one percent thresholds revised once every nine years (Rose & Stroud 1994). The current monitoring programme of one international census every five years is, therefore, inadequate in terms of providing sufficient understanding of changes in numbers, and the distribution and use of sites throughout the wintering range. It is therefore recommended that the frequency of the international census should be increased to once every three years in order to better fulfil these objectives. However, to be effective, an increase in the frequency of coordinated censuses would require the participation of all countries holding wintering Greenland Barnacle Geese, e.g. Ireland and Wales.

Evidence from the northward spring migration of Greenland White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris* during the late 1990s and early 2000s, suggest that the mean departure dates from Ireland/Scotland and the mean arrival dates in Iceland occur earlier in the spring

than previously (A.D. Fox *pers comm*). The anomaly between counts of Greenland Barnacle Geese on Coll and Tiree in late March 2007 and mid-March 2008 also suggest that in some springs, movements north, probably from Islay, starts before April. Thus, it seems prudent to carry out future aerial surveys in either early or mid-March to avoid this phenomenon.

### Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the many people who took part in the census. Margaret McKay and numerous counters undertook ground counts on Islay. Pat & Dave Batty, John Bowler, Paul Boyer, Jamie Boyle, Nigel Buxton, Kenny Graham, Ben Jones, Russell Jones, Alison MacLennan, Bob McMillan, Eric Meek, Donald Mitchell, Malcolm Ogilvie, Mike Peacock, Martin Scott, Dave Sexton, Stuart Shaw, Dylan de Sylva and Fergus Younger provided counts and valuable advice about the status of winter flocks. Apologies to anyone inadvertently omitted. Aerial counts were greatly assisted by pilot Ian Lawson and we would like to thank Ravenair for providing both pilot and plane. We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution from Scottish Natural Heritage and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust for the survey in Scotland and from the National Parks and Wildlife Service for survey in Ireland. Comments on an earlier draft of this report were provided by David Stroud, Peter Cranswick, Richard Hearn and Baz Hughes.

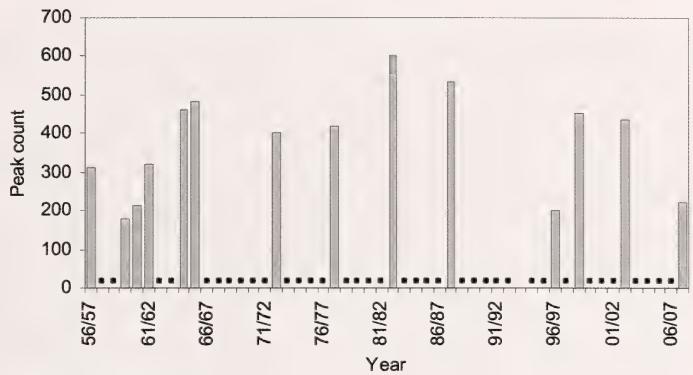


Figure 7g. *Shiant*s

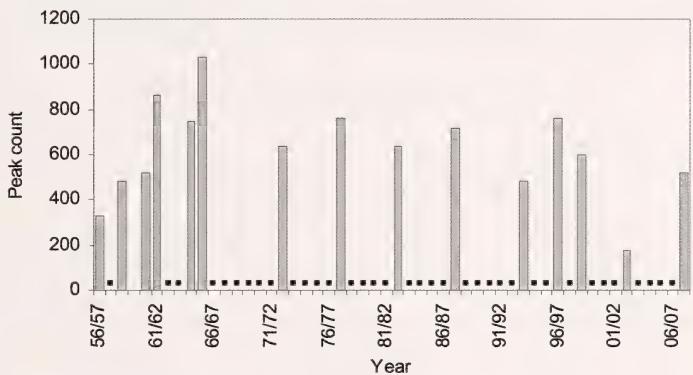


Figure 7h. *Monach Isles*

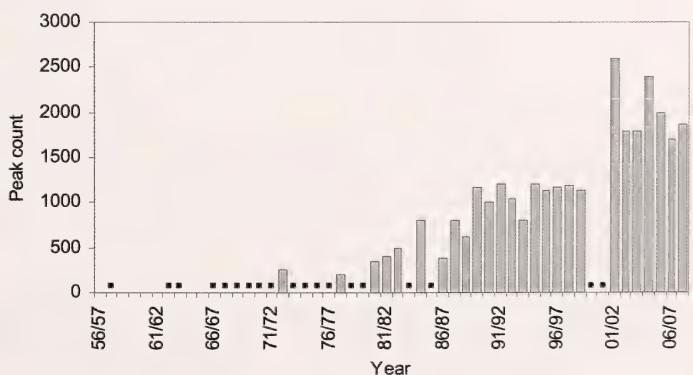


Figure 7i. *South Walls*

Figure 7g–i. Maximum winter numbers of Greenland Barnacle Geese, 1956–2008, at SPAs in Scotland. Dots indicate years when no data were collected.



Plate 87. The survey aircraft © Carl Mitchell.

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*Revised ms accepted January 2009*

Plate 88. Red-throated Diver, Shetland, July 2007 © hughharrop.com.



## The status and distribution of breeding Red-throated Divers in Shetland in 2006

T.D. SMITH, J.D. OKILL, P.M. ELLIS & I.A. DILLON

*In 2006, there was a full census of breeding Red-throated Divers on Shetland as part of a national survey to determine the size of the population and the change in numbers and distribution since 1994. All suitable habitats were surveyed twice between the middle of May and the end of July.*

*Population size for confirmed breeding pairs and the total number of adults was estimated as in 1994. The number of breeding pairs was corrected to allow for undetected breeding pairs as in the 1983 and 1994 surveys.*

*The corrected total for confirmed breeding pairs was 407, comprising 63% of the total adult population of 1286. These totals represent 32% and 31% of the 2006 UK numbers of breeding pairs and adults respectively. This, along with average densities higher than those in Scotland as a whole and in its constituent regions, confirms Shetland as the most important region for breeding Red-throated Divers.*

*Comparing 2006 results with those in 1994 show a decline of 4.7% in breeding pairs and an increase of 5.9% in the overall number of adults. The proportion of the total adult population that bred was 70% in 1994 and 63% in 2006. Breeding pairs had declined steeply between 1983 and 1994. Long-term data suggest that some of the apparent decline since 1994 may be due to annual fluctuation in the proportion of adults that breed. Accordingly, and given the increase in the total number of adults, the population since 1994 may be described as stable but without any recovery towards pre-1994 numbers.*

*Some possible reasons for changes in numbers are given.*

## Introduction

The Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* has a circumpolar breeding distribution including the boreal and subarctic regions of Asia, North America and Europe. The species typically nests close to the edge of small, oligotrophic lakes and pools.

The European breeding population is estimated by Burfield & van Bommel (2004) as 32,000–92,000 pairs, equivalent to 5–24% of the global population (92,000 to 182,000 pairs, Wetland International 2006). Following a large decline between 1970 and 1990, they describe numbers between 1990 and 2000 as stable. However, these assessments are based on data described as mainly of poor to medium quality. Its European conservation status is SPEC 3 (Tucker & Heath 1994, Burfield & van Bommel 2004) with a provisional European status of 'depleted', on the basis of a large historical decline.



Plate 89. Red-throated Diver, Norway, June 2008 © Edmund Fellowes.

In the United Kingdom, it breeds exclusively in Scotland, primarily the north and west, and sporadically or sparsely in the north-east and south-west. Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides hold the bulk of the population, with the breeding range also encompassing the north, north-east and west Highlands, the Inner Hebrides, and the mainland south to Argyll. There is also a small breeding population in the Republic of Ireland.

Generally, adults are present on the British breeding grounds from April to September with an extended laying period from early May to late July (Gomersall *et al.* 1984). Some adults can be back on lochs from March or exceptionally February.

In winter, the species primarily inhabits sheltered inshore waters, very occasionally freshwater, mainly from western Norway to Brittany (Cramp & Simmons 1977). Parrack (in Lack 1986) estimated that up to 15,000 individuals wintered around the North Sea and Atlantic coasts of Britain and Ireland). However, data from aerial counts conducted between 2001 and 2006, supplemented with county bird records and Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts, both from 1995 to 2005, gives a more recent, larger wintering population estimate of 17,116 individuals (O'Brien *et al.* 2008). This is probably due to more comprehensive monitoring rather than an actual increase.

Red-throated Divers breeding in the UK are short-distance migrants to inshore waters of the British Isles. Long-distance migrants, mainly from Scandinavia, winter in the southern North Sea as far as the Bay of Biscay (Okill in Wernham 2002).

Place names on early Shetland maps confirm its historical presence with the first written reference in 1733. In the 19th century, numbers and range were limited by collectors of eggs and specimens, and persecution by fishermen (Holloway 1996). At that time, the stronghold was thought to be west Sutherland and the Outer Hebrides with numbers in Orkney and Shetland relatively low compared to more recent distribution. A few pairs bred in County Donegal, Republic of Ireland in the late 19th century.

Red-throated Divers were present in substantial numbers on Mainland north of Lerwick and Yell, but not breeding on Foula, Fetlar and south Mainland, in the late 1800s (Okill in Pennington *et al.* 2004).

The Shetland breeding population increased between the middle of the 18th century and the 1950s (Venables & Venables 1955). The species was described as rare on Unst in the second part of the 18th century, but breeding regularly there along with Bressay, Burra West, Fetlar, Foula, Hascosay, Mainland & Muckle Roe, Papa Stour and Yell by early to mid-20th century (Venables & Venables 1955). An increase in numbers and range in North Roe, Walls, Sandness and 'other localities' is recorded but only a single pair on Foula. Gomersall *et al.* (1984) report a possible increase of c. 16% between the mid-1970s and early 1980s.

The UK breeding range expanded during the first half of the 20th century (Sharrock 1976, Thom 1986, Holloway 1996). Parslow (1973) described the species as 'scarce' with an estimated 100 to 1,000 pairs. However, prior to the first Breeding Atlas (Sharrock 1976) knowledge of overall population size in Britain was poor.

A minimum estimate of 750 breeding pairs is made for 1968 to 1972 (the period of the first Breeding Atlas) for Britain and Ireland (Sharrock 1976). This included the small population in NW Ireland. Comparison of the distribution map with those from 1890 (after Harvie-Brown, in Sharrock 1976) and in Holloway (1996) demonstrates the range extension in Scotland, primarily in Shetland, Orkney, the Inner Hebrides and Kintyre.

A partial survey of Shetland in 1976 (Bundy 1978) covered Unst, Yell, Fetlar and North Roe (Mainland) with limited coverage around Sullom Voe (Mainland) and located 334 breeding pairs.

After monitoring of study areas in Northmavine (Mainland), Fetlar and Yell in 1981 and 1982 (Gomersall 1981, 1982), a full survey to determine the numbers and distribution of breeding Red-throated Divers in Shetland was carried out in 1983 (Gomersall *et al.* 1984). Unst, Yell, Northmavine & West Mainland were surveyed twice, Fetlar, Noss & Mousa more frequently, and the rest of Shetland once. A total of 607 breeding pairs were located on 576 lochs. Surveying at 10-day intervals in Shetland during 1981 and 1982 established that a proportion of those adults recorded as non-breeding by a survey strategy comprising two visits will have attempted to breed. This was as a result of breeding activity occurring outside the period of survey visits to a square or breeding evidence being overlooked. Comparing the different rates of detection of breeding pairs by varying visit frequencies allowed an estimate for these overlooked breeding pairs of 12% of the apparently non-breeding adults. Accordingly, this figure was applied as a correction factor, giving a corrected total of breeding pairs of 702. The Shetland breeding population was confirmed as a substantial proportion of the national total. The highest nesting densities were nine pairs per km<sup>2</sup> (in Northmavine) and eight pairs per km<sup>2</sup> (on Yell) and these two areas held 50% of the 1983 breeding population. Evidence of diver activity was recorded on 873 lochs. These results suggested an increase of 12 to 21% since the 1976 survey, although considerable differences in methods mean that only broad comparisons are possible.

Regular monitoring, with various visit strategies, of breeding numbers in Unst, Yell, Fetlar, Bressay, Northmavine and Foula recorded peak numbers in the early 1980s, declining until the early 1990s with a slight recovery thereafter. The most likely reason for this variation was thought to be fluctuating food availability (Okill in Pennington *et al.* 2004).

Thom (1986) estimated the population at 1,000 to 1,200 breeding pairs while Batten *et al.* (1990) gave an estimate of 1,200 to 1,500 pairs for the British breeding population.

Gibbons *et al.* (1993) estimated a maximum of 1,425 breeding pairs for 1988 to 1991 (the period of the New Breeding Atlas) for Britain and Ireland, including c. 10 pairs in NW Ireland. This represents a 23% increase since 1968 to 1972 in the number of 10-km squares with records but this is at least partly explained by the more comprehensive data from Shetland. The change map shows range expansion eastwards in west Grampian and east Highland while the abundance map confirms the importance of Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and north-west Highlands.

During the first national survey in 1994 (Gibbons *et al.* 1997), two visits were made to suitable habitat in Shetland and Orkney and to a randomly selected sample of 5-km squares in the rest of the breeding range. The UK population was estimated at 855 breeding pairs and 1,295 non-breeding adults. Estimates of survey efficiency similar to those used in 1983 (Gomersall *et al.* 1984) allowed corrections of breeding pairs to 935 and 1,135 non-breeding adults with 3,010 adults in all. Total numbers in Shetland were 390 breeding pairs, corrected to 427, and 1,214 adults in all. The survey confirmed the importance of Shetland for breeding Red-throated Divers with 46% of the UK breeding pairs and 40% of the UK adults.

### Methods:

Due to a moderate (25 to 49%) decline in the UK breeding population over the previous 25 years, Red-throated Diver is on the amber list of the Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK (Gregory *et al.* 2002). As a result of this status and because this species is not adequately monitored by generic surveys such as the BTO Breeding Birds Survey, it is monitored under the Statutory Conservation Agencies and RSPB Annual Breeding Bird Scheme (SCARABBS). In 2006, the second National Red-throated Diver Survey was carried out. The two main objectives of the survey were

to obtain a reliable estimate of the size of the breeding Red-throated Diver population in the UK, and to estimate the change in population size and distribution since the last survey in 1994.

In 1994, Shetland and Orkney were completely censused. In 2006, this full census was repeated in Shetland using the same methods as 1994, with all freshwater lochs being surveyed, enabling a direct comparison of the populations between the two years. This was achieved by a combination of RSPB Research and local staff, SNH staff, environmental consultancy fieldworkers, a PhD student, a Ranger, Shetland Bird Club members and local diver monitors. Wherever possible, each 5-km square was surveyed by one individual or set of fieldworkers.

Two visits were made between 15 May and 31 July to all freshwater lochs or lochans within each 5-km square, the first visit in late May or early June, with a minimum of two weeks and, where possible, a maximum of five weeks between the two visits. Visits were made at any time during daylight. Visits during periods of fog, prolonged rain and strong winds were avoided. All freshwater lochs or lochans were covered. Red-throated Divers can breed on very small lochans (a few square metres in area) on Shetland, some of which are not marked on the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer maps used by fieldworkers. Each 5-km square was thoroughly searched for all suitable habitat and all such areas were surveyed for Red-throated Divers on both visits. Areas within 500 m of habitation and areas of in-bye were deemed unsuitable for Red-throated Divers and were not visited. However, a few pairs were recorded opportunistically on lochs within such areas.

On the first visit to a square, each loch or dubh loch system, particularly islands and loch edges, was scanned from a discreet vantage point. The location and activity of any Red-throated Divers seen were recorded. If nesting activity was not observed, all lengths of suitable shoreline were searched for active or abandoned scrapes. This was also done if a scrape was located on a loch thought large enough to hold more than one pair. Fresh scrapes were differentiated from those of previous breeding seasons. The latter will tend to have a little vegetation growing through them, whereas scrapes which are currently in use will be flattened due to occupation by the adults. Old egg fragments are bleached white but those from the current season are olive brown.



Plate 90. Red-throated Diver, Shetland, July 2007 © Rebecca Nason.

On the second visit to a square, all suitable habitat within the square was searched again as above, with efforts to confirm occupancy or breeding at all locations where single birds were noted on the earlier visit.

Disturbance was kept to a minimum, breeding pairs being located by observation from a distance wherever possible. The only nest visits occurred when scrapes were initially located during shoreline searches. Red-throated Divers are protected against unauthorised disturbance by Schedule 1 of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, so all survey workers worked under licence from Scottish Natural Heritage. All fieldworkers employed by RSPB secured access permission for entering private land prior to survey work, and adhered to the Scottish Countryside Access Code. Volunteers were advised to do the same.

On each visit, the following data were recorded:

- the number of pairs and apparently unpaired individuals
- any breeding evidence found including nest contents
- the number of breeding attempts (nest scrapes located and broods observed) and
- the number and size (less than 2/3 grown; more than 2/3 grown) of chicks seen.

### Calculation of population estimates

Adults incubating or brooding, eggs, remains of eggs (shell fragments or predated eggs) or chicks (dead or alive) were accepted as evidence of confirmed breeding. Single adults and pairs lacking any of the evidence above were recorded as non-breeding birds. These two categories together produced an estimate of the total number of adult birds.

The 1994 survey estimated the total population size using two measures: a. & d. below

- a. Number of breeding pairs - giving a minimum population size
- b. Maximum number of adults on lochs with no breeding evidence but with adults on one or two visits
- c. Maximum number of non-breeding adults on lochs containing breeding pairs
- d. = (2a) + b + c, giving a maximum population size.

The number of breeding pairs and the total number of individual adults were used as the final population estimates. The numbers of lochs with divers in each of the above categories were recorded. These measures were repeated for the 2006 data, enabling direct comparison between the two surveys.

Using base-line data from monitoring visits at 10-day intervals in 1981 and 1982, Gomersall (1981) assessed the effectiveness of different intervals between, total period and numbers of, visits. In 1982, a key aim was to further investigate the efficacy of different monitoring practices. It was found that two survey visits in the period 1 June to 31 July detected between 61% and 96% of the total number of breeding pairs found with the 10-day visit interval (nine days between 17 May and 15 August in 1981 and 12 days between 3 May and 30 August in 1982). From these figures, 88% was taken as the most accurate correction factor for breeding attempts missed by two visits in June and July. This factor was applied to the results of a full survey to determine the numbers and distribution of breeding Red-throated Divers in Shetland in 1983 (Gomersall *et al.* 1984) and to the data of the first national survey in 1994 (Gibbons *et al.* 1997) to adjust the total number of breeding pairs.

After monitoring of study areas in Northmavine (Mainland), Fetlar and Yell in 1981 and 1982 (Gomersall 1981, 1982, Gomersall *et al.* 1984) Unst, Yell, Northmavine & West Mainland were surveyed twice, Fetlar, Noss & Mousa more frequently, and the rest of Shetland once. A total of 607 breeding pairs were located on 576 lochs. Surveying at 10-day intervals in Shetland during

1981 and 1982 established that a proportion of those adults recorded as non-breeding by a survey strategy comprising two visits will have attempted to breed. This was due to breeding activity occurring outside the period of survey visits to a square or breeding evidence being overlooked. Comparing the different rates of detection of breeding pairs by varying visit frequencies allowed an estimate for these overlooked breeding pairs of 12% of the apparently non-breeding adults.

## Results

### 2006 Coverage

Of the 137 Shetland 5-km squares, seven were assessed as having no habitat suitable for breeding Red-throated Divers from examination of OS 1:25,000 maps and local advice. Five comprised sea stacks exclusively and the other two only sheer sea cliffs. Accordingly, first survey visits were made to 130 squares. Of these squares, 15 proved to have no suitable habitat on the first survey visit and were not revisited. This left 115 squares with suitable breeding habitat, of which all but one were surveyed twice.

One square comprised only uninhabited 'islets', some with suitable breeding habitat, and nine further squares included islets with apparently suitable habitat as well as parts of the mainland. The former square and the islets in one of the other nine were visited once each. The lack of boats meeting current Health and Safety requirements precluded a second visit to this square and these islets, and any visits to the islets in the other eight squares.

There has never been a breeding attempt on Fair Isle which has only two pools on which Red-throated Divers could land (Deryk Shaw pers. comm.). All recent records (since 2000) have been of birds overflying the island with a very few records of birds alighting in previous years. Accordingly, Fair Isle was not formally surveyed. However, very thorough bird monitoring is carried out daily during migration and the breeding season. Within the survey period, only six divers were recorded, all flying over.

### 2006 Results

Data are for the 115 5-km squares with suitable habitat.

**Table 1. Uncorrected population figures for Shetland in 2006.**

Confirmed breeding pairs	Non-breeding pairs	Non-breeding singles	Non-breeding adults	Total number of adults
375	192	152	536	1,286

Mainland had 58% of all the breeding pairs in Shetland, Yell 20%, Unst 9%, Fetlar 7%, Foula and Whalsay 2% each and Bressay 1%. Papa Stour and Noss have less than 1% each.

Venables & Venables (1955) give information on the presence/absence of lochs and of breeding Red-throated Divers for six uninhabited islets unvisited in 2006. Balta has no lochs, Hascosay has two, Vailla one marsh and Vementry numerous lochs. No loch information was given for Samphrey and Papa Little. Regular breeding was reported on Vementry with none on the other five. In 2006, West Linga, Hildasay and Oxna & Cheynies were surveyed while for the other islets, supplementary information on current or recent numbers of breeding divers allowed a rough estimate of nine breeding pairs that may have been missed. Adding these pairs to the uncorrected total would give 384 confirmed breeding pairs in 2006. But this estimate was not included in the figures for the 2006 survey.

Densities per square km are calculated from the total numbers of breeding pairs and adults in each surveyed 5-km square. Thus, densities are the average per km<sup>2</sup> across the land area of each 5-km square, and not those for individual 1-km squares.

The average and maximum densities per 1-km square for all 5-km squares were 0.3 and 2.4 for confirmed breeding pairs. The corresponding figures for the total number of adults were 1.0 and 5.6. Figures 1 and 2 show the average densities per 1-km<sup>2</sup> square for all 5-km squares with habitat (n=115) for pairs and adults respectively.

There were 39 5-km squares with no confirmed breeding pairs. Of the 79 squares with non-breeding birds, 74 held breeding pairs as well, leaving five with non-breeding divers only. There were 34 squares with no recorded divers.

The number of lochs used by breeding pairs was 365 (60.8% of the total used), by apparently non-breeding pairs and singles 235 and by both breeding pairs and apparently non-breeding pairs and singles 25, giving a total number of used lochs of 600.

In 2006, the number of occupied lochs in the UK increased significantly ( $P \leq 0.05$ ) from an estimated 1,599 in 1994 to 2,177 (95% C.I. 1,729 to 2,744), 37%, while in Shetland the corresponding increase was from 583 to 600, 28%.

### Corrected figures

In common with the 1994 survey, the total number of breeding pairs and non-breeding adults were corrected for overlooked breeding pairs by applying the estimates of efficiency in locating breeding pairs applied in the 1983 Shetland survey (Gomersall *et al.* 1984). The correction factor for missed pairs is 12% of the total of non-breeding adults.

The corrected figures for 2006 are 407 breeding pairs (63.3% of the total adult population) and 472 non-breeding adults, the nine pairs estimated for the islets unsurveyed in 2006 having been excluded. Analysis and comparisons are based on the totals recorded during the actual survey in 2006.

**Table 2. The Shetland population in relation to the UK total in 2006.**

	Confirmed breeding pairs	Total number of adults	Occupied lochs	Breeding lochs
UK with 95% CIs	1,255 (1,014–1,551)	4,146 (3,430–4,992)	2177	1,120*
Shetland	407	1,286	600	365*
% of UK	32	31	28	33

\*Uncorrected figures.

In 2006, breeding numbers on Orkney appeared to have declined slightly but are best regarded as stable (Dillon *et al.* 2009). Outwith the Northern Isles, the breeding population increased significantly by 83% and the total number of adults by 73%. On the Outer and Inner Hebrides, breeding pairs increased by an estimated 139% and 144% respectively. Changes in mainland Scotland were much less striking.

Shetland had the highest numbers and average densities of both breeding pairs and adults and remains the most important region for breeding Red-throated Divers. However, it is worth noting that the proportion of adults attempting to breed was highest in the Outer Hebrides and lower on the mainland than anywhere else in Scotland.

### Comparisons between 1983, 1994 and 2006

#### Coverage

Data from 95 5-km squares with suitable habitat were used in Gibbons *et al.* (1997) while the number surveyed in 2006 was 115. Three squares surveyed in 1994 were found to have no suitable habitat in 2006, probably as a result of pools drying out since the earlier survey. This left 95

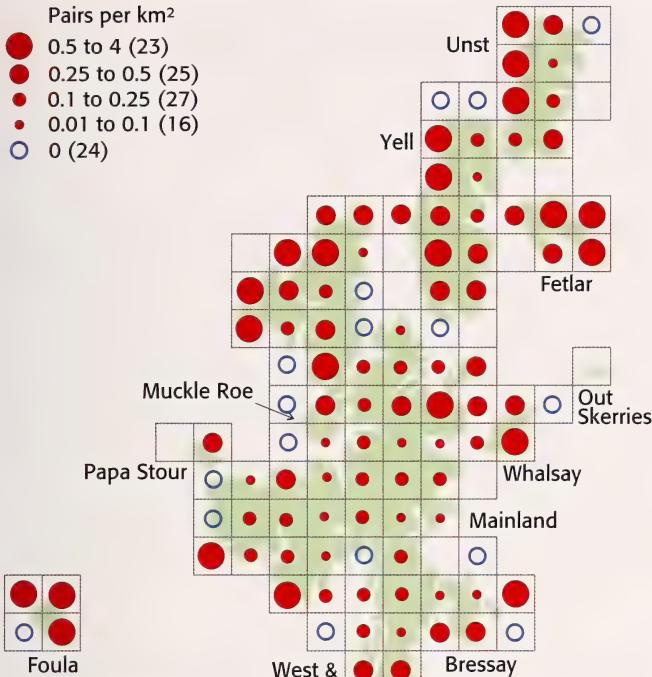


Figure 1. Average densities of confirmed breeding pairs of Red-throated Diver in Shetland in 2006 ( $n = 115$ ).

