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# Scottish Birds

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# Scottish Birds

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*Scottish Birds* is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications, including the *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme Report* and the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

## More about the SOC...

**On the one hand, a birdwatching club;** Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 14 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 2700. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

**On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds;** The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

## Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

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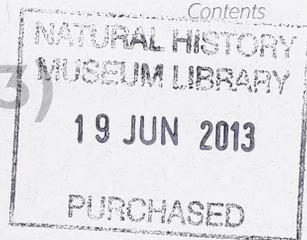
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# Scottish Birds 33:2 (2013)



98 President's Foreword K. Shaw

## PAPERS

99 Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2011  
R.Y. McGowan, C.J. McInerney & T. ap Rheinallt on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

## SHORT NOTES

- 122 Did Red Kites breed in Caithness in the 19th century? A review of the two supposed breeding records R.M. Sellers & D.G.D. Russell  
124 Robin ejecting a pellet R. Holland  
125 Peregrine retrieving prey from water G. Ruthven

## OBITUARIES

- 127 Dr Dorothy (Betty) Rowling (1915–2012)  
127 James Anderson Stout (1911–2013)  
129 Philip Newman (1954–2013)

## ARTICLES, NEWS & VIEWS

- 131 Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Edinburgh, 16 March 2013  
138 NEWS AND NOTICES  
143 SOC and Scottish Environment LINK A. Fox  
145 Long-term declines in Scottish seabird populations W.T.S. Miles  
153 History of a bomb-damaged and transformed painting by George Lodge revealed by X-ray imaging J. Savory  
155 Branch Spotlight - Tayside Branch B. McCurley  
157 An unprecedented wreck of Puffins in eastern Scotland in March and April 2013  
M.P. Harris & N. Elkins  
160 FIELD NOTE  
161 BOOK REVIEWS  
164 Swainson's Thrushes in Scotland in autumn 2012 D. Brown, S.L. Rivers & C.D. Scott  
168 White's Thrush, Creachan, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2012 C.D. Scott  
170 Laughing Gull, Rosehearty, December 2012 - a first for North-east Scotland H. Maggs  
172 Chestnut-eared Bunting, Virkie, Shetland, October 2012 - the second record for Scotland  
R.M. Fray  
174 Black-throated Thrush, Banchory, 25–30 March 2013 - first record for North-east Scotland  
H. Addelee  
178 White-billed Diver, Isle of May, 23 January 2013 - the first island record  
W.T.S. Miles & M.A. Newell  
181 Harlequin Duck on North Uist, Outer Hebrides, February–April 2013 B. Rabbitts  
184 Pine Grosbeak on Shetland 2012/13 M. Chapman & R.J. Nason

## SCOTTISH BIRD SIGHTINGS

188 1 January to 31 March 2013 S.L. Rivers

## PHOTOSPOT

BC Arctic Terns B. Thomason

# President's Foreword

It is mid-April and, strangely, I am writing this piece from a hotel in Bournemouth! I am on a reptile hunt with a couple of pals – unlike back home all the Swallows and martins are in.

Recently, I have been working on raptors on Lewis. While we were there, some well-known egg collectors were also there being followed by the police. As is often the way, these days many interested people followed the whole thing on the internet. Like many of my generation I collected birds' eggs as a wee lad in the 1960s, but it difficult to understand 40-year-old men doing it! For some rare breeders, the problem of egg collecting is, of course, completely overshadowed by deliberate persecution. In Scotland, it strikes me this wide-ranging problem has worsened, not improved, over the last 20 years, and with such entrenched views, I fear there is no solution on the horizon.