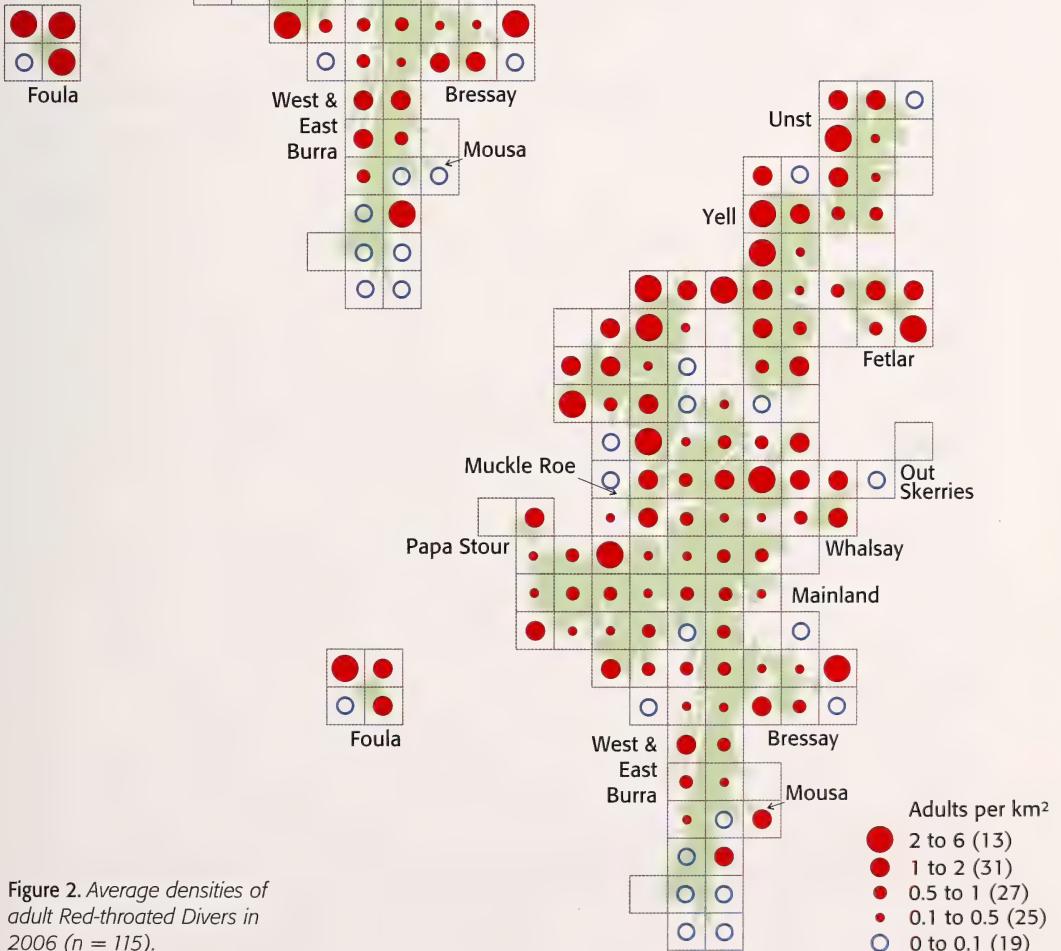


Figure 2. Average densities of adult Red-throated Divers in 2006 ( $n = 115$ ).

squares with suitable habitat surveyed in both years. Of the 20 squares surveyed in 2006 but not in 1994, only four had divers recorded in them, of which three held breeding pairs (two, one and one pairs respectively). One of these three squares had a non-breeding pair and a single adult as well, while the fourth square held only a single adult. Thus, the different coverage between the two surveys produced only a minimal difference in overall records.

## Results

Gomersall *et al.* (1984) does not give totals for non-breeding adults or all adults.

The correction factor is not applicable to the data for all adults and for loch occupation.

The uncorrected totals for breeding pairs were 607 in 1983, 390 in 1994 and 375 in 2006. Those for non-breeding adults were 434 in 1994 and 536 in 2006.

In 2006, the highest number of breeding pairs in any 5-km square was 30 and of all adults 95. In 1994, the same 5-km square recorded the maxima of 27 pairs and 88 adults.

Of these 95 5-km squares, four had no breeding pairs in 1994 and six (different) squares held none in 2006. All 95 squares held adults in 1994 whereas two of these had none in 2006. These figures apply to whole 5-km squares without regard to the land area in each.

**Table 3. Comparative figures and lochs Shetland in 1983, 1994 and 2006.**

Shetland				% Change		
	1983	1994	2006	1983–94	1994–2006	1983–2006
Breeding pairs*	702	427	407	-39.2	-4.7	-42.0
Non-breeders*	no data	360	472	n/a	31.1	n/a
Breeders/Adults %*	no data	70	63	n/a	-10.0	n/a
All adults	no data	1214	1286	n/a	5.9	n/a
Occupied lochs	873	583	600	-33.0	3.0	-31.3
Breeding lochs/Occupied lochs %	66	65	61	-1.5	-6.2	-7.6

### \* Corrected figures

The proportion of breeding pairs presents a mixed picture. It was lower in 1988 to 1991 with twice the number of non-breeders (Gibbons *et al.* 1993) than in 1968 to 1972 (Sharrock 1976). But there were fewer empty scrapes in 1994 (Gibbons *et al.* 1997) than in 1983 (Gomersall *et al.* 1984).

**Table 4. Shetland & UK trends 1994 to 2006.**

	Confirmed breeding pairs*	Total number of adults*	Occupied lochs	Breeding lochs
UK trends	34%	38%	36%	34%
Shetland trends	-4.7%	5.9%	3%	-3%

### \*Corrected figures

The correction factor is not applied to the data for density, all adults and loch occupation. The following evaluation uses uncorrected figures from both years.

**Table 5. Occupied and breeding lochs in 1994 and 2006.**

	1994 UK	1994 Shetland	% of UK	2006 % of UK
Occupied lochs	1,599	583	36.5	28
Breeding lochs	833	377	45.3	33

The proportion of occupied lochs with breeding pairs fell slightly from 1983 to 2006 while the number of lochs with non-breeding adults increased by 48% up to 1994 and by 13% from then to 2006

Density data is for the 95 5-km squares surveyed in both 1994 and 2006. Densities given are the average per km<sup>2</sup> across the land area of each 5-km square. For breeding pairs, four squares with infinite percentage increases in pairs (i.e. up from 0 in 1994) are included as greater than 300%.

Densities per km<sup>2</sup> are calculated from the total numbers of breeding pairs and adults in each surveyed 5-km square. Thus, densities are the average per km<sup>2</sup> across the land area of each 5-km square, and not those for individual 1-km squares.

The average density per km<sup>2</sup> for breeding pairs was 0.42 in 1994 and 0.35 in 2006. The corresponding figure for all adults is 1.10 and 1.11 respectively. These figures reflect the greater proportion of non-breeders in the population in 2006.

Figure 3 shows the percentage change between 1994 and 2006 in the average density of confirmed breeding pairs per km<sup>2</sup> square for each 5-km square (n = 95). It shows a general decline overall but with local variations, suggesting relatively stable numbers on Yell. Numbers on Fetlar and Northmavine show moderate increases and on Unst a slight increase. The population has declined slightly on Foula but considerably in the rest of Mainland and its associated islands.

Figure 4 shows the same changes for the total number of adults (n = 95). It suggests declines in Unst, Yell and Foula. There are apparent increases in Fetlar and Northmavine while the rest of Mainland appears to be stable.

## Discussion

### 2006 Results

Densities given are the average per km<sup>2</sup> across the land area of each 5-km square.

Figure 1 shows clusters of squares with relatively high densities of breeding pairs in NW Unst, Fetlar, Yell, Northmavine (north Mainland), Whalsay and north-east Mainland, and Foula. In contrast, south Mainland has only a few scattered squares of high density amid predominantly low-density squares. Although not directly comparable with pair densities due to the different ranges of density employed, the distribution of adult density (Figure 2) is broadly similar, with concentrations in west Unst, west Yell, Fetlar, Northmavine and Eshaness (both Mainland) and Foula. Density is lower in central and south Mainland.

The detailed and consistent monitoring of breeding Red-throated Divers, particularly brood size and fledging data, in selected areas of Shetland since 1982 allows a very reliable comparison of 2006 diver breeding numbers and success in these areas with those in previous years. Successful pairs were defined as those with chicks (the majority) or eggs during the period of ringing visits - 14 to 27 July 2006 with dates in other years the same or very similar. For the period of 1982 to 2006, the maximum number of successful breeding pairs was 66, the average 50 and the minimum 32. There were 39 successful breeding pairs in 2006, 78% of the overall average for the 27 years, compared to 58 in 1994, 116% of the overall average.

Annual fluctuations in breeding numbers and success limit the usefulness of comparisons between individual years. Tharme *et al.* (1996) presents figures from long-term monitoring for breeding pairs on Fetlar, Foula, Lumbister and the south Yell Quadrat, all of which show annual fluctuations ranging from moderate to very great. However, grouping the data for the 27 years into five-year periods reduces the effects of 'atypical' seasons when the number of successful breeding pairs for 2006 is compared with averages over five years.

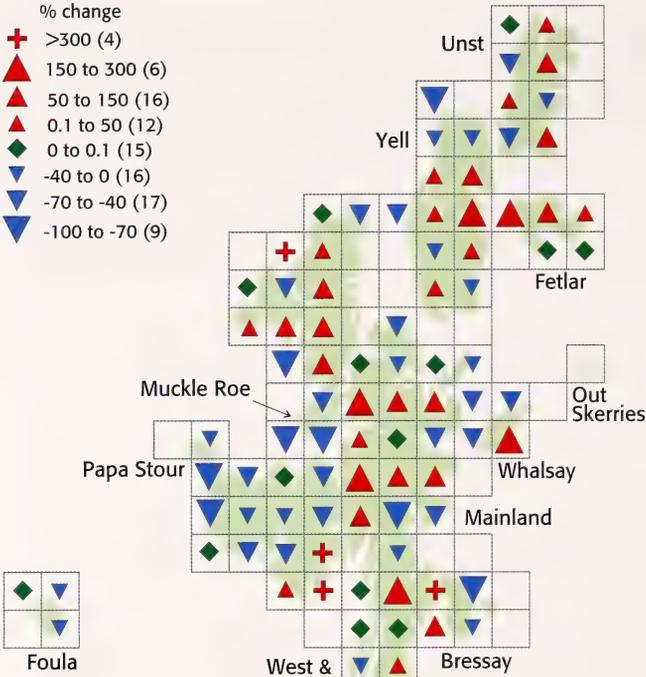


Figure 3. Change in average densities of confirmed breeding pairs of Red-throated Divers in Shetland between 1994 and 2006 (n = 95).

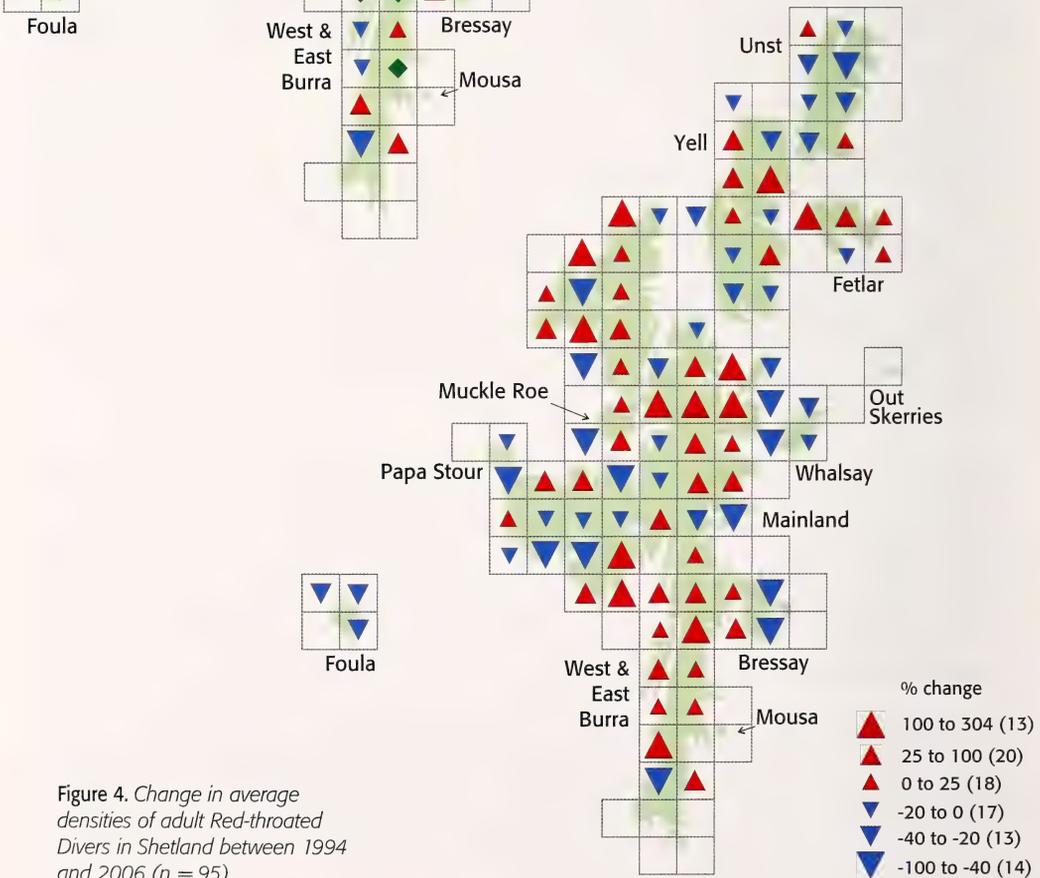


Figure 4. Change in average densities of adult Red-throated Divers in Shetland between 1994 and 2006 (n = 95).

Comparing the individual survey years with their respective five-year bands, the number of successful breeding pairs in 2006 was 93% of the average for 2002 to 2006 while the figure for 1994 was 104% of the 1990 to 1994 average, suggesting that 2006 was a relatively poor breeding season and 1994 relatively better.

Thus, part of the decline in breeding pairs recorded in 2006 relative to 1994 may be due to comparing a year (2006) with a less than average breeding population with one (1994) with a more than average breeding population.

The 2006 National Red-throated Diver Survey investigated an alternative method of correcting for pairs missed in the field. Undetected breeding pairs are most likely to have been those for which an empty scrape (but no other evidence of breeding) was found during the two visits. Each empty scrape (with or without associated divers) was counted as a breeding pair in addition to the number of confirmed breeding pairs. On Shetland in 2006, this method produced a total of 425 breeding pairs.

However, Bundy (1978) treated 'abandoned but used' scrapes as breeding pairs. It appears that some, but not all, of these used scrapes held eggshell fragments. Gomersall (1981, 1982) and Gomersall *et al.* (1984) did not treat empty scrapes as acceptable evidence of breeding since territories can include more than one loch and copulation platforms, which can't be reliably distinguished from nesting scrapes, can occur on both nesting and adjacent lochs. Gibbons *et al.* (1997) adhered to this approach. The UK survey results including empty scrapes were thought to overestimate the breeding population by a considerable margin. Accordingly, this calculation was not used for either the final 2006 figures for the UK (Dillon *et al.* 2009) or those for Shetland.

### Population changes between 1983, 1994 and 2006

For the islets unsurveyed in 2006, some of the corresponding 5-km squares were not included in Gibbons *et al.* (1997) and nor were any of the remaining islets. Accordingly excluding the nine pairs estimated for 2006 from the comparison is unlikely to affect trends between 1994 and 2006.

The differences in survey methods, particularly the number and timing of visits, between the 1983 survey (Gomersall *et al.* 1984) and those in 1994 and 2006 necessitate a degree of caution when comparing the results. However, the changes in population figures between 1983 and 1994 are so great that they demonstrate a real and very considerable decline.

Tharme *et al.* (1996) compare the results of the 1983 and 1994 surveys and found marked declines in breeding pairs in some of the key breeding areas, particularly Northmavine -34%, Unst -32%, central Mainland -40%, west Mainland -33% and Yell -52%. The percentage of the total Shetland population fell from 25% in 1983 to 19% in 1994 on Yell and 16% to 14% in central Mainland, and rose from 4% to 6% in south Mainland and 3% to 5% on Fetlar. Other areas showed slight increases (Northmavine, west Mainland, Unst, Foula, Whalsay and Bressay) with slight decreases in 'other islands'. These changes in distribution were not significant. The proportion of occupied sites which held breeding pairs declined only slightly - 66% of all occupied sites in 1983 compared to 64% in 1994.

The number of non-breeding adults in 2006 was very high, compared to 1994 (360) with the proportion of the total population that bred 10% lower than the 1994 figure. However, the decrease in breeding pairs along with the increase in the total number of adults in 2006 may result solely or largely from annual variation in the proportion of adults that breed. Accordingly, the 2006 population relative to 1994 may be described as stable with an increase in the proportion of non-breeders but without any recovery towards the numbers recorded before 1994. The higher numbers of adults and of occupied lochs in 2006 than in 1994 further supports this view.



Plate 91. Red-throated Diver, Norway, June 2008 © Edmund Fellowes.

Overall, the figures and trends from the three surveys present a picture of a steep decline in breeding pairs from 1983 to 1994 but stability thereafter. In 2006, Shetland held 33% of the UK breeding population and 31% of all adults while the corresponding figures in 1994 were 46% and 40%. These considerable decreases are due more to the significant increases across the whole UK range, 34% (95% C.I. 8 to 65%) in breeding pairs and 38% (95% C.I. 8 to 69%) in all adults, than the relatively small decline in Shetland.

Possible causes of changes in Red-throated Diver populations are outside the aims of the 2006 survey and this paper. Potential and established contributory factors include food shortages in summer and/or winter, increased disturbance and increased mortality, for example through deaths in fishing nets, oiling and breeding season predation. Loch availability appears unlikely to be a limiting factor as numerous unoccupied and apparently suitable breeding lochs were available in Shetland in 2006. The development of wind farms may pose risks from disturbance, habitat change and collisions with turbines. The effects of wind farms on birds are currently the subject of extensive research. Beached Bird Surveys by Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group (SOTEAG) found no trends in the numbers of Red-throated Divers recorded between 1978 and 1994.

Given past population fluctuations in the UK, regular monitoring of the status of the breeding population of Red-throated Divers in the UK and further study of factors affecting population and breeding success remain important.

### Acknowledgements

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## Two early records of Eurasian Jays in Caithness

Until about a quarter of a century ago the Scottish breeding range of the Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* extended only as far north as central Argyll, Perthshire and southern Aberdeenshire, and even with the recent northward extension in range it has only reached southern Lochaber, southern Inverness-shire and Moray & Nairn (Forrester *et al.* 2007, *The Birds of Scotland*, SOC Aberlady). It is generally a sedentary species, which occasionally undertakes long-distance, irruptive movements when its food supply fails. Occurrences in the north of Scotland have been very few. Prior to 1980 there just three records in Shetland, one of which is doubtful (Pennington *et al.* 2004, *The Birds of Shetland*, Christopher Helm, London), one in Orkney (Booth *et al.* 1984, *The Birds of Orkney*, The Orkney Press, Stromness), two in Sutherland (Vittery 1997, *The Birds of Sutherland*, Colin Baxter photography, Grantown-on-Spey), and five in Moray and Nairn (Cook 1992, *The Birds of Moray and Nairn*, The Mercat Press, Edinburgh). In Caithness there are only a couple of unreliable 19th century records (Manson Sam 2002, *A History of Caithness Islands 1769 to 2001*, Privately published). The purpose of this note is to draw attention to two early occurrences in the latter area that have recently come to light.

The records are contained in the 'stuffing books' of Lewis Dunbar, the Thurso taxidermist. They read as follows:

"Jay, Mr McNicol, Sandside (female)" - the entry is dated 2 October 1899, and:

"Jay (2), to be set up, Mr McEwen, Berriedale" - entry dated 9 December 1899.

The 'Mr McNicol' referred to in the first of these is almost certainly Nicol M'Nicol (this is the surname style the family preferred), gamekeeper on the Pilkington family's estate at Sandside, Reay, Caithness. His name crops up fairly regularly in Dunbar's stuffing books, as do several other members of his family, and apart from the gamebirds and birds of prey which might be expected from a gamekeeper there are a number of minor rarities including Great Northern Diver *Gavia immer*, Iceland Gull *Larus glaucooides* (2),

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus*, European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*. He also submitted a number of notes to *The Field* about birds he had taken. He appears to have had a reasonably sound knowledge of birds.

The 'Mr McEwen' referred to in the second record is probably Archibald McEwan (note spelling of surname), the Head Stalker on the Duke of Portland's Langwell Estate at Berriedale, Caithness, but may perhaps be his younger brother James who was the Head Keeper on the Duke's adjoining estate at Braemore, near Dunbeath, Caithness. Both occasionally sent specimens to Dunbar for preservation, mostly birds of prey, but including a European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* from A McEwan and a Little Auk *Alle alle* from J McEwan. It seems reasonable to conclude that whichever of them sent in the Jays had some familiarity with birds.

No information concerning the circumstances under which these birds were taken has survived, but in all likelihood they had been shot or trapped. That three birds should be obtained within two months of one another at sites only 45 km apart suggests that these might have been part of an eruption. It is unlikely that these were cage birds, or birds imported from outside Caithness, though such possibilities are difficult to discount completely. Dunbar seems to have been honest and straightforward in his dealings with bird specimens and there is no suggestion that he ever tried to pass off material from elsewhere as locally obtained, as some taxidermists at the time did.

Dunbar was in the habit of publishing details of the more interesting birds that passed through his hands in the annual report on Scottish Ornithology published in the *Annals of Scottish Ornithology*, and there remains the question of why he did not send in these records. Dunbar was primarily interested in birds of prey and may not have appreciated the significance of what he had been sent. Alternatively it may be that he wished to keep

their existence confidential to protect the finders from any repercussions from their employers, particularly if the intention had been to sell them on at a profit.

I am indebted to the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh for permission to consult Harvie-Brown's papers, stuffing books which includes Dunbar's and to museum staff,

particularly the Curator, Dr Bob McGowan, for help in getting to grips with the wealth of material available

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## Red-breasted Merganser catching and eating a Common Frog

On the afternoon of 9 March 2008, while watching ducks on the Loch of Hundland, West Mainland, Orkney, I noticed two female Red-breasted Mergansers *Mergus serrator* diving in a small inlet off the main loch.

After several dives one of these birds surfaced with a small Common Frog *Rana temporaria*, about 30mm in length, which it held in its bill for a few seconds before swallowing it. The Red-breasted Mergansers continued diving for another five minutes but as far as I could be see nothing else was caught. They then moved back to the main loch and swam away.

Frogs do not appear to be a regular prey item of the Red-breasted Merganser and the only mention I can find is from a Russian study where one was found in the stomach of a Red-breasted Merganser (Cramp S & Simmons KEL 1977. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic*. Vol 1: 677. Oxford University Press, Oxford).

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## Waxwing killed by Jackdaw

On the morning of Sunday 15 February 2009 I saw a Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* land on a Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* approximately 50m from my kitchen window. A second Waxwing joined it but then flew off. No sooner had it gone than a Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula* appeared and started to peck at the first Waxwing which retaliated. The Jackdaw's attack was unrelenting and it was joined by a second Jackdaw. A third jackdaw arrived squawking but not pecking. The Waxwing eventually toppled upside down still clinging to the branch. The pecking continued until it fell lifeless to the ground into deep snow. The Jackdaws flew a little distance away, then after five minutes flew off completely. I have not been able to find any similar accounts in the literature.

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*Revised ms accepted March 2009*



Plate 92. Bohemian Waxwing © Harry Scott.

## Unprecedented spring passage of Long-tailed Skuas over Saltcoats during May 2006

Saltcoats harbour is regarded as the premier seawatching site in north Ayrshire. Jutting out into the Firth of Clyde, this watch point offers commanding views of Irvine Bay to the south and the narrow Arran channel in the west. All four skua species have been observed from Saltcoats (albeit in small numbers) during spring passage, but the Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* has been the rarest by far. Prior to 2006, only 12 records of Long-tailed Skua had been accepted in Ayrshire (R.H. Hogg editor *Ayrshire Bird Reports* 1986–2006) only one of which was seen from Saltcoats, an adult on 13 May 1999. Impressive movements of Long-tailed Skuas occur off the Outer Hebrides in spring when low-pressure weather systems bring flocks close to headlands such as Aird an Runair. (D.L. Davenport. 1991. Spring passage of Long-tailed Skuas off North Uist in 1991. *Scottish Birds* 16: 85–89).

On the afternoon of 23 May 2006, Jason McManus observed a distant flock of what he thought were Long-tailed Skuas off Saltcoats harbour. After checking the weather forecast, T. Byars went down to the harbour at 18.00 and met J McM, Robert Lambie and Mark Maddock. Conditions looked perfect for seawatching, as a fast-moving low-pressure system was tracking northwards over the Irish Sea, bringing intense squalls with long periods of drizzle on a westerly force four. Through the heavy squalls we started to note small numbers of Arctic Skuas heading due south. At 18.10 TB noticed a very distant flock of birds flying high, just south of Irvine Bay, 7 km away. Neither observer could identify these birds though in retrospect all observers agree that these were almost certainly distant Long-tailed Skuas. At around 18.40 definite Long-tailed Skuas began appearing from the north-west. As we tracked the birds southwards, they joined a swirling “kettle” of 45 Long-tailed Skuas that had literally appeared from nowhere, circling and swooping 300 m above Saltcoats harbour like Black-headed Gulls. We watched as a maelstrom of Long-tailed Skuas wheeled with tail streamers fluttering like thin black ribbons. A harsh tern-like call drew our attention as a lone Long-tailed

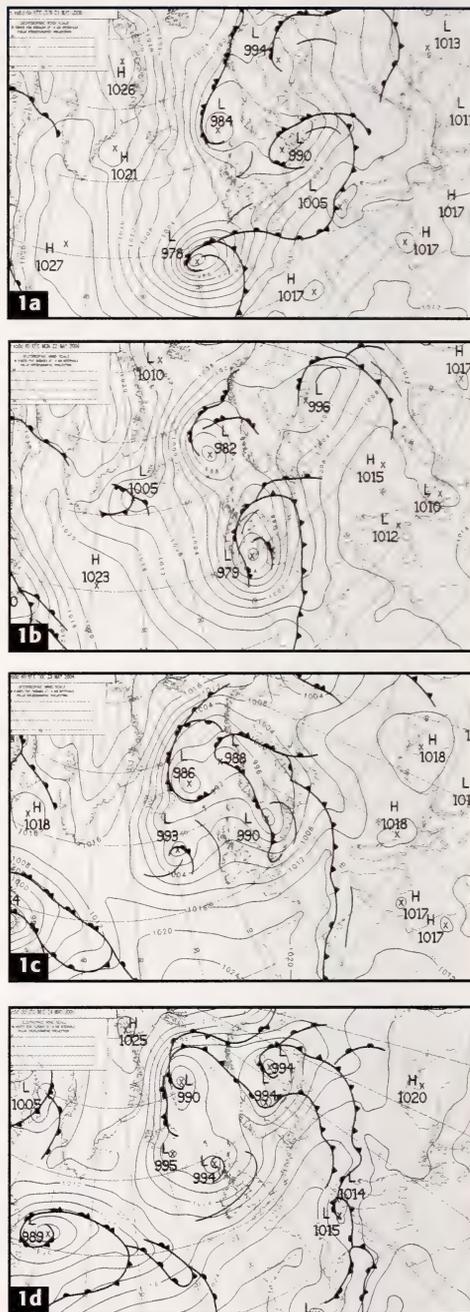


Figure 1. Synoptic charts for (a) 21 May 2009 00hrs, (b) 22 May 2009 00hrs, (c) 23 May 2009 00hrs and (d) 24 May 2009 00hrs. The charts are derived from information supplied by the Met Office.



Plate 93. Long-tailed Skuas, Saltcoats Harbour, Ayrshire, May 2006 © Keith Hoey.

Skua sailed just 10 m above our heads and joined the swirling flock which had now gained height to 400 m. Another two stragglers appeared from the north and also joined the main group of 51 birds, which then dropped rapidly down to sea level and headed northwards in single file just above the waves past Outer Nebock rocks. As the trough weakened, the weather improved quite rapidly and a patch of clear blue sky appeared. The flock of 53 birds ascended and headed purposely inland, climbing all the time, until they were lost to view at about 1000+ m heading high in a north-easterly direction over Meikle Busbie Wood 5 km inland. This “towering” behaviour of Long-tailed Skuas has been documented before in spring off North Uist (D.L. Davenport, *Scottish Birds* 16: 85–89). Although “overlanding” in skua species has been recorded in Ayrshire before, this is the first documented observation of Long-tailed Skuas heading inland from west to east in Ayrshire.

J. McManus went back to the harbour on the following morning: a total of 173 Long-tailed Skuas were logged on 24 May, including separate flocks of 80 and 42, all heading east, inland, through the morning into mid-afternoon. The wind direction by now had become westerly as the low-pressure system had moved into the North Sea. In all 226 Long-tailed Skuas were recorded over the two days.

We thank Angus Hogg for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper and Keith Hoey for providing the only photographic evidence that Long-tailed Skuas were not a figment of anyone’s imagination during May 2006!

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**Jason McManus, 58 Sharpill Rd, Saltcoats, Ayrshire KA21 5QT.**

**Robert Lambie, 5 St Columba Place, Stevenston, Ayrshire KA20 4JN.**

*Revised ms accepted August 2009*

*Norman Elkins commented: “The likely scenario for this large passage stems from the probable accumulation of Long-tailed Skuas in the North Atlantic west of Ireland. This may have arisen due to an abnormal frequency of north to north-east winds during the previous fortnight linked to the passage of depressions being further south than normal. This is borne out by a large passage of skuas off the Isle of Lewis on the 22nd, in a fresh north-west wind.”*

*“Overnight on 22nd/23rd, a transient ridge of high pressure over the area in question moved away as a small active depression tracked towards north-west Scotland. This brought bands of squally showers into the Firth of Clyde in the afternoon of the 23rd associated with a trough. Skuas may have been swept east to the south of the depression, subsequently moving overland in the clearing weather behind the trough, rather than re-tracing their route to move up the west coast. Further movement occurred on the 24th in a similar airmass. Overland passage of skuas is common over large landmasses, usually high enough to remain undetected.”*

## OBITUARIES

### James Stewart Wilson (1939-2009)

SOC members will be saddened to learn of the unexpected death of Jim Wilson on 8 July 2009, aged 70. Jim had been Clyde's Assistant Bird Recorder along with his wife Valerie since being appointed in 1995. However, he had in the previous five years helped in producing Clyde Birds and there is no doubt that without his great effort, publication would have been considerably delayed.

Jim came comparatively late to birding following his early retirement as an architect with Strathclyde Regional Council, when both he and Val joined my 'Birdwatching for Beginners' Adult Education Course for Glasgow University and attended for many years. They joined the SOC and quickly volunteered to help Iain Gibson, Clyde Bird Recorder, in producing the bird report and running the local birdline.

One of Jim's many attributes was his ability to work for hours inputting data into the computer, often a most boring and tedious task. However, he thrived on it and you could be

absolutely certain that whatever he tackled, such as creating a site gazetteer, it would be done methodically, accurately and thoroughly cross-checked. He just would not accept slipshod work and always sought perfection in everything he did. He later co-ordinated counters for the Clyde area Wetland Bird Survey and produced the tables and spreadsheets for the joint scheme organisers.

Many bird trips abroad and at home were enjoyed, the last one being in June 2009 to Corsica. Jim particularly looked forward to our annual visits to places such as Islay, South Uist and southern Ireland, where as well as concentrated birdwatching and good food, various malt whiskies would be sampled! In the event of a minor breakdown he could also be relied upon to use his technological skills to solve the problem, along with producing the required tool from either car boot or hand luggage!

Jim was kind, considerate and always good company and he will be terribly missed by his family and friends.

**David Clugston & Pauline Blair**



Plate 94. *Jim Wilson, Corsica, June 2009* © David Clugston.

## Bob Scott (1938–2009)

One word sums up Bob - enthusiasm. With his bushy beard, booming voice telling stories and his wide smile, once you met Bob you were unlikely to forget him. I first met Bob when he was warden at the Reserve and Bird Observatory at Dungeness, Kent, in the early 1960s. We had to mark out areas to be excavated in the shingle and, while he strode round as if the shingle was tarmac, I was soon staggering behind with him calling "Keep up!". After 15 years there, adding several new species to the British List, he moved to Northward Hill in the same county and then to the RSPB HQ at The Lodge in 1979. Latterly he was head of Reserves Management and was in constant contact with all the wardens. His wide experience in reserves, outstanding bird knowledge but most of all his larger than life character made him extremely effective and popular with all the staff.

But it was not just RSPB work that felt his influence, he was a moving light in the British Birds magazine and heavily involved in Bulgarian conservation. A popular lecturer and leader of bird holidays, he greatly increased these on retiring in 1997, usually with his wife Ann who was equally experienced in the field and lecture hall. He wrote several books and enjoyed private birding trips with friends to places such as South America.

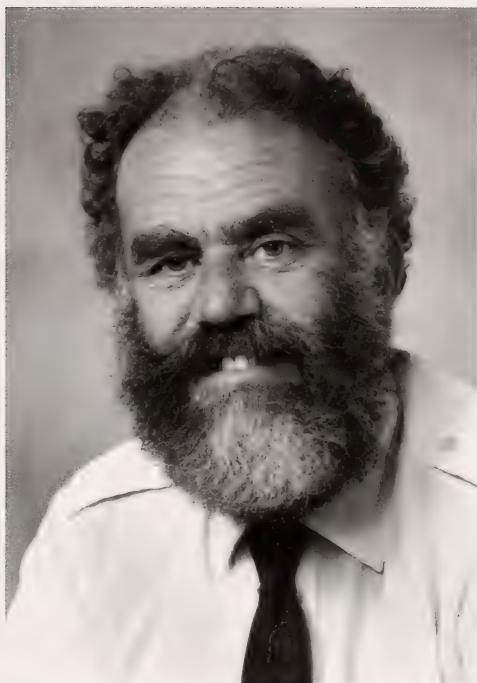


Plate 95. Bob Scott © RSPB.

He loved Scotland and came birding here many times and it was lovely to repay their hospitality and to listen to his stories - all interspersed with loud laughter. That was Bob's style. He'll be sadly missed by all who knew him.

**Frank Hamilton**

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## Dramatic decline in numbers of Atlantic Puffins in the Firth of Forth

Plate 96. Geolocator device attached to a breeding Puffin © Ellie Owen.

The last survey of the Puffin colonies of the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area, made in 2003 by Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) staff under contract to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) found 69,300 occupied burrows on the Isle of May National Nature Reserve (making it the largest single colony in Britain), 12,100 on Craigeith and 1,500 on Fidra. In 2008 a count of randomly selected parts of the Isle of May that had held about half the burrows in 2003 found that numbers had declined to 42,300 occupied burrows. This was totally unexpected since up to 2003 the population had been increasing at 11% per annum and we anticipated there being at least 100,000 occupied burrows. A count of burrows on the Farne Islands made by the National Trust in 2008 also showed a decline of the same order of magnitude, suggesting that the problem was serious and not just confined to the Isle of May. Clearly, checking other islands in the Firth of Forth was a high priority and a count was scheduled for 2009.

Nesting underground, Puffins are difficult to census and the usual method is to count burrows. A widely used counting unit is the 'apparently occupied burrow', defined as a burrow showing signs of use by Puffins, i.e. fresh digging, droppings or other signs that birds have been going in and out. In many colonies there is potential for confusion between a Rabbit and



Plate 97. Marked burrows on the Isle of May © Mike Harris.

a Puffin burrow but the former tends to be much larger, to have much more substantial diggings and characteristic droppings in the entrance. The Rabbit population on the Isle of May crashed due to myxomatosis during the 2007/08 winter, Craigleith has few Rabbits and Fidra none so this was not a serious problem during the current count. Counts in southeast Scotland are best made in late April or early May when all Puffins should have returned to their burrows and most will have eggs, but before the vegetation has grown up.



**Plate 98.** Counting Puffin burrows on the Isle of May  
© Mark Newell.

A team of people walks across the colony each searching a strip about 5m wide by zig-zagging slowly along it. Where there is potential for overlooking burrows or double-counting them, either a cane is used to mark the earth in the entrance of each burrow as it is counted or the counter points to a burrow and says 'mine' to the neighbouring counter. The boundaries of each transect are marked with bamboo canes. Small sections of the colony are delimited with string and the burrows counted separately. Immediately after the count someone who has not taken part in the count makes a detailed examination of each possible burrow to check for burrows which belonged to a Rabbit rather than a Puffin, entrances which were not true burrows (e.g. were very short), cases where there were two entrances to a single burrow (i.e. the burrow had been counted twice) and Puffin burrows

which could have been overlooked. Double-occupancy of a burrow, where two pairs use a single entrance, is extremely rare and the possibility of this is discounted. These calibration counts, that usually show that the actual counts are over-estimates, are later used to correct the actual counts for that part of the colony. All this is time consuming with the result that counts are made only irregularly. Given unlimited time it is possible to check a sample of burrows every few days to assess how many burrows actually have eggs laid but this risks birds deserting burrows. Therefore changes in numbers are almost always based on counts of active burrows.

This year, counts of the parts of the Isle of May not counted in 2008 (and some repeat counts) were made between 1 and 3 May by members of CEH (six) and SNH (two), and Craigleith and Fidra were counted on 6 and 7 May by members of the Forth Seabird Group and Craigleith Management Group volunteers (13 on Craigleith and seven on Fidra). In all the count took about 40 hard person-days, and we thank all those who took part and also the Scottish Seabird Centre for getting us on and off Craigleith and Fidra! SNH and CEH helped with the transport of Alan Leitch and Bill Bruce to and from the Isle of May for training to ensure that the methodologies used on the three islands were consistent. The Isle of May had 45,000 occupied burrows (count 56,867 using the 2008 figures for areas not counted in 2009), Craigleith 4,500 (5,363 counted made up to 5,959 to allow for 10% of area not counted due to nesting Cormorants) and Fidra 800 (count 987). There were also maybe a couple of hundred burrows in an inaccessible steep part of Craigleith that have not been included in any count. Counts such as these are too imprecise to detect annual changes in numbers with any certainty. However, in 2009 counts of parts of the Isle of May censused in 2008 were slightly up and this suggested no serious decline in numbers between 2008 and 2009.

Although counts such as these are of unknown accuracy, it is obvious that there has been a dramatic decline in numbers at these three Firth of Forth colonies since the last count in 2003. The reduction in numbers on Craigleith between 1998 and 2003 was probably a



Plate 99. Counting Puffin burrows on Fidra © Bill Bruce.

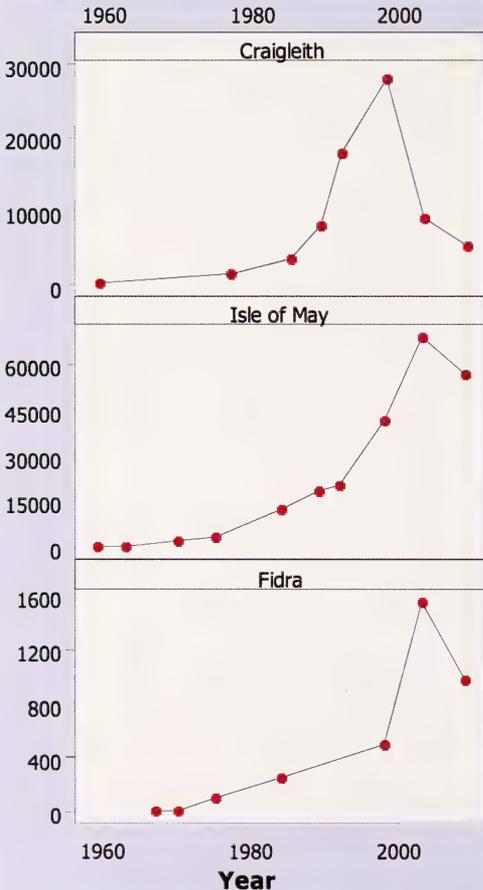


Figure 1. Changes in the number of occupied Puffin burrows on three Firth of Forth islands, 1960–2009.

separate process and due to the spread of Tree Mallow on that island, leading to the current control programme. The survival of breeding Puffins on the Isle of May has been monitored since the early 1970s. Usually it is high and the bulk of adults alive one year are seen again the next. Return rates over the winters of 2006/07 and 2007/08 were very low, suggesting a marked increase in the over-winter mortality of breeding adults.

Relatively little is known of where Puffins from the Forth go during the winter or what they eat. Preliminary results from geolocators - ring-mounted miniaturised loggers which give an approximate indication of a bird's location each day - show that during the 2007/08 winter many breeding adults from the Isle of May spent time in the eastern Atlantic. This is the first time we have had evidence of substantial numbers of Puffins breeding on the east coast of Britain wintering outside the North Sea. Further research effort is now being put into studying the ecology and behaviour of Puffins during the winter and trying to identify the environmental changes that might have been responsible for the recent declines in numbers.

*Mike Harris & Mark Newell (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology), Alan Leitch & Bill Bruce (Forth Seabird Group) and John Hunt (Craigleith Management Group)*  
 Contact Mike Harris: [mph@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:mph@ceh.ac.uk)

## Ian Willis - Wildlife artist and ornithologist



Plate 100. Ian Willis in his studio © David Clugston.

Most people who have been birding for 30 years or more should be familiar with the subject of this article, and will recognise Ian's undoubted skills as a bird illustrator. Not so well known perhaps, is the fact that he is an accomplished bird painter, but whose pictures are seldom seen.

I first met Ian in Brighton in June 1965 at the home of Tony Marr. I was hitchhiking from my native Wirral to the south coast seeking out the region's special birds and butterflies. At that time a group of very keen birdwatchers were honing their identification skills seawatching off Selsey Bill, and observing migration at Beachy Head and elsewhere. These included Tony Marr, Richard Porter, Alan Kitson and Ian Willis, all of whom have contributed greatly to ornithology in many different ways. They could be described as being at the cutting edge of field identification and Ian as the artist of the group, was able to pass on the sometimes subtle differences between species, through his published artwork.

Recently, I renewed my long friendship with Ian and his wife Diane when I visited them at their home in Dalbeattie. We spent time

birding and I gathered background information on his life for this pen portrait.

Ian Robert Willis was born in Hexham, Northumberland in 1944 but lived most of his early life in Sussex. His artistic abilities were first noticed at school, where he won a competition for a class project. He trained at Brighton College of Art (1960–65) and it was during this period that he was given tuition in wood engraving by Raymond Briggs, an award-winning exponent of this exacting medium. Ian clearly had grasped



Plate 101. *The Cranes* wood engraving.



Plate 102. *First-winter Wheatear.*

the considerable skill required to incise a picture into end grain box wood, just as Bewick had done some 160 years earlier. He printed-off only ten copies of *Feeding Cranes* (see above) and I made my first purchase of wildlife art! He chose cranes as his subject, as there had been a remarkable influx into southern England in late October 1963 and a flock was present at Bracklesham, west of Selsey Bill, Sussex.

Whilst at College he was fortunate to have a very good local library on his doorstep. Here he made a particular study of Audubon, amongst other artists, and for an assignment produced a one off volume of 20 copied bird plates and a potted biography, properly printed and bound. Sadly it was handed in but never returned, presumed stolen. At least someone had good taste!

After leaving college his professional career began in 1966 with a six-month's ornithological expedition to Western Turkey surveying wetlands and studying the raptor, stork and crane migration at the Bosphorus. This expedition plus further travels in Europe resulted in his illustrating six papers on birds of prey, written by Steen Christensen, Bent Pors Nielsen and Richard Porter in *British Birds* (1971–1973). This ground-breaking series led him into contact with the publisher Trevor Poyser, and the book *Flight Identification of European Raptors* first appeared in 1974 - so successful that it ran to three editions and was translated into six European languages.

In 1978 following his marriage to Diane, they were looking for somewhere to live away from overcrowded Sussex, where they wanted a quieter and more interesting landscape - what Ian describes as "edge places". Through his friendship with Trevor Poyser they were introduced to Donald and Joan Watson and travelled up to Galloway for a week's holiday. They immediately fell in love with the area and with Donald's many contacts with local landowners, quickly found a cottage to rent on one of the estates close to St. John's Town of Dalry. The Watsons became firm friends, spending time together in the field, as well as discussing birds and bird art.

Since 1970, his colour, brush and ink illustrations have appeared in 45 books. Titles include: *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* (vol. 2 raptors), *The Shell Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland* (all 488 species in colour), *Vogel Mitteleuropas*, *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania*, *The Birds of Africa* (7 vols.) and in the Poyser series - *Birdwatchers' Year*, *The Barn Owl*, *Birds in Scotland*, *The Ruff*, *Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland*, *Owls in Europe* and several others. In recent years he was commissioned to produce artwork for one of the most important



Plate 103. *Osprey study.*

bird books sets yet conceived, the superlative *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Its exacting publishing schedule, the considerable research required to find specimens and pictures of little known species and races has been very challenging, both in his time and energy.

As I alluded to earlier, Ian has produced many fine paintings, his preferred media being gouache, covering a wide range of wildlife subject matter and landscapes. I have chosen pictures from my own collection to illustrate this article. First above, an early watercolour, shows a first-winter Wheatear flying low over Staghorn Plantain. Next comes a fine study of Ospreys based mainly on the Loch Garten pair, which he wardened in late May 1967. Some people might call my next choice of a picture of humble Starlings not very exciting, however I find the contrasting colours and composition very attractive to my eye - you can almost hear the birds squabbling!

In 1975 I was in Finnish Lapland and was lucky enough to find and photograph a Great Grey Owl perched in woodland. On my return home, I commissioned Ian to paint me a picture of the bird - he did this, adding other studies from a nest he had visited whilst researching owls for the Poyser book. My final choice is this much



Plate 104. Starlings.

more recent picture of a group of five Blackcocks displaying on a Galloway lek and is an excellent example of his skill as a wildlife artist.

Ian comes over as a quiet person, not relishing being in the limelight but dedicated to his chosen career. Earning a living as a wildlife artist has its ups and downs, as he knows only too well! Nevertheless, he has held three one-man exhibitions and over 50 mixed artist exhibitions in Britain, South Africa, U.S.A. and Kenya. Having recently retired and living in a lovely area of Scotland, he hopes to be able to enjoy more birding and painting in a far less pressured way.

David Clugston



Plate 105. Lekking Blackcock.

## SOC trip to Ailsa Craig - 11 July 2009



Plate 106. Ringing with Bernie Zonfrillo, Jen Clark and Andy Hastie © Lang Stewart.

It was a really warm, sunny day as we left Girvan harbour for the 90-minute, 10-mile trip to Ailsa Craig. We were sailing across on the M/FV Glorious on this SOC trip, the last of three organised by Hayley Douglas, Clyde Branch Secretary, to be met and led by Bernie Zonfrillo, the man who, with his team of helpers, eradicated the rats from the island in 1991, allowing Puffins and other species to return and thrive. Five tons of poison was deployed on the island, shipped there by Royal Navy Sea King helicopters from HMS Gannet at Prestwick.

On the trip over, we had great views of Kittiwakes, Manx Shearwaters, Gannets and various gulls. Now numbering over 40,000 pairs on Ailsa Craig, the Gannets flew close to the boat and thrilled us with their typical power-dives for fish. This was my first visit to the island and the biggest surprise for me was when I got closer and saw how high it was at 1,114 feet. This igneous intrusion would dwarf the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth, which rises to a mere 313 feet.

Another surprise awaited us when once ashore we had close viewing of Twite on telephone

wires near the lighthouse. This species has now only a patchy breeding population in Scotland - it was reassuring to find it "at home" on Ailsa Craig. We were introduced to Bernie's Slow Worms which he keeps warm and dark under corrugated iron, where temperatures can approach 50°C on hot days. Slow Worms look superficially like snakes, but are actually legless lizards. One way to identify them is that unlike snakes they have eyelids. They eat slugs and keeping warm helps them digest these molluscs.



Plate 107. One of the Slow Worms © Lang Stewart.

After something to eat outside Bernie's cottage, we walked around the island to the main seabird breeding colony which includes Guillemots, Razorbills and of course Puffins. Over 300 have been recorded ashore this season, with between 100 and 120 pairs breeding on the island - a notable success which is the tangible result of removing the rats. Shags were also breeding in unprecedented numbers, at around 175 pairs, something apparently new within the past 200 years! The number of seabirds pouring in over our heads as we stood there was impressive and we noticed that most had sand eels. It turned out to be the perfect place to get flight shots as they came in to land in the colony.

Bernie, and helpers Hayley Douglas and Jen Clark, then started to catch and ring various chicks that were hiding among the rocks. Bernie has his own athletic technique for netting Puffins - it has only a moderate success rate but is highly entertaining to watch.



Plate 108. Bernie Zonfrillo on the hunt © Lang Stewart.

It was a great day, with Hayley and Bernie working hard to make sure everyone saw all the various species and got the utmost enjoyment from the visit. But ultimately I was left with the thought that all the grand designs for environmental protection are important, but the efforts of one man *can* make a difference.

Lang Stewart



Plate 109. Gannet preparing to dive © Lang Stewart.



Plate 110. Puffin with Sandeels © Lang Stewart.



Plate 111. Razorbill in flight © Lang Stewart.

## Bird Atlas 2007–11 - the halfway stage

Fieldwork for the second summer season of the Bird Atlas ended on 31 July 2009, the halfway stage in the project, with the completion of the first two winter and first two summer seasons. This is an ideal opportunity to assess how the survey has gone so far and to plan the next two years of work to ensure we get complete coverage of Scotland by 31 July 2011.

### Summer Update

*Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs)*. Although records are still trickling in, by the end of the second summer it looks as though at least 66% of the minimum number of required tetrads for the national project had received at least one visit and over 80% had received two visits. This is a

great achievement and we are very grateful to everyone who assisted. Some quite remote areas were covered this summer, particularly in the highlands, with Hugh Insley and his band of volunteers covering large areas of Inverness-shire. Individual 10-km squares were targeted for a day visit by a carload of atlasers, who were dropped off at strategic locations to cover their allocated tetrads and picked up later after a good walk and a good days birding in a 'new' location. A similar technique has been used by Ray Murray and the Blitz Group in the Borders. Over 150 tetrads in west and central Ross-shire were covered by David Butterfield, Peter Gordon and Paul and Liz Outwaite who used their sabbaticals from the RSPB to assist with the project.

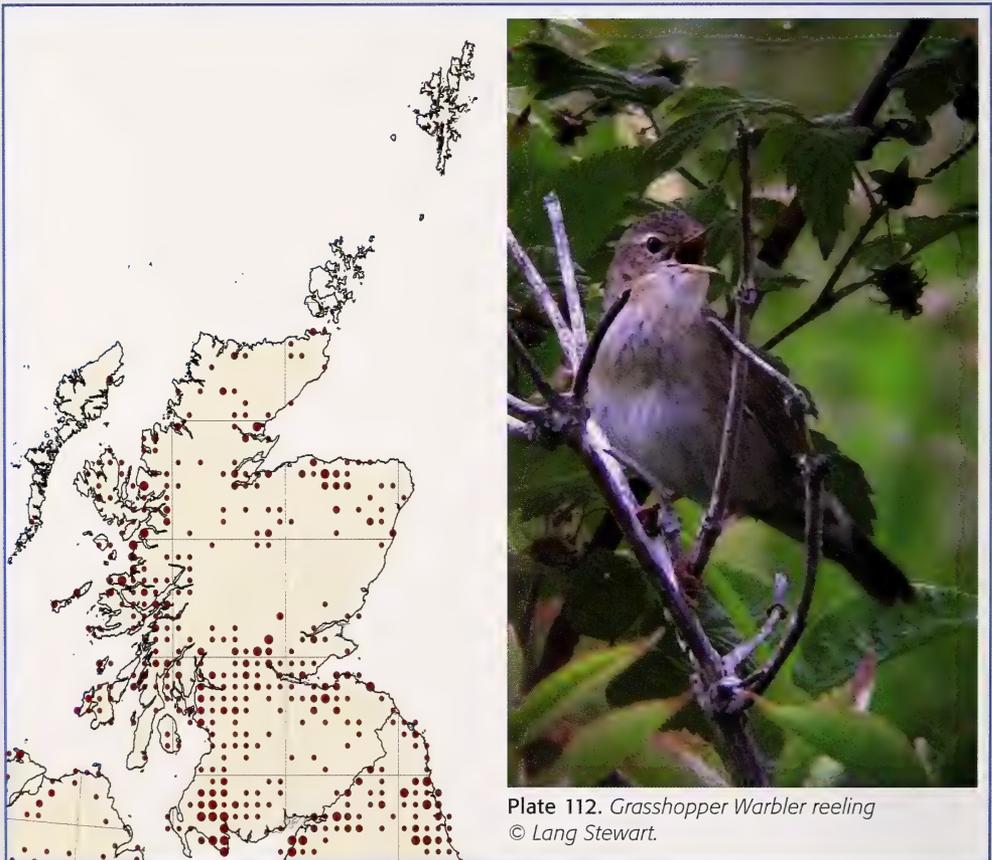


Figure 1. Breeding season distribution of Grasshopper Warbler © BTO. Provisional map based on all 2008 records and 2009 online records.