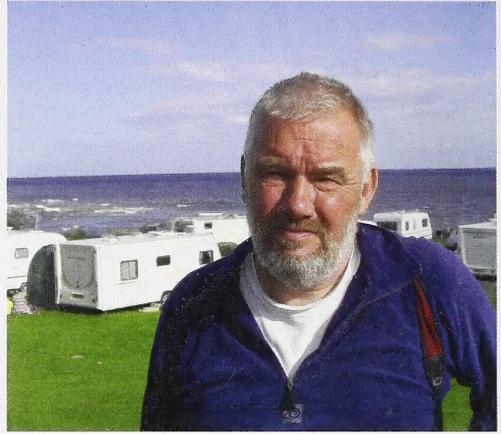


Plate 81. Ken Shaw, Fife, August 2012. © Amanda Coia

On the way down to Dorset, we stopped at the RSPB reserve at Ham Wall in Somerset. The RSPB has some superb new wetland reserves in England and for me Ham Wall and Lakenheath, in Norfolk, stand out. The reed bed creation for breeding Bittern at Ham Wall is excellent and I totally underestimated the size of the wetland. One of the locals told us that there were 40 booming male Bitterns, yes 40! It is an exciting time for wetland birds in England, with increases in Little Egret and the colonisation of Great White Egret and Purple Heron. I look forward to the day – sometime in the future – when we have a site like Ham Wall in Scotland; Spoonbills, Little Egrets and Great White Egrets breeding in Scotland sounds pretty good to me.

By the time you read this, the new SOC website will be up and running. My sincere thanks to Jane Cleaver for the time and energy she has devoted to steering this important project. Thanks also go to all staff at Waterston House and Stephen Hunter for their input and support.

We have also been busy organising this year's annual conference. We were hoping to go to Perthshire, but unfortunately we could not find a venue with weekend availability or within our price range. However, we are delighted to have found a super hotel on the Ayrshire coast and I am very much looking forward to it. It will be difficult to follow last year's programme, but we are doing our best! We have managed to book Mark Avery, the *Political Birder*. At one time, Mark was the director of conservation with RSPB, but now he is very effective as a freelance writer/speaker – a really interesting guy. Also, Tony Marr will be our Friday night speaker. Tony has had an interesting life too, not least of all as a tour leader in the Antarctic for ten years. He recently lived in Norfolk, but has a house at the north tip of Lewis where he can do his birding in relative peace! Steve Roberts was a big success at the raptor groups' conference. He is a Honey-buzzard specialist and has been in touch with me recently as he is writing a paper on the status of the species for *British Birds*. When asked what the most important technique for finding breeding Honey-buzzards is, his reply was simple '*check every buzzard*'. Have we stopped doing so, I wonder?

I look forward to seeing some of you at the conference and until then my best wishes and good birding - Ken Shaw, President



Plates 82–83. Red-rumped Swallow, possible subspecies *japonica/daurica*, Talisker, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, 17–29 June 2011. © Ian Fulton

## Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2011

R.Y. McGowan, C.J. McNerny & T. ap Rheinallt  
on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

This is the fourth annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), covering 2011. Previous reports have covered the periods 2005–08, 2009 and 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012).

Several changes to record assessment have been agreed this year. Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* and Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* are now considered sufficiently numerous that assessment is delegated to a local level for records from 1 January 2013. Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* will be assessed locally from the same date (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012). Similarly, due to an increase in occurrences in Britain, the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) will no longer assess records of Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (<http://www.bbrc.org.uk/514>); accordingly, from 1 January 2013 records of Glossy Ibis will be reviewed by SBRC. For a summary of these changes, see Appendix 2.

In this report we give details of a late acceptance of an Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* in Orkney from 2008, which becomes Scotland's first.

In 2011, two species had their highest ever annual totals. There were three Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea*, which had not been recorded for nine years, and five Black Kites *Milvus migrans*, which have been more or less annual in recent years.

As assessment of American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* is now undertaken locally, these species only appear due to late acceptance of records for the Outer Hebrides in 2007 and 2008 respectively. A Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, seen first on Orkney and then on Skye in 2011, is possibly an Eastern Palearctic subspecies. This potential occurrence of a subspecies new to Britain is under consideration by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC).

In 2011, there were no accepted Scottish records of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* for a second successive year. There have been no records of Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* since 2008, making this the longest blank period since 1981-84; and there were no occurrences of Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* in 2011, making this only the third blank year since 1990.