Plate 112. Grasshopper Warbler reeling  
© Lang Stewart.

In Argyll the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS) team once again visited the Kintyre peninsula covering 35 tetrads. In addition, several individuals have made major efforts covering large numbers of tetrads, including Chris Reynolds in Lewis, Ken Crane on Skye, Paddy Knowles in Inverness-shire, Roger Broad in Argyll, Edmund Fellowes in Dumfries and SOC vice president David Jardine in Ross-shire and Argyll, whilst I have been covering large areas of Sutherland. Chris Reynolds has the distinction of being the top TTVer in the project having made 412 visits to 172 tetrads during the course of the entire project, a superb achievement. It goes without saying that every tetrad counts and whether you have done one or more we are very grateful for the support you have given this important project and hope that you will continue to help to get the job 100% completed.

*Roving Records.* As well as the TTV information, we have also been receiving vast numbers of Roving Records. These are vitally important to top up the species list in each square. They are also an important way to boost the breeding evidence codes up from "possible" to "probable" to "confirmed" breeding. The **Any Square Summary** button on the [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) website has been widely used by observers to see what species are missing from a square and which species are 'under-recorded' with regard to confirmed breeding. In some cases this can be done retrospectively. Recently I was looking through the species list for a 10-km square in Easter Ross and noted that Swift, House Martin, Rook and Jackdaw were only recorded as present. A quick check through my notebook revealed I had evidence of all species nesting in the square so I added the relevant information in as **Roving Records**. Summer 2009 was a particularly good year for Grasshopper Warbler in Scotland. This is a good example of a species that may have been under-recorded in many areas. Look at the map above (Figure 1) - the large dots refer to confirmed breeding, the medium dots to probable breeding and the small dots to possible breeding. Is there any square where you could add records? Check your notebooks and help fill the gaps by adding any extra sightings via the **Roving Records** button on the website.



Figure 2. Timed tetrad visits in winter © BTO. Based on all records received by June 2009.

*Converting records to data.* Every single atlas record requires to be checked. This is a massive job largely being undertaken by local atlas organisers and SOC recorders and is essential to ensure that the final atlas maps are free from errors. In practice, only a tiny percentage of records are queried and most of these relate to inputting errors, mainly incorrect grid references or incorrect use of breeding evidence codes. If you do get a query flagged up on the home page of your website, we would be grateful if you deal with it by editing or deleting the record as appropriate. If a bird is a local rarity you may be asked to submit a description to your local recorder. This is a standard request for all bird records in Scotland.

### Winter 2009/10

On 1 November 2009 the fieldwork for the third winter of the project will commence. Figure 2 shows the situation to date with 68% of the required minimum number of tetrads covered.

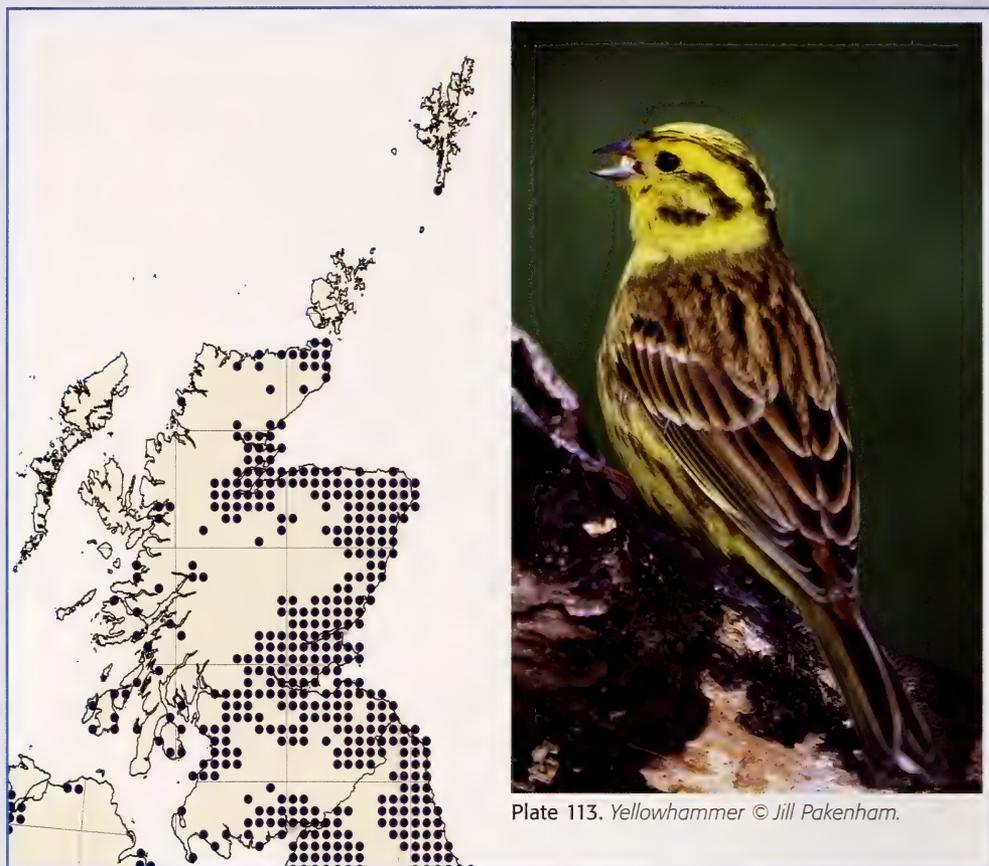


Plate 113. Yellowhammer © Jill Pakenham.

Figure 3. Winter distribution of Yellowhammer © BTO. Provisional map based on all records received by June 2009.

The blue dots indicate 10-km squares where the minimum of eight tetrads have been surveyed, the grey dots indicate 1–7 tetrads have been covered, whilst white means no tetrads have been surveyed. There is still therefore much to do to turn all of Scotland blue. Large areas of Galloway, Argyll, south Ayrshire, parts of Lanarkshire, Perthshire, west and central Ross-shire, Angus, Aberdeenshire and the Western and Northern Isles all require a considerable amount of field work. Even in areas that appear well covered, such as south-east Scotland, much needs to be done as here all tetrads are being covered for a local atlas project. Local atlases are also being undertaken or proposed on Bute, Arran and in Kinross, Caithness, Clyde and Shetland.

So how can you help us achieve full coverage? If you have been allocated tetrads that you have not yet covered please treat these as high

priority for completion during the coming winter. If you think you are now unlikely to be able to survey any allocated tetrads please let your local atlas organiser know as soon as possible so that these tetrads can be re-allocated to other observers. Otherwise check the website, using the **Request a Tetrad** button to see which 10-km squares still require assistance to reach the minimum required target of eight tetrads. Any squares where less than eight tetrads have been allocated, should be treated as high priority. Taking on one or more of these would be very valuable. You may also wish to consider the 'Blitz Team' approach by organising a car load of atlasers for a day's surveying to a 10-km square in one of the less well covered parts of Scotland. This can lead to a super day out exploring a new part of the countryside, whilst at the same time collecting valuable data for the atlas project. Perhaps each SOC branch should endeavour to

run a 'square blitz' event this winter as part of their outings programme.

Even if you cannot assist by conducting a Timed Tetrad Visit, you can help by providing Roving Records for species that you have positively identified. Consider taking on some of your local 10-km squares, print out the species lists using the **Any Square Summary** button and then see if you can find and report any new species for the square. Also keep an eye or ear out for species likely to be under-recorded throughout Scotland such as Jack Snipe, Water Rail, owls and wintering warblers. In some areas, even some quite common species have been overlooked like Sparrowhawk, Treecreeper, Dipper and Grey Wagtail. There are also species like Brambling where winter distribution can vary greatly from one winter to the next. Finally there are declining species like Grey Partridge and Yellowhammer where birds particularly on the margins of their current ranges can be easily missed. Figure 3

shows the current winter map for Yellowhammer. Are the gaps in distribution real or just due to lack of coverage? By submitting Roving Records you can help us produce a more accurate distribution map for these and a whole range of declining species, which will be of great conservation value to them.

Bird Atlas 2007–11 is a joint SOC/BTO/BirdWatch Ireland project. Every SOC member and every SOC branch should do their bit to help make the atlas a resounding success within Scotland, by helping us reach our target of complete coverage of every 10-km square. Full details can be found on the [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) website, but if you do not have computer access and require any further details you can contact the Scottish Atlas Organiser on 07919 378876 or c/o SOC, Waterston House, Aberlady EH32 0PY.

*Bob Swann, Scottish Organiser  
Bird Atlas 2007–11*

### **“LIFERS & TWITCHERS” BIRDING TOURS SOUTHERN AFRICA**



Experience South African birding at its best. The southern African region has over 900 bird species, of which 144 are endemic or near-endemic. The country is therefore a birder's paradise—no matter whether you're an average twitcher or an international birder in search of more lifers. Our tours last 11 days on average and focus on the birding "hot spots" of South Africa. Visit the Highveld grasslands, game and nature reserves in KwaZulu-Natal and World Heritage Sites in the South African summer. In winter our tours take you through the warmer bushveld regions to the north and east, visiting several game reserves and experiencing the best of the country's forest, grassland, woodland and bushveld birding. Tours include a free birding guide book and an orientation bird course on the first day of your trip.

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**Gary Tame**

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**E-mail: [impalasq2@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:impalasq2@yahoo.co.uk)**



Plate 114. *Glen Dochart meadows* © Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority.

Some of Scotland's most iconic habitats and species are to be found close to the central belt in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. The recently launched Biodiversity Action Plan for the area pools the actions of a wide range of people and organisations to help protect them. A first for the National Park, the plan brings together many partners active in conservation, including RSPB Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, landowners and community groups.

Speaking at the launch at the David Marshall Lodge in Aberfoyle, National Park Chief Executive Fiona Logan said, "Conserving and enhancing biodiversity is central to the National Park Authority and this plan details what can be delivered while aiming high in its ambition. By working together we have a fantastic opportunity to improve habitats on a grand scale and reverse population declines of native species such as Black Grouse."

The three-year plan includes projects that will help to conserve some of our endangered bird species, such as Black Grouse and farmland waders. It does this by concentrating effort on improving habitats and only when a species needs more than this does it have its own action plan.

#### **Glen Dochart waders**

National Park Ecologist Gwenda Diack has the job of taking the plan forward and she is excited at the prospect, "One project that illustrates the benefits of such collaborative work is the Glen Dochart Floodplain Project," she said. "Here we're working with the land managers in Glen Dochart to see what actions can be taken to benefit farmland waders such as Redshank, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Curlew and Snipe. The exciting thing about this project is that there is a real opportunity to achieve something at a landscape scale."

"We started the project this year, with National Park Land Management Advisor, Linda Winskill, approaching farmers and land managers in the project area in the glen to engage their support. We have had a tremendously positive response from all the land managers we have spoken to in the area and hope that we can work with them to support current and future management to benefit these species."

To understand what farmland waders the Glen Dochart area already supports, National Park and RSPB staff carried out a breeding wader survey of the floodplain. This helped identify the main grassland areas being used by the birds and will be useful in establishing a baseline for monitoring change and prioritising work. Yvonne Boles, Conservation Officer for RSPB Scotland, who co-ordinated the wader survey, said, "The area supports a good number of waders and all five species were recorded in the Glen. This shows that previous management has provided the mosaic of grassland habitats that the birds need to survive in this area. It's important that the value of these habitats for farmland waders is recognised and, where possible, managed positively to enhance them."



Plate 115. Curlew © Alan Bell.

Nationally, the numbers of breeding waders have declined dramatically over the years with, for example, Curlew numbers declining by over 50% since the mid-1990s. The contributing factors are the draining of habitats, grassland improvement (particularly the conversion of moorland margins to improved grass) and nest predation. These farmland waders need different habitats and in general, a mosaic of



Plate 116. Redshank © Chris Gomersall, RSPB Images.

short and longer tussocky meadow vegetation provides this variety. Snipe like damp meadows with short dense vegetation with ditches and pool margins to feed from and longer vegetation to conceal their nests. Lapwings prefer to nest in a lined scrape in the ground and Curlew chicks like the cover of tussocks and taller vegetation to hide in. All the waders like open ground and damp meadows and pasture, which are found in the Glen Dochart area. Land managers and farmers in the project area will be offered advice on how different areas would benefit from certain management, such as the timing of grazing to increase wader numbers. More importantly, the National Park Land Management Advisors will also offer support to the land managers to apply for funding through the SRDP Rural Priorities and Land Management Options to carry out this work.



Plate 117. Lapwing © Andy Hay, RSPB Images.



Plate 118. Black Grouse © Andy Hay, RSPB Images.

### Black Grouse action

Another programme in the National Park Biodiversity Action Plan focuses on actions to help Black Grouse and again, these projects also highlight the benefits of working in partnership. Black Grouse have declined in numbers across Europe and have been identified as a UK priority species for conservation action. The various reasons for this decline include productive forestry management measures, grazing pressure on uplands which favours grasses over heath species such as bilberry and heather, rough grassland improvements, and the weather with increasingly cold, wet weather in June which threatens chick survival.

For a number of years there has been a co-ordinated survey of known lek areas in the National Park. The counts involve the RSPB, National Park staff, Forestry Commission Scotland, Woodland Trust Scotland and volunteers from the Central Scotland Black Grouse and Capercaillie Study Group (CSBG&CSG). The records are collated by the CSBG&CSG and help to inform assessment of

development and forestry proposals or SRDP Rural Development Contract applications that could affect Black Grouse. Because there are so many reasons for the decline, the National Park Land Management Advisors are working closely with the RSPB to offer more detailed land management advice to the landowners that have known lek sites. Many of these leks occur on privately owned land and funding sources are needed to undertake additional management for Black Grouse.

Another part of the programme is The National Park Black Grouse Habitat Enhancement Project. This aims to progress actions identified in a series of nine management appraisals covering key areas of largely private land and six key areas owned by Forestry Commission Scotland that were produced in an earlier partnership project. The project promotes the implementation of the management recommendations, which include measures such as grazing management, bracken control, restructuring of plantation edges, planting new small woodlands, deer fence removal (or reduction to stock fence height) and fence marking to help prevent bird strikes.

The RSPB is a lead partner on this project and fits this work into a wider Black Grouse project for Argyll and Stirling, for which Alison Phillip is the project officer. She said, "As well as working closely with the Park Authority to implement habitat management benefits for Black Grouse within the park, I am working towards achieving a better understanding of their distribution and population throughout Argyll and Stirling. The objectives of the Argyll and Stirling Black Grouse Project are to stabilise the number and range of the species by delivering positive habitat management in key areas. This project is funded by a partnership of RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Power and GDF Suez."

The National Park's Natural Heritage Grant Scheme, jointly funded by the Park Authority and Scottish Natural Heritage, has helped to fund some of these management measures and two workshops run by the RSPB that focused on forestry and upland farmland management. The National Park Land



**Plate 120.** Fence reduction for the benefit of Black Grouse © Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority.

Management Advisors and the RSPB will also help land managers to apply for funds through the SRDP Rural Priorities and Land Management Options to take forward these practical measures, which could help the birds.

The Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Biodiversity Action Plan highlights the projects that are being carried out, prioritises others which can be achieved through working in partnership. We will review progress with the three-year rolling work programme annually and continue to focus on the delivery of measures that can help to conserve our native birdlife.

If you would like to know more about these projects or others in the National Park please contact me at: [gwenda.diack@lochlomond-trossachs.org](mailto:gwenda.diack@lochlomond-trossachs.org). For information about the Argyll and Stirling Black Grouse Project contact Alison Phillip [alison.phillip@rspb.org.uk](mailto:alison.phillip@rspb.org.uk). The National Park Biodiversity Action Plan is on the National Park website [www.lochlomond-trossachs.org](http://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org).

**Gwenda Diack, National Park Ecologist**



**Plate 119.** Deer fence © Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority.

## Bird (and Butterfly) Spot - African food aid for farmland birds in Scotland

### Painted Ladies invade!

May 2009 was marked by a massive immigration of Painted Lady butterflies from North Africa. Huge numbers swept across Scotland throughout the month; I counted over 230 individuals on 50 m of track running alongside a flowering oil-seed rape crop near Guardbridge in Fife. Well-travelled and well-worn these often tatty individuals got on with the business of laying eggs on the food plants of their caterpillars - thistles. By July many of these caterpillars had pupated and in emerged as beautiful fresh Painted Lady butterflies in August.



Plate 121. Freshly emerged Painted Lady nectaring on red clover, Boghead, Angus, August 2009 © Clive McKay.

### African food aid for Scottish farmland birds

This summer I worked for the RSPB on their Farmland Bird Lifeline (FBL) project monitoring Corn Buntings in Fife, Angus and south Aberdeenshire. RSPB have been working closely with farmers in these areas to provide uncropped seed rich crops in which Corn Buntings can feed over the winter, and nest in the summer. Whilst looking at one such field at Bowhouse Farm near St. Monan's in Fife, I noticed female buntings flying back to their nests to feed their young with bulging beakfulls of what appeared to be black caterpillars. Digital photos confirmed the ID, and a walk through

the FBL "crop" revealed large numbers of Painted Lady caterpillars feeding on the leaves of Creeping Thistle and Spear Thistle.



Plate 122. A Painted Lady caterpillar on creeping thistle, Coal Farm, Fife, July 2009 © Clive McKay.

Subsequent observations showed that female Corn Buntings from at least seven nests were provisioning their young with caterpillars from this field, some flying up to a kilometre to take advantage of this bonanza. Bearing in mind that there are only c. 100 pairs of Corn Buntings in the whole of Fife, this single field was doing a great job! But it wasn't only in Fife where this was happening: female buntings from Angus to Aberdeenshire were feeding their hungry broods on Painted Lady caterpillars taken from their local FBL fields. And Tree Sparrows, House Sparrows and Yellowhammers were also getting in on the action.

Although Painted Lady caterpillars look unpalatable, it would seem that they are not distasteful to farmland birds. Many unpalatable caterpillars obtain toxins from their food plants to deter predators. I presume that thistles contain few such toxins as they depend on their spines for physical protection.

So why are these fields so important? Basically because the crops of mixed oats, barley, rye, linseed etc. are not sprayed with herbicide, allowing "weeds" to grow in amongst them. These "weeds" are often the essential food plants for a host of invertebrates, which in turn are the main food of nestling Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers, Tree Sparrows, Grey Partridges and the like.

**Plate 123.** Female Corn Bunting carrying Painted Lady caterpillars away from Farmland Bird Lifeline field, Bowhouse Farm, St Monans, Fife, July 2009  
© Clive McKay.



Many invertebrate larvae can only feed on a narrow range of plants - Red Admirals and Small Tortoiseshells on nettles, Painted Ladies on thistles etc. When you start to look, it's surprising how rare thistles can be in lowland arable farmland, so these small patches of unsprayed crops really do provide a lifeline for farmland birds. Alas, the new generation of Painted Lady butterflies that hatched from these thistles will probably never go on to breed. To do this they would need to emigrate back to areas with milder winters than Britain's, and to date there is little evidence for this return migration. It is thought that all the butterflies and caterpillars still remaining in Britain from this invasion will die off over the winter. But a new generation of Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers and Tree Sparrows will have benefited from the invasion of 2009.

Clive McKay

**Plate 124.** Brood of four well-fed Corn Bunting chicks, Bowhouse Farm, St Monans, Fife, June 2009  
© Clive McKay.



## News and Notices

### New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire** Mr G. MacDonald, **Borders** Mr A. Midgley, Mr A. Mitchell & Ms R. Johnstone, Mrs C. Rudram, Mr & Mrs G. Smith, **Central Scotland** Mr V. Godley & Ms M. MacSween, Mr & Mrs I. Sinclair, **Clyde** Mrs H. Cadden, Mr D. Sneddon, Mr A. Wild, Mr E. Williams, **England, Wales & NI** Mr J. Clark, Dr I. Duncan, Mr P. Garrity, Mr C. Gould, Mr R. Hider, Mrs L. Palmer, Mr P.C. Roake, **Grampian** Ms M.B. Cowie, Mr A.C. Edward, Mr D. Lunney, Mr H. Paton, **Highland** Mr R. Cookson, Mr N. Davies, Mr R.F. Hewitt, Mr D. MacAskill, Mr C. Rankine, Mr & Mr L. Templeton, **Lothian** Mr D. Brown, Miss C. Cant, Mr M. Coke & Ms S. West, Ms K. Fernie, Mr S. Geary, Mr & Mrs G. Gibb, Mr M. & Dr E. Hardie, Dr & Mrs A. Hart, Ms J. Heney, Mr J. Hird, Mr A. McLellan, Mr & Mrs H. Reid, Ms J. Ritchie & Mr M. Davies, Ms W. Shaw, Ms H. Thomas, **Stewartry** Mr I. Royle, **Tayside** Mr J. Cook, Mr A. Rollo & Ms M. Coleman, **West Galloway** Mr A. Keys, Mr D. Williamson.

### SOC 200 Club

The latest prize-winners are: **May: 1st** £30 Miss R. Davidson **2nd** £20 D. McIver **3rd** £10 S. Howe. **June: 1st** £30 G.A. Ball **2nd** £20 Mrs V. McLellan **3rd** £10 Dr Boddington. **July: 1st** £30 R.G. Vernon **2nd** £20 Mrs McVie **3rd** £10 Prof. Grist.

New members are always welcome. They must be over 18 and SOC members. Please contact: **Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.**

### Open Garden Day at Waterston House

Every second year, over a dozen gardens in Aberlady village are opened to the public under Scotland's Garden Scheme, with profits going to charities. This year, on Sunday 5 July, the SOC was invited to take part and readily agreed. Fortunately we had the experience of Stan da Prato, who is involved in several horticultural organisations, for guidance. As many members will know, the developing gardens at Waterston House include perennial/shrub beds, wild flower meadows, a large pond with a waterfall, an informal hedge, a rock bank and scrub, as well as a compost facility. All are looked after by volunteers and very little expenditure falls to the SOC. Individual explanatory signs for each area were composed by Stan with input from other gardeners. A summary of each is included below.

Good weather on the day and our big yellow sign pulled in the first of 200 visitors well before formal opening time. Dave Allan, Stan, Betty Smith, Sid Morgan and John Pringle were on hand to answer questions and to ensure there was no skinny-dipping in the pool. This was also a good



Plate 125. Garden visitors © John Pringle.

opportunity to steer our visitors into Waterston House (and the art gallery) where Wendy had laid out an informative display with an original map of the site and information on the building and the Club itself. We, of course, also enjoyed the day helping to raise money for charity, consolidating our position in the village and probably made 200 new friends, if not *yet* members.



Plate 126. Stan chills out © John Pringle.

These information panels summarise the main parts of the garden:

**Rock bank** This has examples of the flora native to local coasts such as Sea Campion, Thrift, Bloody Cranesbill, Biting Stonecrop, Kidney Vetch and Rock Rose. Beyond the top of the bank is a developing scrub area of Gorse, Broom, Alder and birch.

**Perennial beds** The garden was laid out in 2005 but due to the prevailing wind, exposure to the sun, low rainfall and soil type, some of the original plantings have proved unsuitable, e.g. heathers and *Rhododendrons*. Replacement is being undertaken gradually to include more plants such as hardy *Geraniums*, *Erodiums*, sages, several members of the daisy family (eg *Santolina*, *Echinacea*, *Leucanthemum*), dwarf *Hebes* and *Sempervivums*. Attraction to bees, butterflies and other insects is also important. House Sparrows, tits and Great Spotted Woodpeckers are very fond of the Red-hot Pokers whilst Dunnocks, Robins and Chaffinches regularly forage beneath the plants. Bird interest is considerably enhanced by the feeding station at the west end of the building which attracts many seed eaters, notably Goldfinches.

**Informal hedge** A spaced line of native shrubs - beech, holly, hawthorn, elder, yew, guelder rose, hazel - plus cotoneaster and other roses - interspersed with rowans, it will eventually provide shelter, nest sites and food for birds and other wildlife.

**Wild flower meadows** Two separate meadows are being developed from grassed areas on soil fertile due to its previous agricultural use. To reduce the level of fertility and the growth of coarse grasses and encourage more interesting flowers, the entire area is strimmed in winter and all material removed. By this time seeds from annuals have dropped to regenerate in the spring. Grass has been entirely removed from two areas and reseeded with arable 'weeds' - poppies, Oxeye Daisy, fumitory and mayweeds. This seems to work and will be trialed again in future years. The more interesting plants include the parasitic Yellow Rattle which weakens grasses, Vipers Bugloss, Musk Mallow and Corn Cockle now extinct in corn fields. Earlier in the year primroses, cowslips, Red Campion and dwarf Daffodils brightened the area.

**The pond** A very natural looking waterfall at one end is driven by a concealed electric pump. Roof water is fed into the pool which also provides water to flush the toilets. The water is mostly a metre deep, not entirely suitable for many pond plants, although three clumps of native white lilies have recently been sourced and these will be moved into deep water as they develop. Blanket weed is currently a nuisance and is regularly removed and left on the bank for aquatic inverte-



Plate 127. View across the waterfall towards Aberlady © Jimmy Maxwell.

brates to return to the water. Native plants include Reedmace, and, in shallower water, Bogbean, Flag Iris, Water Mint, Marsh Marigold, Loosestrife, Branched Bur-Reed and Greater Spearwort. In season *Mimulus* (Monkeyflower) makes a brilliant edge to the waterfall. Fish are still absent but frogs and their spawn and a variety of invertebrates including snails, which feed on the blanket weed, are all welcome.

Also seen around the gardens on most Wednesday mornings are a motley crew of gardeners, tea drinkers and tall-story tellers who all make the garden come alive. Additional to those already mentioned above are Marjorie Adams, Colin Beckett, Bill McArthur, Jamie McGillivray and Sheena Menzies.

*John Pringle*

### Do you want to help the SOC?

The SOC is your club; its success depends on the contribution from members. This short feature will, over successive issues, highlight some of the ways you can help. If you wish any further information please contact: Wendy Hicks at Waterston House.

- Gift Aid
- Remembering the SOC in your Will
- Gifting old bird books
- Getting involved in surveys
- Contributing articles for publication
- Attracting new members

Assisting in branch activities: could you assist your local branch in helping to organise an indoor meeting or field visit. Little things such as assisting with the raffle all help, so don't be afraid to ask!

### Branch contacts - amendments

The following are amendments to the Branch Secretaries and Recorders contacts sheet circulated in the June quarterly mailing:

- **Clyde Recorder:**  
New email; wilsonval@btinternet.com
- **Highland Recorder:**  
Kevin Davies, Tel: 01381 600545  
Email; kevjandkaren@hotmail.com
- **West Galloway Secretary:**  
New email; geoff.roddens@btinternet.com

### ■ Perth & Kinross Recorder:

Mike Martin, Tel: 01738 633948  
Email; mwa.martin@btinternet.com

### SOC Annual Conference 2009

'Celebrating Scotland's Bird Observatories'.  
Friday 30 October–Sunday 1 November.  
Windlestrae Hotel, Kinross.

### BTO/SOC Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

Saturday 20 March 2010, Culloden Academy,  
Culloden, Inverness.

### Replies to Stan da Prato's article "TV and Mr. Trump" in our last edition

Stan da Prato quite rightly questions the BBC's present coverage of the natural world. I fully agree with his views on celebrities and dumbing-down, and I am surprised he was not even more critical. Unfortunately, it isn't just the BBC's nature coverage that has been on the slippery slope for several years in the relentless chase for celebrities and spectacle. It seems to think this course will protect its licence fee income, but I believe it has made a serious misjudgement and will rue the backlash. Frank Field argued effectively in yesterday's *Sunday Times* that "Auntie is dying" and proposed that it should be replaced by a Public Service Broadcasting Commission allocating a much-reduced licence fee for the making of specific public-interest programmes. More and more people seem to be coming to this view, believing that the BBC - like MPs - appears more concerned about serving its own purposes than delivering on its Charter.

As far as the BBC's nature coverage is concerned, I believe the key moment was its decision to drop the Wildlife on One/Wildlife on Two stream of 30-minute programmes that had run for years and instructed us so effectively in all the myriad aspects of nature. When will we ever get another *Stately Stoats of Kedleston*, for example? Then, in 2006, we had the much-vaunted *Blue Planet*, on which the BBC is said to have blown virtually its whole nature budget. It was impressive, yes, but empty - just spectacle, and taught us little or nothing. Great for the BBC brand, overseas sales and the makers' CVs, no doubt, but surely far from what Lord Reith would

have wanted. The makers of *Blue Planet* sought input from the public and I exchanged several emails' worth of ideas with them before eventually giving up when it became clear the sort of "action" series they had in mind. Now, the occasional *Natural World* episode that isn't dominated by its presenters with the animals used as props is about all we have to look forward to, such as the excellent *Cuckoo* Stan mentioned. If it wasn't for the sales value of and public love for David Attenborough, I expect he'd have been dumped long ago too.

We need intelligent nature programmes strongly linked to conservation issues to encourage the new and increasingly urban generations to get out there and start treating our planet better. Recently I managed to catch on *Animal Planet* - not normally the most instructive of channels - the repeated *Soul of a River - Tales of the Mekong* series. By telling through their own words the stories of people living and working on and near this great river, it provided an instructive, fascinating and alarming account of the Mekong's ecosystem and the threats it faces. Nothing fancy, just good old-fashioned documentary-making of the sort the BBC used to do as matter of course, and doesn't any more.

The SOC should certainly make its voice heard, preferably in association with other nature and wildlife organisations. Let's have a national campaign, to show that some of us still care.

**Brian Cox**

We quite agree about wildlife programmes on TV. We don't often watch them and can't stand Spring and Autumn Watch. Non-birding friends seem surprised that we don't watch the latter two and don't understand when we say that we prefer to watch spring. We did happen to see the *Cuckoo* programme and we recall another good programme, about seabirds, presented by Roy Dennis, that we thought to be good for the same reasons: he spoke to people actually involved in research for a change. In this digital age it should be possible to opt for a choice of commentaries: dumb chatter with music in the background through to informative and inspiring.

**Richard & Barbara Mearns**

I entirely agree with Stan da Prato's sentiments regarding the current quality of nature broadcasting on television. Unfortunately for some presenters, it is difficult for us to know how much of the humanising of wildlife is due to the programme designers and how much to the presenters themselves. Were others like me driven to breaking point by the weekly antics of "Percy" the wild Scottish stag - and this from a presenter of well-established worth as a fine naturalist over many years?

In the same vein, I have become increasingly uneasy regarding the treatment of wild birds at the proliferating "Birds of prey" displays around the country, often at garden centres etc. I have no problem with events where the bird of prey is allowed to more or less do its natural thing through a simulation of hunting sequences, but often the owls, falcons etc are presented on tethering pedestals for the public to view. Fine so far, but on many occasions bystanders are being encouraged to approach and stroke the birds. This is probably normal bonding behaviour between the carer and their captive birds, but I feel there is something educationally wrong here and a real appreciation of wild things and how they behave is being distorted by the popular "birds are cuddly" line.

On my remarking to the guardian of these birds that I hadn't seen a Little Owl in the wild in Scotland for many years, he informed me that they were breeding locally in Lanarkshire not many miles away! The importance generated in sharing his expertise with the public had obviously encouraged him into fields of knowledge as yet unknown to the likes of "Birds of Scotland" authors.

This example, though far removed from TV presentations, displays the same element of undervaluing wildlife that so disappoints me. Wildlife is for observing, studying and enjoying, but certainly not for entertainment via "hands-on" gratification, nor for the indulgence of personalities who feel compelled to keep their audiences amused.

**Jimmy Maxwell**

## Notes and Comment



Plate 128. Wood Pigeon and Sparrowhawk  
© David Merrie.

### Unlikely perching mates

The Wood Pigeon sits there everyday, but on this wet morning was joined by this Sparrowhawk. My grab picture was taken through the bedroom window, hence not properly sharp. The pigeon looked a bit apprehensive and showed some relief when the Sparrowhawk flew off first.

David Merrie

### Good news, more Gannets in the world

"I've lost my cameraman, are you available tomorrow to do an aerial survey of the Forth Islands?" This is just the sort of call that justifies

owning a mobile and when John Davies explained what he wanted, basically photographs of Inchcolm, Inchkeith, Fidra and Craigeith for gull-counting, I leapt at it. "...and if you would like to do the Bass for Gannets, feel free" - so we did.

The Gannets' indifference to small, slow-flying aircraft has allowed us to build up a detailed picture of the relentless growth of the Bass colony since the mid-1980s. This time I was not intending to make a full survey, I just wanted to sit back and enjoy the spectacle without a camera in the way. However it was too tempting, all conditions were perfect, windless, bright sunshine, cooperative Gannets and a fancy new digital camera. After a couple of circuits of the rock, I found I had taken 300 pictures, more than enough to do a count from - but that will be a job for long winter nights. It's clear though, that the Bass numbers have increased since the last survey in 2004, good news backed up by substantial increases counted at Fair Isle, Troup Head and Grassholm this summer

Stuart Murray



Plate 129. Gannet's view of the Bass © Stuart Murray.



**Plate 130.** Cuckoo at Cowgills Glen, Lanarkshire  
© Lang Stewart.

### Cuckoo - Cuckhold

Sad news, the Cuckoo is now on the RSPB's Red List. As I write (in May), the Cuckoo is still calling on the moorland of the Isle of Bute. But in many parts of Britain it is the call that no longer heralds the arrival of spring.

In keeping with my interest in ornithological folklore, I read that in the West of Scotland, if you heard the Cuckoo before breakfast, ill fortune awaited you. If you heard it on a full stomach, all would be well. In the Borders it was believed that the male Cuckoo would eat its own eggs, hence the female Cuckoo learnt how to thwart his unpleasant habit by laying eggs in other birds' nests. In the chauvinistic times of Shakespeare, the blame was laid at the female's feet. She mated with the bird in whose nest she had laid, hence 'cuckolding' her mate.

*The Cuckoo then on every tree  
Mocks married men, for thus sings he: Cuckoo,  
Cuckoo, Cuckoo - O word of fear,  
Unpleasing to a married ear.*

### Love's Labour's Lost Act 5, Scene 2

The Cuckoo is famous for 'obligate blood parasitism' - laying its eggs in other birds' nests. In Britain over 50 species have been identified as hosts - Robin, Pied Wagtail, Sedge Warbler, Meadow Pipit, Hedge Sparrow and Reed Warbler being the most favoured. The parasitism is so highly evolved that the female produces eggs that closely resemble those of the host. David Attenborough has brought to

our TV screens footage of how the recently hatched fledgling Cuckoo uses the hollow in its back to throw out the eggs of its host. There is evidence that females use the same host species that raised them, hence the inherited ability to produce eggs that resemble those of the host species. Contemporary observation shows that the Cuckoo is least efficient in producing Hedge Sparrow eggs, suggesting that this species is a newcomer to the list of host species. On Bute the Meadow Pipit is most favoured, hence the Cuckoo's presence on our upland moors.

The Cuckoo's natural food is insectivorous; hairy caterpillars a major food item. The current, rather precipitous decline of the Cuckoo may be due to insecticide use.

The children's rhyme, which I have known all my life goes:

*In April I open my bill,  
In May, I sing night and day,  
In June I change my tune,  
In July away I fly,  
In August away I must.  
If they stay until September,  
'Tis as much as the oldest man can remember.*

Far from legend, it is known that the adult Cuckoos leave for sub-Saharan Africa (via Italy) well before the young of the year depart. These young are born with the instinct to find their winter quarters alone, uninfluenced by their foster parents. Nature not nurture rules - OK!!

**Michael Thomas**



**Plate 131.** Cuckoo from Rev. F.O. Morris's The History of British Birds, 1850.



Plates 132–134. Dead Tawny Owls © Dave Merrie.



#### Owls in trouble

The pictures above and left are of adult and immature Tawny Owls which were unfortunately electrocuted. They were found by a neighbour below a transformer on a pole in ground at Craigie, Perthshire on 20 July. The burnt claw of the immature (Plate 133) can be clearly seen and the claws of the adult are gripping grass (Plate 134), suggesting it was still alive when it hit the ground.

*David Merrie*



#### A brave mother!

On 20 July a female Mallard was leading 10 tiny ducklings down the Cuddy Stream in Peebles when she saw a Grey Heron ahead of her. Clearly realising the potential threat, she took off and launched herself at the Heron's back, seemingly grabbing it with her beak. The Heron took off downstream with the duck still attached! A few moments later, the Mallard flew back safely to her brood, shook herself, and continued as before.

*Tom Dougall*

# BOOK REVIEWS



**RSPB Handbook of Scottish Birds.** Peter Holden and Stuart Housden, 2009. Christopher Helm (A. & C. Black), ISBN 978-1-4081-1232-8, softback, £9.99.

This follows the same format as the "RSPB Handbook of British Birds", published in 2002, with mostly one A5 page per species, colour-coded at the top for conservation status, and covering 250 species of regular occurrence. Inevitably the two books overlap. At first glance this one appears to be aimed at relative beginners in Scotland, or those on a first visit, and may seem to have little to offer most readers of *Scottish Birds*. But there's more to it than that.

It contains much basic information in concise and conveniently accessible form, and it will go in an OS map-sized pocket. Much of the information has probably been taken from the Club's own two volume *Birds of Scotland* and due acknowledgement is made to that, but few of us will ever read that great work from cover to cover. The illustrations - several per species - are generally good, almost good enough to tempt some readers to think they don't need a proper field guide. The distribution maps are quite detailed and perhaps not to be interpreted too precisely. The pale yellow for summer visitors doesn't always show up very well, especially in small bits. But even on a first browse through this book, I have found some useful bits which I know to be true and which I cannot recall seeing anywhere else.

At £9.99 it is well worth thinking about.

John Law

**Birds of Ethiopia and Eritrea.** John Ash and John Atkins, 2009. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-1-4081-0979-3, hardback, 463 pages, £45.00.

This is a most thorough and well-researched avifauna of these two countries, giving a huge amount of detail. It starts with a comprehensive, albeit relatively brief and mercifully simple, history of the development of these two countries, which have sometimes been together as Abyssinia and at other times, as now, independent states. This history combines the troubled development of the two countries with the ornithological history, almost entirely conducted by European explorers and adventurers, of whom James Bruce of Kinnaird, discoverer of the Blue Nile, was among the earliest. Chapters on topography, geology, vegetation and climate set the scene for bird habitats and conservation, whilst migration (including of course many wintering Palearctic species) and breeding seasons are separately covered.

There follows a superb section of photos of the 29 endemic species which are such a lure to birdwatchers from other areas, but most of the remainder of the book, some 280 pages, is taken up with brief descriptions of distribution, habitat requirement, breeding dates and favoured sites for each of the 871 species recorded. These short paragraphs are placed side-by-side with detailed distribution maps, but sadly with no more photos or



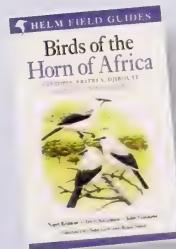
illustrations, which make this largest section of the book somewhat dry. Finally there is a short section on ringing and recoveries.

This comprehensive book is for the serious student of the fascinating birdlife of such an important, and still to outsiders relatively unknown, part of the African continent. It is probably unlikely to feature in the luggage of most visitors, particularly first-timers, who will initially be more interested in identification.

Mike Betts

**Birds of the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Socotra.** Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson and John Fanshawe, 2009. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-0-7136-6541-3, paperback, 496 pages, £29.99.

This is a classic Helm field guide, of typically high standard, and is a most welcome update to previous guides which all appear to be out of print. With around 70 species to be found only in this area, and being on such an important migration route for Palearctic species wintering in Africa, the Horn is an increasingly popular destination for birders. Much of the area is still off-limits, notably Somalia, and certain border areas between Ethiopia and Eritrea. However of recent years Ethiopia in particular, where most of the endemics and near-endemics can be found, has become increasingly accessible to outsiders.



Even the island of Socotra, which belongs to Yemen and has some 10 endemics of its own, is now a realistic destination.

The book would be vital to any birder visiting this area: it gives a clear and concise description of every species ever recorded in the area, of habitat, distribution and voice, each accompanied by a small map. Opposite each description is a superb illustration. My only niggle is that some of the maps, inevitably slightly small because of the size of the area covered, can be difficult to read: the authors have shown the high ground, understandably because this is particularly relevant to many of the endemics, but its grey shading sometimes makes for a difficult combination with the colours showing species' distribution.

I am hoping to return to Ethiopia in the future, and this book will certainly come with me.

*Mike Betts*

***Islands.* R.J. Berry, 2009. New Naturalist No. 109. Collins, ISBN 978-0-00-726737-8, hardback, 384 pages, £50.00. Also available in softback, £29.99.**

The book begins with a series of chapters about islands in general and those around Britain and Ireland in particular. The author attempts to define an island - must it necessarily be separated from the mainland at all stages of the tide? Has Skye ceased to be an island since the bridge was built? He discusses various historical criteria before settling on a list of around 500, including such outposts as North Rona, Sula Sgeir and Rockall but not Fidra and Craighleith in the Forth. Eccentrically (his word), he includes the Faroes as "major insular neighbours of ours" and they do, at times, form a useful outgroup for comparison.

A dash through 4,500 million years of geological history follows, with increasing focus on the Holocene, the 10,000 years or so since the last ice age. In this time, the changing sea levels have greatly altered our islands, submerging some completely and splitting others into many smaller islets. This is where island biogeography comes into the story. Which species managed to cross the "land bridges" before they were lost? Isolation on islands also affects evolution. Many island endemic subspecies have been claimed. Examples include Wrens, field mice and the extinct St Kilda House Mouse. How many stand up to modern scientific examination? Then there are the introductions, such as rats, mink and hedgehogs. What is a native anyway? Many thought of as natives have arrived with human help. Of course, humans too are relatively recent colonists of these islands!

Later chapters focus on particular island groups, starting at the Faroes, Shetland and Orkney and working anticlockwise round our shores. There are so many islands that these are necessarily brief but informative. I learnt quite a lot, including the fact that the midpoint of a line from John O'Groats to Lands End lies not far from my parents' home in the Isle of Man! I only noticed one factual error; the Bass Rock is said to be home to 34,000 pairs of Gannets, whereas the true figure (2004) is around 48,000.

The book closes with a history of island naturalists; those who have visited or lived in the islands over the centuries and have written about their natural history, from Martin Martin, through Thomas



Pennant and John Harvie-Brown to Fraser Darling, Joe Eggeling and Bryan Nelson. A telling example of human impact is shown in Figure 241, a photograph taken on Rum after the post-International Ornithological Congress cruise in 1966. It shows what was probably the only litter bin on the island, almost entirely buried under a pile of empty beer cans!

There have been many previous books in the New Naturalist series on particular island groups, including Professor Berry's own volumes on Shetland (No 64) and Orkney (No 70). This is a worthy addition to the series for anyone interested in our island biogeography and its effects on distribution and evolution.

*Paul Speak*

***An Atlas of Wader Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia.* Simon Delany, Derek Scott, Tim Dodman & David Stroud, 2009. Wetlands International, Wageningen, The Netherlands, ISBN 78-90-5882-047-1, 524 pages, hardback, £70.00.**

Although yet another atlas, this one is somewhat different in that it maps the breeding and non-breeding distribution of each population of every wader species in the region, plus showing the linkage between the two distributions and maximum counts at all key sites.

It is a collaborative effort by several European NGOs including the Wader Study Group and JNCC. The aim of the book is to illustrate the current knowledge of wader population distribution and to identify key sites which, in turn, will assist long-term conservation and enable the implementation of both the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement

and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. If this seems rather distant to one's day-to-day birding, then remember that if you count birds for WeBS (the Wetland Bird Survey), as many of us do, this information will have been fundamental towards the data in the book.

Ninety species are described, all of which occur regularly in Africa, SW and Central Asia and Europe. Many have several discrete populations using a diversity of flyways. A wetland is a key site if it supports 1% of the individuals of a population at any time of the year. Several lie in Scotland, including the Firths of Clyde, Forth and Tay, the Moray Firth, the Uist machairs and some of the Northern Isles.

Each species is illustrated by a colour photograph and full-page map. The following text describes the geographical variation and distribution, movements, population limits and sizes, conservation status, habitat and ecology, and the network and protection status of key sites. A table for most species shows these sites listed by country, with the site name and co-ordinates, the season of importance, the population using the site and the source of the data. Maximum and average counts are also shown as well as the year in which the maximum was recorded. This latter does highlight the disparity in regular coverage. For example, there are countries for which counts are recent, such as data from UK and France, but also those where no counts are available since the 1970s. Generally, though, most are from the 1990s and later.

If, like me, you cannot help counting birds on overseas wetlands, the book shows you where and when are best, and how many are at your favourite

sites. Otherwise, it is instructive to see where your homeland waders spend the rest of their year.

All in all, an excellent publication for conservationists and researchers, but its genre and the price would probably deter most birders from buying it for themselves.

*Norman Elkins*

**Call of the Eagle.** Dave Walker, 2009. Whittles Publishing, Dunbeath, Caithness, ISBN 978-1904445-82-1, 163 pages, paperback, £16.99.

I read this book in a cloud of nostalgia. The author watched the Lake District Golden Eagle nest sites over a 30-year period. I was a volunteer watcher there in the 1970s.

This is not a happy tale because the eagles there are no longer viable. No young reared since 1996, no eggs laid since 2000 and only a single male since 2004. Dave Walker, who has probably spent more hours watching Golden Eagles than anyone else, is pessimistic about the future of Goldies in Britain. He regards them as the forgotten species of the conservation movement. The annual death toll of the species in Scotland continues.

The book covers all aspects of Golden Eagle behaviour, mostly the result of Lake District vigils, but includes a chapter on Scotland. Some interesting colour photographs are included.

*Michael Thomas*

**The Little Owl - Conservation, Ecology and Behaviour of *Athene noctua*.** Dries van Nieuwenhuysse, Jean-Claude Genot and David H. Johnson, 2008. Cambridge University Press, ISBN 978-0-521-88678-9, hardback, 574 pages, £40.00.

There is nowadays a fairly regular stream of publications devoted to individual species and this latest is a notable newcomer. The book comprehensively covers all aspects of the Little Owl's life, including sections on history, conservation, breeding biology, behaviour, habitat, food, distribution, taxonomy and world population. In other words virtually everything you would want to know about the species may be found here. Much of the detailed study took place in Belgium, but data is provided for no less than 84 countries which indicates its extensive range. This is a book like others of its type which most would explore by individual sections of particular interest, but in total it must be now seen as the authoritative reference on this attractive bird. A shame that the species figures in such a small way in Scotland.

*Keith Macgregor*

**Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere.** Richard Chandler, 2009. Christopher Helm, ISBN 978-1-408-10790-4, 448 pages, softback, £29.99.

Ornithological literature has a plethora of books dealing with shorebirds to which the author freely admits in the opening



acknowledgements paragraph. What makes this volume special and different is that instead of relying on the skills of an artist for the illustrations, it incorporates very high quality digital photographs. Simply turning the pages reveals a stunning selection of photographs, with multiple shots for all 134 species covered. Some 850 colour photographs have been carefully selected providing detailed coverage of virtually all ages, plumages and subspecies in the region.

In his introduction the author, an acknowledged shorebird expert, mainly covers two important topics and key to shorebird identification. Plumage and moults runs to 15 pages and shorebird behaviour to 12 pages. Here the use of photographs clearly illustrates points described in the text.



Each species account discusses the main identification criteria, covering dimensions, wingspan, flight characteristics, plumage descriptions for

all ages, calls/song, status, habitat and distribution, racial variation and hybridisation, similar species and key references. Naturally, some species are covered on a single page and reflect the paucity of good information, whilst others run to eight pages or more. Picking out Ruff as an instructive example, a single page shows the extraordinary range of plumages in a series of 12 photographs of breeding male birds.

This relatively handy-sized volume will be an important new source for shorebird identification and a very good addition to the in-car library.

David Clugston

**Archibald Thorburn: The Prints and Proofs 1889-1934.** David Waters, 2009. Langford Press, ISBN 978-1-904078-27-2, hardback, £38.00.

David Waters has been an admirer of Archibald Thorburn's work since at 18 he was given a Thorburn print - subsequently he became an avid collector. This book gives a short account of Thorburn's life as an artist and illustrator. The rest of the chapters are given below:

- 1 Books written and illustrated by Thorburn,
- 2 Collectors issues, sourcing images, print quality, print care and preservation,
- 3 Print types, publishers and printers. The period when Thorburn was productive was also a time when new printing techniques were introduced, many of which he used.
- 4 The Prints. The book contains 190 prints of varying sizes giving the methods of production that it is known that Thorburn used. Even now, 118 years after the first print was published, previously unknown prints appear. The last signed print was published in 1934, a year before his death. All show Thorburn's mastery of composition and detail with each print accurately depicting species in their usual habitat.

This book was marred for me by three problems:

- 1 In the introductory chapters some illustrations have no explanatory title which can make it difficult to link a particular image to the text.
- 2 The larger prints are printed across the fold obscuring some details and making it difficult to appreciate the quality of the print.
- 3 Apart from an index linking "page" to "category" there is no effective index of prints by title, which makes it difficult for anyone searching for a particular print by title.

The book appears to have been written by a collector for other collectors, but for any one interested in bird art and illustrations, it is a fascinating collection - a good opportunity to view all Thorburn's prints together.

Harriet Trevelyan

**Return of the Eagle.** Greg Breining, photos by Frank Oberle and others, 2008. The Lyons Press, ISBN 978-0-7627-4790-0, softback, £12.99.

The eagle captures the imagination of many countries and cultures and this is certainly



the case for the Bald Eagle in the USA. It is a bird which has iconic status and inhabits the American consciousness. As one commentator notes in the book, the Bald Eagle "reflects the soul of America". It is little wonder then that this species was adopted as the national symbol of the USA in 1782. However, like many top predators, it was driven to the brink of extinction in the 1960s, due to a legacy of hunting and wide scale poisoning by agri-chemicals, all in the pursuit of uncontrolled development. This book effectively chronicles the Bald Eagle's demise and its subsequent recovery through an effective conservation programme implemented by conservation groups and government agencies. The book also features a directory of over 150 areas where people can view Bald Eagles. First published in 1994, this is a worthy reprint which serves as a great celebration of a magnificent bird of prey, expressed beautifully in both text and photo.

Michael Thornton

**History of British Birds.** D.W. Yalden & U. Albarella, 2009. Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19921751-9, hardback, £55.00.

This book records the presence of birds in Britain from the first known Jurassic fossil - *Archaeopteryx* - to the present. It appears to be the first attempt to bring together information which up until now has been scattered throughout archaeological reports and other writings. The authors, with help of research students, trawled through manuscripts in the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester and other institutions to make a database of all birds mentioned. Identification of each species in these reports was by the reports' authors and this was accepted by D. Yalden.

The first chapters cover:

1) *Identification and dating of found specimens.* This depends on adequate and accurate reference collections to classify and date the bird bones discovered. The authors dispel the myth that bird bones are not robust enough to become fossils or that they cannot be reliably assigned to a species. Genetic studies have shed light on the relationship between species but results from these studies suggest that at the accepted rate of genetic modification, the diversion of species must have started much earlier than traditionally proposed.

2) *The early history of birds in Europe.* The authors describe the variations in climate experienced in Europe, from tropical, to cool, to glaciated, that influenced habitats: the Upper Jurassic through cool Cretaceous, glaciation, post-glacial treeless prairie, then after very rapid warming, to widespread woodland coverage, and as man began farming, to the present

managed mixed agricultural and wooded landscape. They use the accepted cultural timescale from Mesolithic, Iron Age via Roman, Anglo-Saxon, mediaeval etc to examine the effect of social organisation on habitat and therefore birds. From this is extrapolated the likely avifauna at each period. The authors acknowledge that this has less relevance to Ireland where there was no Anglo-Saxon presence and to Scotland where the situation was more complex with Picts, Scots from Ireland, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings - all present and interacting at different times.

The authors have attempted to confirm the British Mesolithic avifauna found at archaeological and historic sites by comparison with Bialowieza National Park, Poland - a fairly similar present day habitat. Though its climate is continental not maritime, there are enough similarities to be useful.

The problems of using found bones to give a description of an avifauna at any particular period are discussed: the size of bones can determine their persistence in archaeological sites. Such descriptions of the avifauna can never be comprehensive. Smaller birds are probably under represented and later human activity can affect some sites.