In 2011, as in previous years, the Northern Isles accounted for most Scottish records of songbirds on the SBRC list. Only 20 of 94 individuals newly recorded in 2011 were seen outwith the Northern Isles, and only nine of these were on the mainland. Two species (Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatu*s and Water Pipit) accounted for seven of the nine mainland sightings.

### Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format, which is modelled on the annual BBRC reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the *Scottish List* (Forrester 2013).

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

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007), with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases, older records, 'At sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris* and Oortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004, but excluding the current year. Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted.
- Total number in the current year (2011).

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2011, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles, full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa, information is also provided about pre-2011 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years are sometimes accepted locally without formal submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided. Revised details are also provided for some pre-2011 records published previously.

For each record listed in full, the following information is provided. For additional details, see ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a).

- Year (unless this is 2011).
- Recording area ([www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network/](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network/)).
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or sex if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present throughout; in some cases it may have been observed only on the first and last dates given.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.

- Existence of a photograph, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited. All other observers are covered by the use of 'et al.'
- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, local recorder and/or others.

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

### Species coverage

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

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC list. Appendix 3 lists minor corrections to previous SBRC reports.

### SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the SOC Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current members are Alan Lauder (chairman), John Bowler, Mark Chapman, Hywel Maggs, John Nadin, Martin Scott and John Sweeney, with Chris McInerny as non-voting secretary and Bob McGowan as non-voting museum consultant. Martin Scott replaced Tristan ap Rheinallt during the period when the records reported here were assessed.

The *Scottish List* subcommittee consists of Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny and Roger Riddington. For more information about SBRC, see ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a) and [www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee/](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee/).

### Acknowledgements

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

Next, we thank the following current and former recorders and report compilers for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Paul Baxter, Mark Chapman, Paul Collin, Jon Cook, Martin Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain English, Keith Gillon, Angus Hogg, Hugh Insley, Hywel Maggs, Ray Murray, David Parnaby, Scott Paterson, Chris Pendlebury, Mike Pennington, Brian Rabbitts, David Parnaby, Malcolm Ware, Stephen Welch, Jim Williams, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas.

We appreciate Keith Naylor's scrutiny of past and current SBRC reports and thank him for his valuable comments. We thank Ian Andrews for making available the database of records of scarce and rare species used during the preparation of Forrester *et al.* (2007), and also for creating the graphics.

## Systematic list of accepted records

### Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

O: 3: 0

**Table 1.** Additional records of Egyptian Goose in Scotland, 2010 and 2008.

**2010: North-east Scotland** Meikle Loch & Ythan estuary, 27 March (J. & T. Nichols *et al.*).

**2008: Orkney** Little Green Holm, 30 June (A.J. Leitch, E.R. Meek *et al.*); same, Loons, Mainland, 7 November (W. Herkel *et al.*).

Egyptian Goose was only recently added to Category C of the *Scottish List*, following the occurrence of an adult at several sites on Mainland Shetland in February and March 2010 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

The observation of a bird in North-east Scotland came just two days after the last sighting in Shetland, and may relate to the same individual. However, as late winter and early spring is the time when migrants of presumed continental origin are seen in southern England (Riddington 2011), there could well have been more than one bird at large in Scotland in March 2010.

The Orkney individual was seen two years prior to these records and thus becomes the first for Scotland. Like the Shetland individual, it was apparently a long-stayer, although only reported on two dates six months apart.

All three of these sightings are considered more likely to relate to birds from feral populations rather than escapes from captivity.

(Breeds throughout Africa south of 20°N latitude, extending farther north into southern Egypt, the only part of its natural range to fall within the Western Palearctic. There are substantial naturalised populations in England (concentrated in Norfolk), the Netherlands and Denmark, with smaller numbers breeding in Belgium, France and Germany.)

### White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*

197: 131: 17

**Table 2.** Accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2011, with additional records for 2010.

**2011: Argyll** Aird, Tiree, adult, 18 October (J. Bowler).

**Highland** Sròn na Cleite, Melvaig, Ross & Cromarty, adult or third-calendar-year, 9 April (K.A. & K.D. Shaw *et al.*).