Cretaceous bird fossils have been found but not enough to give a coherent story. The first abundant British avifauna is found in the Eocene London Clays laid down 38–54 million years ago (Ma). In Britain the number of zoological archaeological finds is diminished by the Ice Ages (1.8 Ma to present) when biological activity was very reduced and many specimens destroyed by the ice.

The rest of the chapter headings are: 1) pre-Roman Farm and Fenland, 2) Roman and Medieval

Britain and 3) Elizabethan to Victorian and into the 20th Century. The authors also look at evidence of bird presence as given in place names.

This book is well furnished with tables and distribution maps. To me, with limited knowledge of palaeontology and archaeology, the most useful table (on pages 18 & 19) showed the geological time line from Jurassic to present giving the sites and birds identified. It is tripartite, the left part showing the geological period 194 to 2 million years ago, the middle, the Pleistocene is expanded to show the period 1,800,000 to 10,000 years ago and the right section is expanded from the late Palaeolithic 15,000 years ago to the present.

There is a problem with the arrangement of those distribution maps which pair archaeological sites with place-names. Each pair is printed on opposite sides of the same page making comparison a matter of constant page-turning. As the authors state in the introduction, this book is aimed at the professional practitioner; they give complete lists of species found at any period or site, and I, as a mere interested amateur, although fascinated with the wealth of information, found it quite hard work at times. The authors set out to collate as many of the available reports as possible for fellow professionals, and as such it should succeed. It is more for reference than a good read, but I did learn much from it.



Harriet Trevelyan

# Birding in Scotland

## PHOTOSPOT



**Plate 135.** *This photograph shows something rarely seen and almost never photographed in the wild! Not only a Corncrake out in the open, but with a brood of three well-grown chicks to boot. The chicks in the photo are perhaps ten days old – after this time the female leaves them to fend for themselves.*

*Corncrakes are of course masters at hiding in tall vegetation, so the chances of seeing them at the end of summer are pretty remote. This photograph was taken by John Bowler in his back garden at Balephuil on Tiree on 26 August 2009.*

*John commented: "It had just stopped raining and the female bird had come out of the long grass, first to start preening (and dry off!), and was quickly joined by two chicks, who did the same. A third chick then emerged and the other two chicks went over to meet with it (one bird even touching bills with the newcomer). The family has been around for several days now in the garden - I've never seen such a confiding brood before."*

*"I took this photo by digi-binning; I put my Nikon Coolpix 4500 camera up to the right eye-piece of my Swarovski 8x30 bins, focussing on the birds by looking through the left eye-piece with my right eye and then simply clicking away on a portrait setting (without referring to the screen on the back of the camera). I find this technique works really well for record shots and allows you to follow the birds in the bins whilst you are photographing them. The photos were taken through our lounge windows which overlook the back garden. By moving slowly within the lounge I was able to get right up against the window without spooking the birds."*

**PhotoSpot** - a new feature in which we hope to publish the best image posted on the SOC website each quarter. It could be a stunning portrait, or a record shot of something unique, but when presented in Scottish Birds the photographer will be asked to supply the story behind the photograph, together with a brief explanation of techniques and equipment used. **Send in your photos now - it's open to all.**

# Cattle Egret at Steinish, Lewis, 13 August 2007 - the first Outer Hebrides record

T. AP RHEINALLT

On the evening of 13 August 2007 I was driving to Steinish on the outskirts of Stornoway to check the wader roost, when my attention was drawn to a white bird flying over the road ahead of me. Because of the traffic I was unable to slow down or stop immediately, but this brief view was enough to show that it was a small egret. I jumped to the conclusion that it was a Little Egret, with a mental note to check for Snowy; Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* was not on my radar at that point, never having been recorded in the Outer Hebrides or indeed in western Scotland as far as I was aware.

I quickly turned left onto a quieter road, and jumped out of the car. There was no sign of the bird so I concluded that it had landed - perhaps to avoid the heavy shower rushing in from the west. A reed-filled ditch at the bottom of the field seemed the most likely location,

and so I sat in my car to wait for the shower to pass. There were some Common Gulls feeding in the field beside me, but I quickly realised that the closest bird was certainly no gull. Instead it was a Cattle Egret in breeding plumage!

I watched the bird for more than an hour as it moved around the area, initially feeding with sheep and later with cattle. It was also seen by Martin Scott and Bob Wemyss, who came along in response to my phone calls. The next day Martin Scott relocated it at Laxdale, and that was the last time it was seen.

This bird was the first record for the Outer Hebrides, and only the fourth for Scotland.

*Tristan ap Rheinallt, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides. Email: calidris@cix.co.uk*



Plates 136–137. Cattle Egret, Steinish, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, August 2007 © Tristan ap Rheinallt



Plates 138–139. Cattle Egret, Cardoness, Dumfries & Galloway, January 2008 © Fraser Simpson.

## Cattle Egret at Cardoness, December 2007–January 2008 - the second Dumfries & Galloway record

M. HANNAY & P.N. COLLIN

Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* have proven to be successful colonisers spreading across Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. Cattle Egrets also reached South America in 1877 and have since spread throughout North America reaching Canada.

Given the widely recognised changes in climate in Europe, and the associated rapid colonisation of Britain and subsequent breeding by Little Egrets, the equivalent colonisation by the closely related Cattle Egret therefore came as no surprise - it was just a question of when. The scale of the initial invasion in late 2007 was remarkable and centred on SW England, southern Ireland and Wales with additional birds scattered elsewhere. Birds were often mobile making it difficult to ascertain the exact totals involved

but estimates put numbers at over 50 in the SW counties of England and about 109 in total (Angus Murray pers com).

The influx started with birds first being seen in September 2007, with at least 15 present by November and over 50 by Christmas, with numbers continuing to increase into January 2008.

The only Scottish representative from this influx was a single bird found in Dumfries and Galloway on 24 December 2007; below MH describes how he first discovered this bird on his home patch:

I was just returning from our local town, Gatehouse of Fleet, in Kirkcudbrightshire, during the late morning of Christmas Eve, 2007, with

one of my sons, having been to collect some last minute Christmas shopping. As I turned off the A75, I noticed what looked like an egret out of the corner of my eye in the poorly drained and rushy field opposite our drive, but, being on the main road where it was difficult, to stop, I decided to carry on and walk back later to look for it. I also wanted to get my telescope to show the bird to my son, James, aged nine.

To be honest, despite the field-type habitat, I was assuming all the time that the bird was a Little Egret, a bird I had seen once before on the shore here at Cardoness, and a bird that is now being seen with some regularity along the North Solway coast.

We walked to the end of our drive and I was relieved to see that the bird was still there, so I immediately put the 'scope on it, ready to show James his first egret. Imagine my surprise as I put my eye to the lens to be presented, not with a Little Egret as I had assumed, but the blunt, yellow bill of a stunning Cattle Egret, and on Christmas Eve too! "It's not a Little Egret, it's a f..... Cattle Egret" were my exact exclaimed words, so James not only saw his first Cattle Egret, but also learnt a new word at the same time!

A few people saw it later that day, and it was seen going off to roost, probably in some conifers opposite. It was still present on Christmas Day, but could not be found the following morning. With the help of many pairs of searching eyes, it was relocated in the fields close to Cardoness Castle, about 2.5 km away, later on Boxing Day where it remained until it was last reported on 11 January 2008.

During its stay, it was seen by a couple of hundred visiting birders. It appeared to be feeding happily, mainly eating earthworms, and typically frequented several fields which had grazing sheep in them, but was also seen in an overgrown marshy area near cottages beside the main road. Sometimes it would actually feed along the verge of the A75, and it is to be hoped that it didn't meet a sticky end on the fender of some Irish juggernaut! At times it could be ridiculously tame

resulting in some excellent photographs being taken, though at others it was surprisingly elusive, I subsequently discovered that it was not averse on occasion to feeding within a hen run beside a nearby farmhouse!

This was the sixth record of Cattle Egret for Scotland, and the second for Dumfries and Galloway after a long-staying bird in 1986. It proved at the time to be the most northerly UK bird from the influx in late 2007, though subsequently a single bird was recorded at Mydaleur in Iceland on 20 December.

Some 70 birds associated with this influx stayed on in England until May 2008 and two pairs successfully bred in Somerset.

#### Reference

Arandt, W.J. 1988. Range expansion of Cattle Egret in the Caribbean Basin. *Colonial Waterbirds* 2: 252–262.

*Mark Hannay, Cardoness Estate, Gatehouse of Fleet, Dumfries & Galloway.*

*Paul N. Collin, Gairland, Old Edinburgh Road, Newton Stewart Dumfries & Galloway DG8 6PL.*



## Cattle Egret - its status in Scotland

*Cattle Egret* is the most widespread of the heron family, and breeds in the Americas, the Palearctic, Africa, southern Asia and Australia. It has undergone a major range expansion during the latter half of the 20th century, and appears to have benefitted from deforestation and conversion of land to arable and livestock farming. Within the Western Palearctic it is a resident breeder in the Canary Islands, along the NW coast of Morocco and Algeria, and in Portugal and Spain and then eastwards locally through the western Mediterranean islands, France, Italy and Egypt, Israel, Turkey and the Caucasus. In recent years records have increased in NW Europe and small flocks of birds have been seen annually in Belgium and Holland. Birds in the western part of this range are more widely dispersed in winter while those in more northerly areas tend to migrate south to coastal areas of the Mediterranean.

The first Cattle Egret in Britain was an immature female shot near Kingsbridge, Devon in late

October 1805. There were only two other accepted records up until 1950 - in Norfolk in 1917 and 1934. Since then there have been a further 259 individuals to the end of 2007, with just six of these in Scotland:

- 1979 Angus, one, Loch of Kinnordy, 10–19 May.
- 1986 Dumfries & Galloway, one, Black Park Farm and Souleat Loch, near Stranraer, 14 October to 20 November. Same, Milton Loch, near Crocketford (Dumfries & Galloway), 6–14 December.
- 1999 Shetland, one, Symbister Harbour, Whalsay, 27 January - taken into care (released in Portugal on 19 February).
- 2007 Outer Hebrides, adult, Steinish & Laxdale, Lewis, 13–14 August.
- 2007 Caithness, adult, Scrabster Mains, 22 September to 3 October.
- 2007–08 Dumfries & Galloway, adult, Cardoness, 24 December to 11 January 2008.

Records of Cattle Egret in Britain have risen dramatically from none in the 1950s, seven in the 1960s and five in the 1970s, increasing to 29 in the 1980s, 59 in the 1990s and 152 from 2000 to the end of 2007, with 90 of these in 2007 alone. The species has been annual in Britain since 1992 and the rapid increase in records and relative ease of identification has resulted in it no longer being a BBRC description species from 1 January 2009.

The great majority of records have come from southern Britain, particularly the SW counties of England, with very few records north of a line from the Wash to the Mersey. Prior to the 2007 influx there were record from all months of the year with peaks of find dates in early spring and in December. Following the 2007 influx two pairs of Cattle Egrets bred in Somerset in summer 2008 and each successfully fledged one chick - the first recorded breeding in Britain. If this species follows its close cousin, the Little Egret, then we can expect it to become an increasing visitor to Scotland, though the same factors which still prevent Little Egret breeding in the north of Britain may well delay its addition to the Scottish breeding fauna.



Plate 140. Cattle Egret at Scrabster Main, Caithness, September 2007 © Harry Scott.



Plate 141. *Hudsonian Whimbrel, Fair Isle, August 2007* © Deryk Shaw.

## Hudsonian Whimbrel on Fair Isle, August 2007 - the third Scottish record

D.N. SHAW

It was 17:45hrs on 29 August 2007 and, as there had been a large movement of Great Shearwaters past North Ronaldsay, I was sitting on the east side of Bunes trying in vain to catch a glimpse of one - you'd think that after eight years of seawatching off Fair Isle I'd realise how futile it is!

I heard what I thought was a Whimbrel call somewhere to my right. I looked up and saw a light brown whimbrel-sized bird flying low along the edge of the cliff away from me. It did not have a white rump and appeared too pale for a Whimbrel. It really threw me as to what it was. The pale brown upperparts with buff fringes to many of the feathers made me suspect a juvenile raptor. I raised my bins to it and thought "No, wrong shape" "It was a Whimbrel, but it had a dark rump - it must be a Hudsonian!" It then veered around the end of Bunes, turning sideways and I saw its striking

head pattern. Confirmed! I followed it but by the time I got there there was no sign of it.

I returned to the observatory as it was tea time. As we ate, the mist and rain rolled in and although we (myself, Mark Breaks & Simon Davies) searched likely areas after tea we could not find it. Next morning Paul Baxter phoned to say he had just seen it flying over the shop towards the east coast. I relocated it sitting on a small skerrie off the Rippack. We all had good views there before it flew northwards along the coast and was lost once more. A few Shetland birders were coming in for it on the Good Shepherd so I spent some time trying to relocate it. Eventually I spotted it from Bunes, across the bay of Finniquoy feeding along the rocky face of Goorn. It remained in the general Finniquoy area until 31 August when it flew north along the east coast and was not seen again.

### Description

**General appearance:** A medium/large wader with brown upperparts, dirtier underparts, a striking stripey head pattern, fairly long legs and long downward curved bill. **Upperparts:** Stripey head pattern typical of Eurasian Whimbrel with broad brown lateral crown stripes, a narrow dirty white median crown stripe, long broad dirty white (with tiny brown flecks) supercilium and a long dark brown eye stripe. However it appeared to be more strikingly patterned than on Eurasian Whimbrel. This may have been because the entire rest of the upperparts were generally a lighter brown than on Eurasian Whimbrel and lacking in white, being mottled various shades of mid-brown to buff and therefore contrasting more with the head than it would on Eurasian Whimbrel. In flight, there was a noticeable pale buff panel across the middle section of each wing (secondaries, greater, median and lesser coverts). Primaries were darker brown similar to crown stripes and the primary coverts stood out as being a darker brown still. The underwing was also different to Eurasian Whimbrel, being noticeably mid-brown instead of white as on Eurasian Whimbrel. The most obvious difference (from Eurasian Whimbrel) however was the lack of a white rump, it being uniform light brown instead, not really contrasting with the back or tail, although tail did have slightly darker bars through it. **Underparts:** The underparts too were lacking in pure white, being a dirty white with lots

of small light brown flecks - appearing at distance to be uniform dirty pale buff, more uniform, lacking the streaking of Eurasian Whimbrel. **Bare parts:** Eye: black. Bill: long (2.5–3.0 x head length), between Eurasian Curlew and Eurasian Whimbrel in length, fairly straight proximal half, gently curved downwards along distal half - less curved than Eurasian Whimbrel. Reddish horn at base gradually darkening to blackish at tip. Legs: blue-grey medium length as Eurasian Whimbrel. **Call:** loud rapid bubbling whistle 'whuwhuwhuwhuwhuw' as Eurasian Whimbrel. **Age/Sex:** The plumage was extremely worn with many ragged body feathers and wing covert feathers indicating it was an adult. The long bill I assume suggests it was a female. **Behaviour:** Kept very much to the coast, either feeding low down along rocky cliff faces or on rocky skerries just offshore. Fairly active when feeding, walked around rock face, probing into nooks and crannies for food items, occasionally raised wings for balance. I have never observed such behaviour from Eurasian Whimbrel.

There has been one other Fair Isle record -found and identified by Valerie Thom and Ken Williamson on 27–31 May 1955 and this was also the first British record.

*Deryk N. Shaw, Fair Isle Bird Observatory,  
Fair Isle, Shetland ZE2 9JU.*



Plates 142–143. *Hudsonian Whimbrel, Fair Isle, August 2007* © Paul Baxter.



Plate 144. Hudsonian Whimbrel, Fair Isle, August 2007 © Deryk Shaw.

## Hudsonian Whimbrel - its status in Scotland

Four races of Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* are typically recognised, with birds which breed in North America being ascribed to the race *N. p. hudsonicus* generally referred to as 'Hudsonian' Whimbrel. This subspecies breeds in Alaska, NW and central Canada eastwards to Hudson Bay. The population is entirely migratory and winters in coastal areas of southern USA, the Caribbean, Central America and South America as far south as Brazil and Chile.

The taxonomic position of the subspecies of Whimbrel has long been debated, with some authors suggesting that some of these forms deserve full species status. While the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) and its American counterpart (AOU) currently treat the forms as subspecies, the BOU Taxonomic Sub-committee are considering a split to elevate up to three forms to full species level following new published evidence from recent genetic studies.

The most obvious plumage differences between Hudsonian Whimbrel and birds which breed in Western Europe (of the nominate race

*N. p. phaeopus*) are its dark rump, stronger head pattern and generally paler upperparts, though several other subtler features also differ (for further details see Bosanquet, S. 2000. The Hudsonian Whimbrel in Gwent. *Birding World* 13: 190–193).

The 2007 individual was only the fifth Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus* to be recorded in Britain, but better awareness of this race/species appears to be responsible for the recent increase in sightings:

- 1955 Fair Isle, Shetland, 27–31 May.
- 1974 Out Skerries, Shetland, 24 July to 8 August.
- 2000 Goldcliff Pools, Gwent, 6–7 May.
- 2007 Walney Island, Cumbria, 1st-summer, 14 June to 19 August.
- 2007 Fair Isle, Shetland, adult, 29–31 August.

There have only been two other European records to the end of 2007 both from Ireland: one at Tralee Harbour, Co. Kerry on 1 October 1957 and one at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford on 27 September 1980. There are also records from the Azores and the Cape Verde Islands.



Plate 145. Buff-bellied Pipit, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Rebecca Nason.

## Buff-bellied Pipit on Fair Isle, 23–25 September and 1–7 October 2007

M. WARD & D.N. SHAW

It would be fair to say that most of the birdwatchers present on Fair Isle in autumn 2007 were distinctly disheartened due to the continuation of persistent westerly and south-westerly winds over a period of several weeks and the lack of anything 'new' appearing. Most of the visiting birdwatchers were choosing to spend most of their time in the Observatory, although the wardens of course dutifully carried out their daily, morning migrant searches. Even my best friend Ade Cooper and myself (Mark Ward), on our first visit - of two weeks duration, were feeling a little let down!

We persisted though, despite little reward for our efforts, and decided to walk up to the top of Ward Hill on the afternoon of 23 September 2007, more to be able to say we'd been to the highest point on the island rather than in any real hope of finding anything particularly good.

We walked down from the summit and descended towards the airstrip, which we decided to walk alongside. The lure of a cup of tea was great, but I joined Ade in 'one final sweep'.

A group of Meadow Pipits flushed from the boggy grassland in front of us and an unusual, piercing call made us prick up our ears. It was a single note, more clipped than Meadow Pipit, but we were both ready to pass it off as an odd sounding Meadow Pipit and walk on when I said "We should follow that up really; it's been so quiet at least we can pretend for a moment it could be something interesting!" When the bird flushed again and the same very distinctive 'different' call sounded out, both our pulse rates quickened. I rapidly went through in my mind the possibilities of rare pipits in the UK, and having ruled out all but one (the only one on

the British list whose call I had never heard before), I said "It could be a Buff-belly...". This was before any other Buff-bellied Pipits *Anthus rubescens* had been reported in Britain and Ireland in the 2007 influx, so such a record was still of true MEGA status and not what we expected on Fair Isle!

Without oversimplifying the identification, our very first views of the bird on the ground made us realise it was no Meadow Pipit and was indeed a Buff-bellied Pipit! It separated from the Meadows when it fed, but when they flew, it tended to fly across and join them in the air before they settled again. It was noticeably tamer than them, and on one occasion I stalked it to within 10m or so and it was still unconcerned as it fed in the grass.

We watched it for about half an hour, making extensive notes and generally watching the bird very closely and carefully, trying hard to contain our inevitable excitement. What an unexpected reward for our efforts! Ade, the artist of the two of us, made field sketches and I took a few record shots through Ade's telescope. I telephoned the observatory to triumphantly report the news of our find and this produced the inevitable excited mass of birders stirred from their slumber!

To our relief, the bird was relocated when the first arrival of observatory based birders and islanders took place after it had vanished for a time - something it was very good at doing in the abundance of suitable feeding habitat on the island. Everyone enjoyed good views and soon we were receiving the applause for the fruits of our labour and for livening things up on the island! A flush was organised for others to hear the distinctive call, which we had already heard several times by now.

The first mainland Shetland birders to arrive the next day all 'dipped' it despite extensive, prolonged searching, although I did have the bird fly over my head calling back towards its original spot while they were searching nearby. However, some did connect the following day. This bird went missing for hours at a time (despite some extensive, persistent searches) and slipped away unnoticed with remarkable ease. Despite an extremely thorough search on 26 September it could not be relocated and was assumed to have departed...

#### **Deryk Shaw takes up the tale...**

On 1 October I was heading out on north census and decided to do it in reverse today, heading through Homisdale, Suka Mire towards Hill Dyke. Halfway along Homisdale a few pipits flew up



Plate 146. Buff-bellied Pipit, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Rebecca Nason.

and one gave a call I instantly recognised as being Buff-bellied Pipit (I had heard this call just a few days previously). It was flying almost directly into the sunlight as I watched it fly and land about 30m away just over the rise on Byerwall. Delighted that it was still present, I made a few phone calls before heading off in pursuit. I could not find it and an extensive search of Byerwall, Suka Mire, Vaatnagard, Homisdale and Eas Brecks by a posse of 15 did not manage to relocate it either. Everyone was drained and fed up by lunch time! After lunch a few of us did another sweep of Eas Brecks and Homisdale, then I suggested Vassetter as our next area. It proved to be a good decision as the bird was found very near the start. It remained in this area for a week, although it did go missing for long spells at a time, and it became fairly approachable with care.

### Description

**General appearance:** A fairly dark pipit, larger than Meadow Pipit, most similar to Rock or Water Pipit but not quite as chunky as these species. **Head:** The most striking part of the bird because of a wide, flaring supercilium. Crown olive-grey, similar to but not as dark as Rock Pipit and obviously different from the fawny-brown of Meadow Pipit. Faint dark streaks (forming lines) could be seen on very close views. An indistinct deep buff supercilium extended from the base of the bill to the eye (this could only be seen on close scrutiny), whereupon it changed markedly becoming dirty white (with dark flecks) widening above the eye and flaring behind the eye before narrowing slightly at the rear. It extended about an eye width behind the eye. Equally noticeable was the complete whitish eye-ring. An indistinct dark grey lateral crown stripe bordered the upper edge of the supercilium. A very thin black moustachial stripe could be made out on close views and providing that the bird kept still long enough, and a broad buff-white sub-moustachial stripe curled round the lower edge of plain brown-grey ear-coverts. The dark grey malar stripe was very thin and disjointed at the bill base (only seen when the bird stopped to eat something or to look around) until it widened out markedly at the side of the throat forming a heavily mottled triangular patch - the densest part of the underpart markings, as on most pipits.

**Upperparts:** Nape/mantle/back; essentially olive-grey. Nape very slightly greyer (paler) and plain. Mantle olive-grey with faint darker lines of neat dots/short streaks - not dissimilar to the faint markings on an Olive-backed Pipit, much less obvious and neater than on Meadow Pipit and sometimes fainter even than Rock Pipit. Scapulars were however unmarked. Two pale wing-bars could be easily seen. Greater coverts were edged and tipped pale grey-buff whilst the median coverts were tipped a cleaner grey-white, both more noticeable than on Rock Pipits and even most Meadow Pipits. Tertials were even more striking, especially when viewed from the rear; they were long, almost black, with sharply contrasting white edging. Much more contrasting than the Rock Pipits. Likewise, central tail feathers appeared blackish, with the outer ones white. **Underparts:** Throat off-white, unmarked. A strong yellow-buff wash was evident across the breast and down the flanks (where slightly tinged pink), paling towards belly and (from photos) absent on white undertail coverts. This was especially strong when viewed head on when the colour appeared deeper. Diffuse brown streaking across upper breast becoming more sparse on lower breast and along flanks, streaks as broad as on Meadow Pipit but not as distinct. **Bare Parts:** Bill; fine, like Meadow Pipit but slightly longer with yellowy-orange base to lower mandible and dark horn tip and upper mandible. Eye; black. Legs; dark reddish-brown. **Call:** Hard to describe. A short '*psipp*' like a 'squeaky' Meadow Pipit but only uttered singly. Although distinctive when heard well, it was quite quiet and could be easily lost in the wind or just passed off as a funny 'mipit' if not heard well. It was often given (but not always) when it was flushed. **Behaviour:** Although when discovered it was flying with a small group of Meadow Pipits, once refound on Vassetter it was almost always observed alone. Occasionally it would have a brief aerial chase with an encroaching Meadow Pipit. When feeding, it kept pretty low, almost constantly walking through short heather and short rough grass, often being lost to view, stretching neck to pick at morsels and only stopping to eat a larger item (eg beetle/worm). It could cover quite a bit of ground in a short time.



Plates 147–149. Buff-bellied Pipit, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Deryk Shaw.

There is one previous Fair Isle record; an immature watched by Ken Williamson for a few minutes feeding on the edge of the cliffs at Guidicum on 17 September 1953.

**Mark Ward & Deryk N. Shaw, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland, ZE2 9JU**

### Buff-bellied Pipit - its status in Scotland

This species breeds in western Greenland and northern and western North America (subspecies *rubescens*) and in north-eastern Russia (subspecies *japonicus*), with the former wintering along the Pacific coast of the USA as far south as Honduras and in the states bordering the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic coast north to Virginia, and the latter in Japan, South Korea and south-east China and sporadically further west into western China, and eastern parts of Kazakhstan, south to Pakistan and northern India. All records in Britain plus others in Iceland, Ireland, Germany and Italy relate to the form *rubescens*, though *japonicus* has also been recorded in Europe.

This Fair Isle individual above was the second of six birds to be recorded in Britain in 2007. The first was found on board a ship just over 200 km NW of Lewis, Outer Hebrides on 19 September (found dead next day), while two occurred on Scilly from 25 September to 2 October and 27 September to 2 October, while the other two were at Farmoor Reservoir, Oxfordshire from 8–10 October and on Benbecula, Outer Hebrides on 18 October. This was an unprecedented influx which more than doubled the five previous records of this species in Britain.

The first British record was an immature male caught on St Kilda, on 30 September 1910, with the second the 1953 Fair Isle bird mentioned earlier. Since then there have been individuals on Scilly on 9–19 October 1988 and a particularly mobile bird from 30 September to 28 October 1996, plus another long-staying individual present at Wyberton, Lincolnshire on 5–13 December 2005 which was refound there on 24–29 January 2006. Remarkably this bird also had a Fair Isle connection, being found by a former assistant warden, Paul French.

The recent increase in records may well reflect changes in weather patterns during the species southward autumn migration period, but will also owe much to a considerable increase in awareness among observers of the identification criteria for this tricky species.



Plate 150. Buff-bellied Pipit, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Mark Breaks.



Plate 151. Siberian Thrush, Foula, Shetland, September 2007 © Peter Gordon.

## Siberian Thrush, Foula, Shetland, 28 September 2007 - the fourth Scottish record

P. GORDON

Ever since my schoolboy days, the thrushes plate in the Peterson Field Guide has fascinated me, but only recently have I been able to rationalise why this is so - it shows a mixture of birds which are familiar alongside species which have come a very, very long way off course. They are either common - even Ring Ouzel remains widespread - or very rare indeed, with chief amongst those prizes being Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*.

### Act 1, Scene 1

Many years on and I found myself on Foula, where just about anything might turn up in late September and a fall of common migrants already included an Icterine Warbler. I left Alastair Crowle, Alan Lauder and Ken Shaw, at our lunch spot to check the windswept area beyond the crofts of Hametoun, Siberian

Thrush was not amongst my 'Top Five' predictions, nor indeed my 'Top 100'. After all, I had learnt since my schooldays that *Zoothera* thrushes are skulking brutes, unlikely to be found on the close-cropped turf loved by feeding Blackbirds.

### Act 1, Scene 2

A bird moves, just in front of me and I instinctively raise my bins to see a vision of schoolboy desire. I know my friends must still be nearby but words fail me and all I can shout is "Hoi". This was obviously a mistake as the thrush flies away, remembering that it should be hiding in an impenetrable thicket. But, impenetrable thickets being scarce on this part of Foula and the bird, like a Ryanair passenger, being fed up with food-free flights, it decides to land on the opposite slope and carry on feeding.

### Act 2, Scene 1

All assemble. Smiles and handshakes all round. "Wow - it's so blue" "I just couldn't get the words out" "Get lots of pics" "What a beaut!"

### Act 2, Scene 2

After a period of note-taking, sketching, photography, we discuss what to do next. As the bird seems settled in an area where no concerns over access are likely, we need someone to run to the public phone box to let out the news and give Shetland birders the opportunity to make an expensive twitch. An acrimonious debate as to who should have this honour is settled when Ken Shaw, who has the biggest list and most needs the exercise, volunteers.

### Act 2, Scene 3

Two plane-loads of birders arrive and are directed to the bird, which shows well in the afternoon sunshine. They leave happy - apart from four guys who haven't arranged return transport or accommodation on Foula. But they did get the bird, which is after all what really matters.

### Act 3, Scene 1

Alan and Ken search for the bird from first light next morning, but resignedly phone out the news that the bird appears to have departed overnight in clear conditions. One boat-load of birders arrives nevertheless, but by contrast with yesterday's visitors, they leave with lists unchanged and bank balances reasonably intact.

### Postscript

The following description was submitted to BBRC and accepted as the seventh British record of this species.

A well-proportioned thrush, difficult to estimate size without other species for direct comparison but somewhere between Fieldfare and Redwing, although not so dumpy as latter. Generally dark slatey-grey above with lovely blue tinge, prominent pale face markings, dark breast, wings and tail and paler underparts. In flight showed prominent black central bar against white background of underwing. Dark head with broad, creamy supercilium from bill to rear of ear-coverts, pale cheek patch, moustachial stripe, chin and throat. Slatey breast merged into white V of belly and grey flanks, with narrow white shaft streaks, black undertail-coverts with broad, white terminal fringes. White-tipped outer tail feathers. Narrow, pale tips to secondary coverts. Dark bill with paler cutting edge, mid-brown legs and feet. 'Alert' position and feeding actions identical to *Turdus* thrushes but also had a peculiar, crouched, forward gait through grass which I described as "snake run". The bird fed on its own, although other thrushes were present nearby, on very short maritime grassland.

*Peter Gordon, Nethybridge, Inverness-shire.*



Plates 152–153. Siberian Thrush, Foula, Shetland, September 2007 © hughharrop.com.



Plates 154–155. Siberian Thrush, Foula, Shetland, September 2007 © Peter Gordon.

### Siberian Thrush - its status in Scotland

*This species breeds from central Siberia eastwards to the Pacific coast and through northern-most Mongolia to north-east China and Japan. The population is almost totally migratory and winters from extreme NE India discontinuously south and eastwards through south-east Asia from Myanmar to Malaysia and Indonesia.*

*Up to the end of 2007 there have been just seven accepted records of Siberian Thrush in Britain, with four of these in Scotland, including the Foula individual above. The first Scottish and British record was an adult male which was*

*present on the Isle of May from 1–4 October 1954. The next was not until a male was found at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk on Christmas Day 1977. The third individual was a male seen briefly at Widewall, South Ronaldsay, Orkney on 13 November 1984, and the fourth was also on Orkney - a female trapped on North Ronaldsay on 1 October 1992 and which remained to 8 October, making it the longest staying of the seven birds. The fifth record was of a 1st-winter male at Burnham Overy, Norfolk on 18 September 1994, and the sixth was found on Gugh, Isles of Scilly where it stayed from 5–8 October 1999, remarkably a White's Thrush was found in close proximity to this individual on the adjacent island of St Agnes on 6 October.*



Plate 156. Grey-cheeked Thrush, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Rebecca Nason

## Grey-cheeked Thrush on Fair Isle, 30 September 2007

D.N. SHAW

It had been a good day so far with both Blyth's Reed and Marsh Warblers trapped in the morning plus a Lanceolated Warbler, a couple of Bluethroats and a few Yellow-browed Warblers scattered around. That calm, cool, clear afternoon I was trying to find somewhere that had not been covered 15 minutes previously and decided to head up Hoini, via Pund. It must have been 16:00hrs by the time I reached the north end of Hoini by Gunnawark with nothing to report. It was a lovely afternoon so I phoned my wife and suggested she came for a walk with the kids to meet me. I then started heading back along the Hill Dyke when I spied a bird, crouched, unmoving, in a patch of sun on the hillside c. 20m away over the wall. I stopped dead in my tracks. It looked like a small Song Thrush. I slowly raised my bins. It was sitting face-on and I noted grey spotting on the breast, more mottled than on Song Thrush. Its belly was white. It then began to hop around, feeding, and I noted uniform greyish-olive upperparts. I had a *Catharus* thrush, either Grey-cheeked *C minimus* or Swainson's and phoned my wife to bring my telescope. She was already at Double Dyke and had to run back... with the kids! I then

proceeded to take more notes. There had been a Swainson's Thrush on Unst for the past week and so I thought this was the most likely species for my bird, but I thought Swainson's was supposed to look most like a Song Thrush with some buff on the face. My bird looked grey. It did not appear to have a noticeable eye-ringing but I could not remember which one did. I was certain it must be Grey-cheeked but mainly because of the Swainson's on Unst I was loathe to call it yet! I phoned Hollie again! She had not left and I asked her to find the page in the *Collins Bird Guide* of the thrushes and to read out to me the descriptions for Swainson's and Grey-cheeked. Thirty seconds later, I told her "It's a Grey-cheeked! Find Ben (the Ranger) and tell him to flag it!"

I waved frantically at a group of birders who were loitering around Pund, then phoned a few others and waited... Everyone eventually arrived and had good views before I allowed the photographers to edge a little closer. Some nice photos were taken before dusk when it dropped down into Gunnawark, never to be seen again!



Plate 157. Grey-cheeked Thrush, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Rebecca Nason.

### Description

**General appearance:** A small thrush, similar to Song Thrush but smaller and greyer with less distinct breast spotting. **Head:** Fairly plain. Greyish-olive crown. Plain face with large black eye and slightly mottled ear-coverts, which had a faint yellowish-buff wash in sunlight. Thin, black streaked malar stripe. **Upperparts:** At any distance appeared uniform greyish-olive. Although not particularly evident in the field and only noted in good scope views in sunlight, there were very faint dark spots all over the mantle. Flight feathers slightly browner with darker tips to primary coverts and small pale buff tips to many greater coverts on right wing but only one on left wing. **Underparts:** Throat white contrasting (in sunlight) with a faint yellowish-buff wash on upper breast - in later colder light (or shade) the ground colour looked similar (white). Breast spotted, dark brown, heavy and more dense on upper breast becoming grey and fainter on lower breast. Flanks broadly washed grey with a hint of brown

(in sunlight). Belly/undertail coverts whitish. Underwing only seen fleetingly a couple of times showed the distinctive grey and white striped pattern of *Catharus* thrushes - Rebecca Nason managed to get a good photo of this. **Bare Parts:** Bill; all dark (blackish) - in my notes - but photos show a small amount of yellow at the base of lower mandible, extending part way along cutting edge. Eye; black, no eye-ring. Legs; pinkish-grey.

This was the third Fair Isle record, however the previous two were back in the Octobers of 1953 and 1958. Swainson's Thrush has been recorded here from 30 September–6 October 1990 and so has Hermit Thrush on 2 June 1975 and 19 October 1995. We still await a Veery to complete the set.

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## Grey-cheeked Thrush - its status in Scotland

This species breeds mostly in North America from Alaska eastwards through Canada to the Atlantic coast of Labrador and Newfoundland, with a smaller breeding population in eastern-most Siberia. The entire population migrates through eastern USA to wintering grounds in north-western parts of South America.

The first Scottish and British record of this species was a 1st-winter bird trapped on Fair Isle on 5 October 1953 and which remained to the following day. The second record was also from Fair Isle - a 1st-winter trapped on 29 October 1958. By the end of 2007 there had been a total of 48 birds found in Britain with the 2007 Fair Isle bird being the 10th record for Scotland.

In addition to the three individuals on Fair Isle, there have been four other records from the Northern Isles. Two have been on Shetland: one at Voe, Mainland from 19–20 October 1982, and a 1st-winter (trapped) on Foula, present from 27–30 September 2003. The other two were both on Orkney: one in North Hoy, Hoy on 16 October 1994, and a 1st-winter in a garden at Stromness, Mainland from 14–16 October 2001, which was trapped on the latter date. There are also two records from the Outer Hebrides: one (trapped) on St Kilda on 29 October 1965, but which died overnight, and a 1st-winter (trapped), on Benbecula on 29 October 1989. There is a single record from the Scottish mainland - Moray & Nairn, 1st-winter male, Lossiemouth, Moray & Nairn found dying on 26 November 1965.

Elsewhere in Britain the great majority of birds have been discovered in SW England, with 23 of these (just under half of all records) from the Isles of Scilly alone, and several others from Cornwall and Devon. There are also records from Durham, Norfolk, Hertfordshire and Gloucestershire, and three from Wales. The longest-staying individual was one present on St Mary's, Scilly from 27 October to 15 November 1979 (20 days), and several birds have lingered at their site of discovery

for over a week, but most do not remain for more than two or three days.

All birds discovered in Britain have occurred in autumn between 22 September and 26 November, with just under 90 % of records in October and a notable peak in the latter half of the month. The earliest bird found was present on St Agnes, Isles of Scilly from 22–26 September 1991, while the latest find was the 1965 Lossiemouth bird. This latter bird almost certainly first made landfall on this side of the Atlantic well before it was actually found, and this is presumably also true of the only other two November records in Britain - one trapped well inland at Croxton, Norfolk on 10 November 2004, and another at Northaw Great Wood, Hertfordshire from 13–25 November 2005.

Grey-cheeked Thrush is the most regular of the 'North American' *Catharus* thrushes to be recorded in Britain, being over twice as numerous as its close relative Swainson's Thrush, while Hermit Thrush and Veery have managed just a handful of records each.



Plate 158. Grey-cheeked Thrush, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Rebecca Nason.



Plate 159. Pine Bunting, Fair Isle, October 2007 © Deryk Shaw.

## Pine Bunting on Fair Isle, October–November 2007

### M. BREAKS

Nearing the end of my morning migrant census of the south-east section of Fair Isle on 25 October 2007 I was walking up the road past Barkland and the Chalet when I heard a Yellowhammer fly over. I looked up and saw it drop in behind the Chalet. I walked around the building to get a better look, but could not see anything. I walked up to the bushes and two birds took flight; one bird showed yellow underparts while the other one appeared to be whiter and to have a white spot on the face, but before I could lift my binoculars they dropped down behind the other side of the Chalet. I sneaked around quietly but there was no sign of either bird. I then heard them further up the road and spotted them on the side of the drive to Field. I edged closer and saw the Yellowhammer on the fence, then seconds later the other bird hopped up and, as I suspected from the brief views earlier, it was a male Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*.

The face pattern was most striking, with a chestnut, red-brown throat and supercilium eye-stripe surrounding a white spot below the eye, which got broader on the cheek. It had a pinkish eye-ring, its crown was greyish with dark streaking and showed a thin whitish central crown stripe. The nape was also greyish. Its bill was a typically stout finch/bunting bill, with dark grey upper and pale grey lower mandibles. The bunting hopped onto the ground in the long grass feeding. Its upperparts were mainly chestnut brown with some black streaking, while the underparts had chestnut brown streaking on the flanks and a white belly. Its legs seemed pinkish-brown. Minutes later they took to the air again before dropping into the garden at Barkland. I called the observatory and once everyone arrived the bird gave great views. The only slight concern was that some of the primaries had a very slight yellow fringe.

The following day the Pine Bunting wandered into the Heligoland trap at Barkland and further examination showed that there was only a very tiny spot of pale yellow on the underwing at the carpal.

#### **Additional comments by Deryk Shaw**

The accompanying photos show just how pale the yellow on the edge of some primaries was, and had the bird been distant this may not have been noted as such. Likewise, the tiny amount of yellow on the underwing could only be seen once the bird was in the hand. A small amount of yellow in these areas is now considered acceptable for Pine Bunting. Although it initially associated with a Yellowhammer, it was later seen on its own and during its stay spent c50% of the time with a Yellowhammer and 50% on its own. Its call sounded exactly like a Yellowhammer's 'tic-a-tic'. It was last seen on 10 November 2007.

Whereas there is known to be a hybrid zone where Pine Buntings and Yellowhammers breed together, with the resultant offspring showing intermediate plumage features as expected, this bird has been accepted by BBRC with the view that a very small amount of yellow in the wing is okay for acceptance of the bird as a Pine Bunting. A similar bird on Fair Isle in 1995, which was originally accepted as a hybrid Pine Bunting x Yellowhammer has now been accepted as a Pine Bunting after review (see *British Birds* 97: 620–621 for discussion of this issue).

This was the ninth Pine Bunting to be recorded on Fair Isle and the 48th in Britain.

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### **Pine Bunting - its status in Scotland**

*Pine Bunting breeds as far west as European Russia, but the main population is found in the Eastern Palearctic eastwards through Russia and northern Kazakhstan and China to the Pacific coast.*

*The first British record was in 1911, when a male was found on Fair Isle on 30 October, but it was over thirty years before the next - a male found on Papa Westray, Orkney on 15 October 1943. There have now been a total of 48 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2007, with 25 of these in Scotland.*



Plates 160–161. Pine Bunting, Fair Isle, October 2007 © Paul Baxter.

All except two of the Scottish records have come from the Northern Isles, with four in Shetland, nine on Fair Isle (1911, 1980 [2], 1987 [2], 1994, 1995, 1998, 2007), and ten from Orkney (1943, 1967, 1987 [2], 1988 [2], 1991 [2], 1994, 1995) with eight of the latter from North Ronaldsay. The other two records involve one of indeterminate sex at Golspie, Sutherland (Highland) on 6–8 January 1976 - the only record from the Scottish mainland (see Goater, R. 2006. *Birding Scotland* 9: 5–7, for an account of the finding of this bird), and a female at Carinish, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 16 November 2005.

The Scottish records involve 17 males and seven females plus the 1976 Golspie individual. The 23 records elsewhere in Britain show a similar split with 18 males and five females. This presumably reflects the difficulty of identifying females in the field and is markedly different to the ratios found in the regular over-wintering vagrant populations in Italy where females average twice as numerous as males, and the incidence of immature birds is also much higher there (British Birds 2008. *Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2007*: p571)). Alternatively this could indicate slight differences in the vectors of displacement for different sex/age birds during their autumn migration.

The pattern and distribution of records in Scotland is markedly different from that elsewhere in Britain. The find dates of birds in Scotland show a strong bias to the late autumn with 16 birds in October and 6 in November, between the dates of 8 October and 16 November, with single records from January (Golspie 1976), June (North Ronaldsay, Orkney 1995) and August (North Ronaldsay 1967). Elsewhere in Britain the majority of birds are found in the first part of the year with four each in January, February and March, and six in April, with just three in October and two in November. These records are mostly from Northumberland to Yorkshire, with others from Lincolnshire to Suffolk, and from Greater London and Surrey to Devon. Interestingly there are also two records from Scilly (1983, 1985) and from Welsh islands (Skokholm 2000, Bardsey 2001). A feature of the records elsewhere is the notable

proportion of inland records, and the overall pattern is consistent with birds arriving (predominantly) in the north in autumn and then subsequently being found in the south either as over-wintering individuals or when re-orientating in spring to head back towards the breeding areas.

This may also account for why the average length of stay of birds in Scotland is only just over four days, with the longest staying bird being a 1st-winter female at Utra, Fair Isle, which was present for 23 days from 22 October 1987. Elsewhere in Britain the average length of stay is 8.7 days, and three individuals have stayed longer than the 1987 Fair Isle bird: a male at Wembury, Devon - present for 50 days from 27 January to 17 March 2004; a male at Dagenham Chase, Greater London, which lingered for 34 days from 12 February 1992; and a female found at Big Waters CP, Northumberland - seen from 18 February to 16 March 1990 (27 days).

The pattern of occurrence in Britain is quite erratic with nine blank years from 1980 to 2007, though there have been four records in a year in both 1987 and 1994 (all in Scotland), and three in both 2001 and 2004 (none in Scotland). There appears to be no correlation between good years in Scotland and those elsewhere in Britain, and another potentially interesting feature is that records in Scotland seem to be declining slightly from eight in the 1980s, and nine in 1990s, to just four from 2000 to the end of 2007. By contrast, south of the border there were five in the 1980s and in the 1990s, but there have already been eight from 2000 to the end of 2007. Only time will tell if this relative change in frequency of records indicates real differences in the factors affecting the occurrence of Pine Buntings in Britain or is just due to random chance.



Plate 162. Mourning Dove, Carnach, North Uist, November 2007 © Terry Fountain.

## Mourning Dove at Carnach, North Uist, November 2007 - the second Scottish record

### B. RABBITS

Anyone who thinks lightning never strikes the same place twice should have changed their mind after reading this!

On 14 November 1999 I identified an unusual bird seen by a neighbour in her garden at Carinish, North Uist as a Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*. This was the first Scottish record and only the third for the Western Palearctic following an emaciated 1st-winter found in a Heligoland trap at the Calf of Man Bird Observatory on 31 October 1989 and a 1st-winter female collected (illegally) on Heimaey, Iceland, on 19 October 1995. The Carinish bird appeared to be in poor health and was not seen after 15 November; disappointing for many birders as only a small number managed to catch up with it.

Until recently the Calf of Man bird constituted the first British record but, as the Isle of Man is a British Crown Dependency, it does not form

part of Great Britain and the British Ornithologists' Union no longer includes birds occurring there on the British List. Consequently, the North Uist Mourning Dove became the first British record. This remained the sole record until the appearance of another 1st-winter Mourning Dove on North Uist in autumn of 2007 and remarkably just 4 km from Carinish, the site of the earlier record. On this occasion the bird stayed for six days, with the result that Mourning Dove was well and truly 'unblocked'.

The weather of the first day of November 2007 was "dreich" with persistent fine rain and visibility of less than a kilometre. At about lunchtime I took a break from working on the Outer Hebrides Bird Report and set off for the local shop. On the spur of the moment I decided to make a detour to see if a Ring-necked Duck was still on Loch na Faoileige at Carnach. Also as it was the start of the national BTO Bird Atlas Project, so I could make



**Plate 163.** Mourning Dove, Carnach, North Uist, November 2007 © Terry Fountain.

some Roving Records. After noting that the duck was still present I was driving slowly away when a bird flew up from the side of the road onto a rock. After stopping and looking through my bins I was amazed to find I was looking at a Mourning Dove only metres away. I hadn't brought my camera! After a few moments the dove flew off into the gloom towards Clachan-a-Luib. There had been some straw bales at the side of the road and the dove appeared to have been feeding among the spilt chaff. I decided to return home to ring the news out. On returning to Carnach I found the bird had returned and was feeding. A short while later, together with Steve Duffield and Terry Fountain, we were able to enjoy close views and take many photos. When we were there the local crofter, Alistair MacDonald, came by and asked if there was anything unusual about. When we told him about the dove he remarked that he had wondered what the bird was and that his wife, Annie, had first seen it several days before! Unlike the 1999 bird the Carnach one appeared to be in good health and performed well to the assembled throng over the next six days. The dove's visit certainly provided a welcomed boost for local B&B and car hire operators. Some other birds visible from Carnach included not only the Ring-necked Duck, but up to three Golden Eagles and a White-tailed Eagle.

One can only speculate on how many rarities go unreported if they turn up in remote locations without a resident birder, but it certainly was a

strange coincidence that a rarity of this magnitude should turn up on the same island and at locations separated by only a few kms.

The Carnach bird was not the only Mourning Dove found on this side of the Atlantic in autumn 2007: on 2 November on Inishbofin, a small island off the coast of Co. Galway, Anthony McGeehan found the first for Ireland, another 1st-winter that was present until 15 November at least (apparently the dove was first seen by a local person four days earlier). Certainly the weather from 27 to 29 October when both the Scottish and Irish birds arrived was suitable for a transatlantic crossing by an American landbird.

Up to the end of 2007 there were just two other Western Palearctic records besides those already mentioned: one in Sweden at Brannas, Södermanland, on 3–11 June 2001 and one on the Azores at Corvo on 2 November 2005. In addition to these Western Palearctic records, there are also records from Greenland. In 2008 there were three additional Western Palearctic occurrences: one at Greifswalder Oie, Germany on 4 May; one at Skagen, Nordjylland, Denmark on 19–21 May; and one at Fajã Grande, Flores on 23 October - the second record for the Azores.

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*Mourning Dove is a common species in North America and breeds in high numbers from south-east Alaska and southern Canada and south through the USA to Panama and on the West Indies. The birds in the northern part of the range typically migrate south for the winter, mostly into southern parts of the USA, but some travel as far as Central America.*

# Birdline Scotland REVIEW

compiled by

Angus Murray & Stuart Rivers

## 09068 700234

*Bringing you all the latest bird sightings from around Scotland*

All records refer to the period 1 July–31 December 2007 unless otherwise stated.

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### July to December 2007

There was a good selection of rare/scarce Nearctic waders found in July - while the Killdeer on Shetland broke all records as it stayed month after month until finally last seen in November - remarkably this bird reappeared again in 2008. August weather was fairly unsettled, resulting in more rain and cooler conditions than usual.

Along the east coast towards the latter half of the month, American waders put in a good showing and there was some excellent seawatching and the first wave of eastern passerines appeared. The first three weeks of September were almost constantly dominated by westerly winds. However, sunny conditions combined with light NE and SE winds arising out of a high pressure over Scandinavia during the last week resulted in an opening of the floodgates for eastern vagrants with Shetland especially again being responsible for a phenomenal amount of rare birds. The 28 September 2007 rivalled the equivalent date in 2003 for the amount of, and quality of, rare birds on there. By contrast, totals for most scarcities were low.

After a very good end to September on Shetland anticipation was very high that a really "big one" would be found in October, but, despite a fantastic selection and number of far eastern vagrants on Shetland, it wasn't. Despite that list of rarities the totals for most scarce migrants were again low. With a lot of coverage by very good "rarity finders", and conducive weather conditions, it was to be expected that Shetland would be very good. The weekend of the 13–14 October was a memorable one with an incredible selection of rare birds concentrated in the Sumburgh area, and the contrast

with the rest of Scotland was so startling this year - with mainland Scotland, and even to an extent Orkney and the Outer Hebrides, being largely a rarity-free zone during the month - until right at the end - best things come to those who wait! After a dismal October on mainland Scotland fortunes picked up in November, which these days it seems, for many Scottish birdwatchers at least, is the more productive month for quality rarities. The run of good birds continued on Mainland Scotland through December.

**Bewick's Swan:** a group of four birds at Montrose Basin (Angus) from 24 December were the only ones seen during the month - this species is now a very scarce Scottish bird. **Taiga Bean Goose:** the regular wintering flock returned to the Fannyside Lochs area, North Lanarkshire (Clyde) from 28 September with about 90 birds present by the end of the month.

**Snow Goose:** a fully-winged blue morph bird, seen with no other accompanying geese, was an intriguing record at Kilrenny then Fife Ness (both Fife) on 21–22 September. During October a single white morph bird was in Argyll and a blue morph in Fife then Lothian. Three blue morph birds were seen in November - singles in Highland, Fife still and Dumfries & Galloway. At least four were seen with wild goose flocks during December: blue morphs in Fife and Dumfries & Galloway still, one near Finstown (Orkney) on 8–12th and at least one intermediate/blue morph bird in NE Scotland. **Ross's Goose:** two adult birds initially seen in NE Scotland on 5 October with Pink-footed Geese were then noted at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross), Montrose Basin (Angus) and then with Pink-feet at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 24–27 October. **Lesser Canada Goose:** at least 11 presumed vagrant small-race birds were noted during October

including up to seven on Islay (Argyll). Two presumed returning small race birds seen in with the Solway Barnacle Geese during November, one of the Richardson's type and one of the Taverner's type - at RSPB Mersehead on 25th. Up to eight further presumed vagrant Canada Geese were reported from Argyll, the Outer Hebrides and Highland during the month. **Red-breasted Goose:** an adult was present with the Barnacle Geese at WWT Caerlaverock (Dumfries & Galloway) on 13–25 November. The adult was again in the WWT Caerlaverock area from 23 December. **American Wigeon:** a drake found at the end of June, remained on the Ythan Estuary (NE Scotland) until at least 7 July. The only bird reported in December was a drake at Maywick (Shetland) on 11–13th. **Green-winged Teal:** several drakes were found during December with birds on Orkney (2), Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Renfrewshire, Upper Forth and Fife. **Ring-necked Duck:** a drake was at Loch Gelly (Fife) on 19–31 July. only two were found in September - both on the 30th - a drake on Shetland and a juvenile on South Uist (Outer Hebrides). Three different birds were on the Outer Hebrides during October as well as a drake on Shetland and a drake at St John's Loch (Caithness) on 7 October. Two females lingered into November on North Uist, Outer Hebrides), one until 7th and one, at Loch Eaval, until the 24th at least. Another two on Shetland were the only other birds reported during the month. Five birds were seen in December - two still on Shetland, and singles on the Outer Hebrides, Highland and in Caithness. **Lesser Scaup:** two drakes were at St John's Loch (Caithness) on 7 October. The only report in November was of a female on Fetlar (Shetland) from 11 November. Two drakes,

probably both returning birds, were found in December - at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) on 8th and Coot Loch, Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) from 21st whilst the female was still on Fetlar (Shetland) on 31st.

**King Eider:** the only bird reported during July was the adult drake still in Argyll, seen off Rhunahaorine Point on 7th. An adult drake returned to Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shetland) on 25 August and remained throughout September. Two different birds were noted on Shetland during November with a female found off Girdleness, NE Scotland on 23rd, which was then joined by a 1st-winter drake on 1 December, and both remained into 2008. A drake was again at Mousa Sound (Shetland) on 20–30th, while a 1st-winter drake was found at Leven (Fife) on 29 December. **Black Scoter:** a drake was reported at Loch Indaal, Islay (Argyll) on 5 November. **Surf Scoter:** up to six (three adult drakes, a 1st-summer drake and two females) were amongst the Common and Velvet Scoters between Blackdog and Murcar Golf Course (NE Scotland) throughout July. Only four were reported in November - a drake still in Fife and up to three drakes on Orkney. At least six were reported in December - from Orkney (2+ drakes), three at Sound of Taransay, Harris (Outer Hebrides) and a drake still at Largo Bay (Fife) throughout. **Smew:** only eight birds were seen during December. **Common Quail:** over 25 birds were reported in July, 16 of which were from Borders including up to 11 singing birds in the Reston area and three singing at Smailholm. At least 22 were reported in August, again with the best numbers in Borders, including 10 birds (at least one juvenile amongst them) seen during crop spraying at Newmains Farm near Reston on 23rd.

**White-billed Diver:** a breeding-plumaged bird was seen off Girdleness, Aberdeen on 9 November, with another past St Abbs Head, Borders on 11th and four different birds were seen on Shetland during the month. The only report during December was an adult still off Fetlar (Shetland) on 3rd. **Fea's Petrel:** the seawatching highlight of August was the 'Soft-plumaged Petrel' presumed to be of this species seen flying past Labost, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 24th cementing its place as Scotland's premier west coast seawatching location. **Cory's Shearwater:** one was reported flying past North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 7 July, with another reported passed Dunbar (Lothian) on 9 July. The only reports in August were from North Ronaldsay (Orkney) with singles on 27th and 28th. Only five were reported in September. **Great Shearwater:** 41 were seen flying past Labost, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 25 August with 20 seen on the 26th. For the third year running large numbers of Great Shearwaters were noted in Scottish waters at the end of August with Lewis and North Ronaldsay (Orkney) again proving to be the best sites. Birds were seen passing North Ronaldsay almost daily from the 23rd, with 16 on the 28th the largest count. Record numbers were seen in the early part of September, with Lewis (Outer Hebrides) and North Ronaldsay (Orkney) the premier sites. A British record count of 7,114 birds passed the Butt of Lewis on 8th with 1,076 past there on the 10th, while 289 passed North Ronaldsay between the 9–20th with a peak count of 91 on the 12th. Smaller numbers were seen more or less throughout Scotland including first county records for Borders, Angus and Dumfries & Galloway. **Sooty Shearwater:** the first report of the year was a single past Newtonhill (NE Scotland) on 16 July with c. 30 further birds reported by the end of

the month most of which were seen off North Ronaldsay (Orkney). Unsurprisingly the largest counts during August were noted at Labost, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) and North Ronaldsay (Orkney) with 251 past the former on the 25th and 260 counted past the latter on the 28th. In the last week of the month good numbers were also noted in the North Sea including 180 past Fishtown of Usan on 28th - an Angus record count. Some late birds were noted with small numbers being seen up to 20 November. **Balearic Shearwater:** only two were reported in July, both after 22nd - singles in Borders and NE Scotland. Fifteen were reported in August, a fair proportion of which were from east coast headlands. **Little Shearwater:** one was reported past North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 19 August. **Leach's Storm-petrel:** small numbers of birds were seen well into November with 23 past Uisaed Point (Argyll) on 8th the largest count.

**Black-crowned Night Heron:** a juvenile was on Bressay on 15 September. **Cattle Egret:** an adult bird in breeding plumage was a fantastic find on Lewis at Steinish/Stornoway (Outer Hebrides) on 13–14 August - first record for the Outer Hebrides and only the fourth for Scotland. An adult was at Thurso/Scrabster from at least 22 September, possibly the same individual previously seen on the Outer Hebrides and the first recorded on mainland Scotland since 1986. One was found near Cardoness, near Gatehouse of Fleet (Dumfries & Galloway) on 24 December and stayed into 2008. With a record UK influx of Cattle Egrets during November and December it was perhaps not surprising that Scotland got one, but prior to the three Scottish sightings in 2007 there had been only three accepted Scottish records. **Little Egret:** four were reported in July - singles in Moray & Nairn and Perth & Kinross plus up to two birds at Montrose Basin

(Angus) throughout the month. There was a good showing, in a Scottish context, during August with at least 10 reported, including up to three birds together at Montrose Basin (Angus) and one on the Isle of Eigg (Highland) on 25–26th. Numbers stayed high during September, and at least nine were still present in October. Five birds were reported in November - from Dumfries & Galloway, Ayrshire (2), Orkney and Shetland, and eight birds were seen in December. **Great White Egret:** two different adult summer birds present in the west of Scotland at the start of July appeared, on plumage features, to be the two birds present in north-east England, on Teesside and East Yorkshire, in June. Both were found on the 4th, one was at Wards Pond (West Dunbartonshire) until 13 July and the other at Loch Doon (Ayrshire) until 6th (the first record for Ayrshire). One, probably of Nearctic origin, was on South Uist then North Uist (Outer Hebrides)



Plate 164. Great Shearwater, off Stonehaven, NE Scotland, September, 2007 © Caroline Weir.

from 12 October, and remained on North Uist/Benbecula until 21 November at least. The bird on the Outer Hebrides was seen again on South Uist and Benbecula on 25–27 December. **Eurasian Spoonbill:** one was present briefly at Skinflats (Upper Forth) on 25 August. One at Inverlochry on at least 25–26 November was only the second record ever for Highland after one in 1976.

**Pallid Harrier:** the remarkable run of records of juvenile birds on Shetland continued with a bird in the Loch of Spiggie/Hillwell area on 23–28 August, and again on 7–8 September. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was on Foula, Shetland on 16–18 October. Five birds were reported in November, though none were mass observed. Only two birds were reported in December: a juvenile on Mainland Orkney from 1st and one at Achmore, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 16th. **Red-footed Falcon:** a very late male was seen briefly at Tarbat Ness, Highland on 15 October. **Eurasian Hobby:** there were seven widely scattered reports throughout Scotland in July. **Gyr Falcon:** a juvenile grey morph bird was around Stornoway Airport area, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 11–14 November. **Common Crane:** one was at Montrose Basin on 12 August with two reported over Bettyhill (Highland) on 24 August.

**Killdeer:** the unprecedented long stay of the bird on Shetland continued right the way from April through to 19 November. **Kentish Plover:** a juvenile was a surprise find at the South Ford, South Uist on 10 November - unsurprisingly a first record for the Outer Hebrides, it remained until the year's end. **American Golden Plover:** a 1st-summer type was on the Monach Islands (Outer Hebrides) on 14–17 July. Up to six were reported during September including up to three on Orkney,

two on the Outer Hebrides and one at Balgray Reservoir on the 16th - the first record for Renfrewshire and the Clyde area. At least 14 birds were seen during October including two different at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) including a popular showy juvenile on 21–31 October and a juvenile at Annan on 24–29th - the 2nd record for Dumfries & Galloway. Juvenile birds remained at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) until 2 November and Ythan Estuary (NE Scotland) until 18 November. **Little Stint:** a moderate showing in September with 25+ birds seen. **Temminck's Stint:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg (NE Scotland) on 3–4 August. **Least Sandpiper:** one was photographed at the Butt of Lewis, Lewis on 12 October - the first record for the Outer Hebrides. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** an adult was on the Ythan Estuary on 29–31 July - the 9th record for NE Scotland though the first since 2001. Despite the influx of juvenile White-rumped Sandpipers two autumns ago a high proportion of the records overall are of midsummer adults which contrasts with the vast majority of Baird's Sandpiper records being of autumn juveniles. Three were seen from 14 August - adults on Orkney, Shetland and the Ythan Estuary (NE Scotland). An adult was on Unst (Shetland) from 27 September. Two were seen on Shetland during October. **Baird's Sandpiper:** an adult at Pool of Virkie (Shetland) on 21 July was very noteworthy and follows on from a very rare spring record this year on Tiree (Argyll). Four birds were seen in September - two on Shetland, and singles on North Uist and on the Ythan Estuary (NE Scotland) on 30th. A juvenile at Loch Leven on 12–17 October was a first record for Perth & Kinross. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** an adult was at at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 12–16 July with another adult at Balgarva, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on

21–25 July. Three birds were seen in August - at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NE Scotland) on 2–4th, Fair Isle on 3rd, and Boddam Voe (Shetland) on 10–16th. At least 18 birds were reported in September, including the 2nd record for Renfrewshire at Balgray Reservoir on 9–25th and three together at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg (NE Scotland) on 23–25th. Five birds were seen in October included one near Mallaig (Highland) on 22–23rd and one trapped and ringed at Montrose Basin (Angus) on 29th. One was at WWT Caerlaverock, Dumfries & Galloway from 20 November, and was last reported on 7 December.

**Curlew Sandpiper:** the seven birds reported in August were all in NE Scotland and Lothian, including the first juvenile at Aberlady Bay on 29th. There was a moderate showing in September with 35+ reported.

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 27–30 July. A good showing during September with at least 22 noted including a Scottish record count of eight birds, all juveniles, on Tiree (Argyll) on 19th. Five were seen during October with singles on Orkney and Tiree (Argyll) and three on Shetland. **Jack Snipe:** a very high count for mainland Scotland of 35 birds was made at Craigmarnloch Marsh, Renfrewshire (Clyde) on 11 November with 22 of the birds trapped and ringed. **Hudsonian Whimbrel:** one on Fair Isle from the 29–31 August was a real surprise, with the only two previous Scottish records also being from Shetland. **Spotted Redshank:** 10 birds in August was a reasonable total in a Scottish context. **Spotted Sandpiper:** two different birds were found on Shetland in September - one on Unst from 21st and one on Yell from 25th, whilst another was at Bragar, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 27th. One was at Kinneil (Upper

Forth) from 24 December into 2008. **Solitary Sandpiper:** one on Hirta, St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 27–31 August was the fifth Scottish record and the third for the Outer Hebrides. This record is a good reminder that St Kilda has the ability to pull in very rare birds indeed, as witnessed by records such as Hooded Warbler and Tennessee Warbler from there in the early 1990s. **Greater Yellowlegs:** one on Foula on 11 October was the first record for Shetland. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** two were seen in September - one at Peninerine, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 1st and one at Loch of Tankerness, Orkney on 19th and 28th, with the latter presumably the same bird seen on Shapinsay (Orkney) on 6–7 October. One was found at Montrose Basin (Angus) on 10 November and remained there into 2008. **Grey Phalarope:** 33 birds were reported in September, over half of which were on the Outer Hebrides, though seven were seen off Fife between the 28–30th. Good numbers were noted on the Outer Hebrides during October including 10+ off Griminish Point, North Uist on 16th and seven off Ardvule Point, South Uist the same day. At least 13 birds were reported in November, mostly from the Outer Hebrides. Three were reported in the last week of December, on Orkney, Outer Hebrides and in Ayrshire.

**Pomarine Skua:** at least 92 were reported in August, including 20 past Dunbar (Lothian) on 28th and 10 off Hound Point (also Lothian) on 27th, and 11 past there on 28th. Reasonable numbers were seen in September and there was an autumn record count for the Outer Hebrides of 122 birds past Griminish Point on 16 October. Good numbers were seen well into November including 178 past Hound Point (Lothian) between 3–22nd with a high count of 97 on the 4th, 121 off North Queensferry

(Fife) between 3–20th with a high count of 83 on the 4th, 24 past Griminish Point, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on the 8th and up to 21 Broadford Bay, Skye (Highland) on the 8th. Seven were reported in December. **Long-tailed Skua:** five were reported in August, Reasonable numbers were seen in September. **Mediterranean Gull:** at least 11 birds were seen during July, at least six of which were in Lothian. **Laughing Gull:** a 1st-winter bird was found at Firths Voe (Shetland) on 8 December, and was still present on 22nd at least. **Little Gull:** normally build up in numbers in the Firth of Tay during July but in 2007 the highest numbers were in the Firth of Forth from the 24th peaking at 302 birds between Musselburgh and Port Seton (Lothian) on 26 July. Numbers during August in Angus peaked at c. 1,700 birds off Arbroath on 25th. **Sabine's Gull:** at least two were seen in August with an adult summer past Barns Ness and then presumably the same bird then on the beach at Tynninghame (both Lothian) on 18th and a juvenile past Birsay (Orkney) on 30th. There was a good showing in September with around 55 reported. A late juvenile passed Uisaed Point (Argyll) on 8th November, while a superb inland find was a juvenile present by the Ruthven Barracks near Insh

Marshes (Highland) on 8–9 December - the second record for Speyside. **Ring-billed Gull:** the adult returned to Oban (Argyll) on 23 August. Three adult birds returned to regular wintering areas in Highland, Orkney and Upper Forth during October, and birds remained in Upper Forth, Highland and Argyll throughout November. Four adults were noted in December - lingering birds at Oban (Argyll), on Orkney and at Kinneil (Upper Forth), plus a new bird at Claggain Bay, Islay (Argyll) on 8th. **Caspian Gull:** a 1st-winter bird at Tynninghame (Lothian) in October was only the second record for Scotland, following the 1st-winter individual found nearby at Dunbar in December 2006. **Iceland Gull:** seven were reported during July, and reasonable numbers were then seen through the autumn, building up to around 35 seen in December. **Glaucous Gull:** six were reported during July, the autumn was fairly average, and the year finished with around 35 seen in December. **Bonaparte's Gull:** a 1st-summer was at Ardvule Point, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) throughout July up to 2 September. One was at Fishtown of Usan (Angus) from 11 November, and one at Peterhead (NE Scotland) from 25 November - both probably returning birds from previous winters, and remaining into 2008.



**Plate 165.** *Sabine's Gull*, Insh Marshes, Highland, December 2007  
© Dave Pullan.



**Plate 166.** *Bonaparte's Gull, Peterhead, NE Scotland, November 2007*  
© Chris Gibbins.

**Ivory Gull:** a 1st-winter bird was seen very briefly off Griminish Point, North Uist and then later the same day briefly at Howmore, South Uist (both Outer Hebrides) on 10 November.

**Bridled or Sooty Tern:** a bird of this species pair flew past Dunbar then Barns Ness on 18 August but at too great a distance to be confirmed to species level.

**Whiskered Tern:** an adult was seen briefly at Machrihanish (Argyll) on 9 July - only the 4th record for Scotland. **Black Tern:** the only individual reported was an adult at Loch Alsh (Highland) on 19 July. **White-winged Black Tern:** one was at Loch of Tankerness (Orkney) on 22–23 July. The second bird of the summer was also at Loch of Tankerness - an adult present on 8–11 August. A very late juvenile was at Loch of Skene (NE Scotland) on 21–29 October.

**Arctic Tern:** some very late birds were seen in November in the last report being a juvenile at Inverkeithing (Fife) on 22nd.

**Brünnich's Guillemot:** one at Girdleness, NE Scotland on 7 November was a fantastic find for the Scottish mainland - it was present close inshore throughout the afternoon but was not seen the next day. **Little Auk:** a phenomenal 18,900+ flew past St

Abbs Head, Borders on 11 November. The same day also saw counts of 6,000+ past Dunbar and 1,500 past Scoughall (both Lothian) and 1,477 past Collieston (NE Scotland) with the next day 3,180 reported at Girdleness, NE Scotland and then 1,162 were counted past Sumburgh Head (Shetland) on 22nd. Only very low numbers were reported in December.

**Mourning Dove:** a 1st-winter bird was at Carnach, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) from 29 October to 7 November. Found and identified by Brian Rabbitts on the 1st November whilst doing the BTO winter bird atlas, Brian later discovered that the local crofters had noticed it first there on 29th. Remarkably this fourth for the Wester Palearctic was found only 4.5 km way from the previous British record, at Carinish, North Uist in 1999. **Snowy Owl:** a male was again noted on west Lewis (Outer Hebrides), in the Aird Uig/Mangurstadh area on 25 July. One or more summering bird were still on St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) up until August. One was again on west Lewis from 19 September, and one was seen there again on 11 October. **Hoopoe:** one was on Trondra (Shetland) on 30 September. **Wryneck:** the only birds reported in August were three

on Fair Isle from 11th, and the only bird in September was at Fife Ness (Fife) on 21st.

**Red-rumped Swallow:** one was at Port of Ness, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 28 October.

**Greater Short-toed Lark:** the only one reported in September was on Shetland, with two seen there during October. **Wood Lark:** two different birds were seen on Shetland during October. One was on the Out Skerries (Shetland) on 3 December.

**Shore Lark:** singles were on Unst (Shetland) and Sanday (Orkney) from 10 September. One was at Torness (Lothian) from 30 November to 4 December and then nearby at Barns Ness on 12th.

**Richard's Pipit:** only two were noted in September - both on Shetland. Only eight were reported in October - all from the Northern Isles. Two were seen in December - both in NE Scotland - one at Stonehaven on 15th and the other at Meikle Loch on 22–30th.

**Blyth's Pipit:** one was present at Sumburgh on 17–18 October with another on Fair Isle on 27 October which was later found dead (the 5–6th Shetland and Scottish records). **Olive-backed Pipit:** up to six were reported from Foula, Shetland in October with at least two others seen elsewhere on Shetland during the month.

**Pechora Pipit:** the only bird reported in September was one seen briefly on Out Skerries (Shetland) on 28 September. One was on Foula on 3–6 October, with another at Toab, Shetland on 12–14 October.

**Water Pipit:** an over-wintering bird was seen in Ayrshire and two in Lothian from 14 November. **Buff-bellied Pipit:** one was found on board a ship between Iceland and the Butt of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 19th - when the bird was first seen the ship was in Icelandic waters but it died on board there on 20th when the ship was in British waters c 225 km NW of the Butt of Lewis. At least

one was present on Fair Isle between 23 September and 2 October, a new bird was on Fair Isle on 1–7 October, with another found on Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) on 18 October - only the third to fifth records for Scotland. **Yellow Wagtail:** a notably late bird was at Stornoway, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 14 November. **Citrine Wagtail:** at least two 1st-winter birds were seen on Fair Isle in August, with an early bird present from 13th onwards with then at least one further bird present along with it on 27th. Up to four were seen on Fair Isle during September, with a further two birds reported from elsewhere on Shetland, and one on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 28th. One was on Whalsay, Shetland on 3–8 October. **Waxwing:** over 375 were reported in November including 60+ in Dundee (Angus) on 25–27th, a maximum count of 45 from Aberdeen (NE Scotland) and 40 at Granton, Edinburgh (Lothian) on 25th. Around 350 were reported in December, mainly in Aberdeen and Edinburgh with peak counts of 142 in Aberdeen city centre on 18th and 55 at Bruntsfield, Edinburgh on 1st. **Dipper:** a bird of the Black-

bellied race was on Fair Isle on 5 December.

**Thrush Nightingale:** one was present on Fair Isle on 28 September.

**Common Nightingale:** one was at Unst, Shetland from 14 October.

**Siberian Rubythroat:** a male was found at Hametoun, Foula, Shetland on 5 October.

**Bluethroat:** Nine were reported in October.

**Red-flanked Bluetail:** one was at Scatness, Shetland on 13–14 October.

**Black Redstart:** 12 were logged in November, at least four of which were in Lothian.

At least seven were reported in December - including a 1st-winter male at Bracken Bay (Ayrshire) on 10–14th.

**White's Thrush:** the remains of one were found on Fair Isle on 2 October, and a live bird was present at Sumburgh, Shetland on 13 October.

**Siberian Thrush:** the star find of September was a 1st-winter male on Foula on 28th - surprisingly the first record for Shetland.

**Swainson's Thrush:** one was found on Fetlar (Shetland) on 28 September, remaining to at least 2 October.

**Grey-cheeked Thrush:** one was on Fair Isle on 30 September.

**Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler:** one was trapped on Fair Isle on 30 September, with another on Out Skerries (Shetland) on 2 October - the 9th Shetland record away from Fair Isle.

**Lanceolated Warbler:** up to six different birds were seen on Fair Isle between 27 September to 3 October, with another on Foula from 7–9 October.

**Paddyfield Warbler:** one was present at Quendale, Shetland from 9–14 October.

**Blyth's Reed Warbler:** one was trapped on Fair Isle on 30 September.

At least three birds were reported from Shetland between 1–14 October - the increase in records of this species means more observers have experience of it - evident from the fact that all of these birds were identified without being trapped.

**Marsh Warbler:** the only bird reported in August was one on Fair Isle on 25th. Five were seen in September - all on Shetland apart from one at Snishival, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 29th.

The only birds in October were two on Fair Isle in the first week.

**Booted Warbler:** one was on Barra (Outer Hebrides) on 11 September.

**Icterine Warbler:** the only bird reported in August was one on Fair Isle on 11–14th. It was notably scarce in September with just five reported - all from the Northern Isles.

**Melodious Warbler:** one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) on 30 August and remained throughout September to 12 October.

**Barred Warbler:** six were reported from 19 August, all on Shetland and Orkney, though only c25 were seen in September, and only c18 were reported in October.

**Lesser Whitethroat:** an unusually late bird was found in an Ayr garden (Ayrshire) on 24–26 December.

**Subalpine Warbler:** the long staying female on the Isle of May was present up to 19 July at least. A male was on Fair Isle on 20–29 October.

**Sardinian Warbler:** a female was at South Scousburgh (Shetland) on 26–30 September.

**Greenish Warbler:**



Plate 167. Citrine Wagtail, Fair Isle, September 2007 © Harry Scott.

one was present on Fair Isle on 20–21 August with three others reported on Shetland during the latter part of the month. **Arctic Warbler:** one was on the Out Skerries (Shetland) on 23–27 September, and another was on Whalsay, Shetland on 9 October. A very late bird was at Halligarth, Unst on 10 November - the only previous November report in Scotland was from Stornoway (Outer Hebrides), though this bird was not accepted by BBRC due to the possibility of Eastern Crowned Warbler not being completely eliminated. **Pallas's Leaf Warbler:** one was at Sumburgh on 12–15 October. Two were found over the weekend of 23–25 November - one at St Abbs Head (Borders) and one at Ethie Mains (Angus). **Yellow-browed Warbler:** a total of about 55 birds in September from 22nd was a low one by recent autumn standards. By contrast very good numbers were seen in October with 220+ reported, mainly from Shetland with 52+ around the islands on the 8th alone. During the month on Shetland it was the commonest warbler present on many days. One was seen at Oban Trumisgarry, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 3 November; another was reported from Unst (Shetland) the same day. **Radde's Warbler:** the only bird of the autumn was at Toab, Shetland on 18 October. **Dusky Warbler:** one was at Sumburgh, Shetland on 12–14 October, with four others reported elsewhere on Shetland between 12–24th. **Firecrest:** only two were seen in October - one in East Lothian on 9th and one on Fair Isle from 24th (only the 4th island record). Three were reported in November - one from Fair Isle still up to 8th, one at Whiting Bay, Arran (Clyde Islands) on 17th, and one at St Abbs, Borders on 23rd.

**Red-breasted Flycatcher:** nine were seen in October, including three on Orkney and two on the

Outer Hebrides. A late bird was at Stornoway, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 4 November. **Red-backed Shrike:** the only birds reported in August were on Fair Isle, with two different individuals seen on 20–26th. Eight were seen in September, including juveniles on Barra (Outer Hebrides) on 12th and Tiree (Argyll) on 17th. **Lesser Grey Shrike:** the individual first seen on Fair Isle on the 27 May, over-summered remaining there until 18 August. **Great Grey Shrike:** the only bird reported in September was on Unst (Shetland) from 28th. Six birds were reported in October including two in the Clyde area and one in Highland. Only three were reported in November: two still in the Clyde area and one in Highland, and all three remained into December. **Rosy Starling:** the only individual reported in July was an adult on South Uist (Outer Hebrides) in the Drimsdale/ Howmore area up to 11th at least. An adult was present at Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) from 21 August. The only one seen in September was a juvenile on Barra (Outer Hebrides) on 12th.

**Arctic Redpoll:** eight different birds were reported from Shetland on 1–19 October, all thought to be of the form *hornemanni*. One of the form *hornemanni* was seen at Oban Trumisgarry, North Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 3 November. **Common Rosefinch:** singles were reported from Holm

(Orkney) on 6th and Scousburgh (Shetland) on 8 July. Nine were reported from 11 August, all on the Northern Isles. During September 24 were reported, mainly on Shetland though one was on Tiree (Argyll) and two were on Barra (Outer Hebrides). At least 15 birds were reported in October, and a late bird was on Fair Isle on 18–22 November. **Lapland Bunting:** at least four were at Torness Power Station on 2 December and then at least three in fields inland of Barns Ness on 6–12th (both Lothian) with up to nine in fields at Dowlaw, Borders from 15 December. **Pine Bunting:** a male was present on Fair Isle from 25 October to 10 November. **Ortolan Bunting:** relatively scarce this autumn, with the earliest a 1st-winter bird at Hoswick (Shetland) on 25–27 August. A late bird was on North Ronaldsay, Orkney on 28 October. **Rustic Bunting:** one was at Sumburgh, Shetland on 14 October. **Little Buntings:** the only one reported in September was on Shetland. Nine were logged in October, mostly on the Northern Isles, but including singles on Tiree (Argyll) and South Uist (Outer Hebrides). **Black-headed Bunting:** a male was photographed on the Isle of Canna (Highland) on 8 July - a not untypical west coast location with a high proportion of midsummer records of Black-headed Bunting in Scotland coming from Argyll, Highland and the Outer Hebrides.



Plate 168. Little Bunting, Fair Isle, October 2007 © Rebecca Nason.

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