**Highland** Loch Ewe, Ross & Cromarty, adult or third-calendar-year, 9 April (K.A. & K.D. Shaw *et al.*).

**Highland** Gruinard Island, Ross & Cromarty, adult or third-calendar-year, 10 April (K.A. & K.D. Shaw *et al.*).

**Moray & Nairn** Burghead, up to three, including one adult, 20 April to 8 May (A. Guthrie, M.J.H. Cook *et al.*).

**North-east Scotland** Portsoy, up to five, including three adults, 21–30 April, photo (C. Gibbins, H.E. Maggs, P.A. Osborn *et al.*).

**Orkney** Tor Ness, North Ronaldsay, second-calendar-year, 28 March (M.D. Warren).

**Orkney** Broch of Gurness, Evie, Mainland, adult, 7 June, photo (G. Hogg *et al.*).

**Orkney** Kirk Sound & Holm Sound, Mainland, juvenile, 12 December (K.E. Hague).



Plate 84. White-billed Diver, adult, Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine), South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 14–16 November 2011. © Steve Duffield

**Outer Hebrides** Port Nis (Port of Ness) & Sgiogarstaigh (Skigersta), Lewis, 2–5 May, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).

**Outer Hebrides** Peighinn nan Aoireann (Peninerine), South Uist, adult, 14–16 November, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

**Shetland** Bluemull Sound, adult (returning), 26 January 2011 (B.H. Thomason); same, 7 November (B.H. Thomason).

**Shetland** South Nesting Bay, Kirkabister, Mainland, adult (returning), 7 February to 4 May (J. Dunn *et al.*).

**2010: Moray & Nairn** Burghead, two adults and one immature, 14 April to 3 May (R. Proctor, A. Saunder *et al.*).

**Shetland** Bluemull Sound, 3 October (M. Garner, B.H. Thomason *et al.*).

White-billed Diver is a scarce visitor to Scotland, with ten or more birds being reported each year since 2003. Most are seen in Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Highland, with some preferred localities being used each year in spring as presumed stop-overs between wintering and summering areas. In Shetland, a small number of wintering individuals are believed to return to the same sites in successive years.

The number and spatial distribution of records in 2011 conforms to the pattern seen in previous years, with a preponderance of birds in Highland and the islands in spring. However, the observation of small groups at Portsoy (North-east Scotland) and Burghead (Moray & Nairn) is a new phenomenon, although the additional 2010 record reported here suggests that at least one of these two locations could be a regular spring stop-over. All 22 accepted records from Moray & Nairn and North-east Scotland prior to 2010 involved single birds, with the exception of two at Peterhead (North-east Scotland) in October 1998.

The late acceptance of a record from Orkney in 2005, involving a single bird at Inganess Bay, Mainland (Hudson *et al.* 2011), brings the total for that year to 27 birds.

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

## **Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis***

c. 228: 23: 1

**Table 3.** Accepted records of Cory's Shearwater in Scotland, 2011, with an additional record for 2005.

**2011: Lothian** Dunbar, 17 September (K. Gillon *et al.*).

**2005: Angus & Dundee** Scurdle Ness, 21 August (S. Busuttill).

Cory's Shearwater is recorded near-annually in Scottish waters, with most birds seen off North Ronaldsay (Orkney) and the Outer Hebrides. Although ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2010a) reported a marked increase in sightings from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, numbers since appear to have decreased, with no more than two birds seen annually between 2007 and 2011.

The Angus & Dundee and Lothian individuals reported here were the sixth and eighth respectively for the recording areas and occurred during the peak autumn period for this species in Scotland.

(Breeds on the Azores, Canary Islands and other nearby Atlantic islands, with the closely related Scopoli's Shearwater *C. diomedea* breeding in the Mediterranean. Both species can occur in North Atlantic waters in autumn and are on the *British List*, but most are assumed to be Cory's and no confirmed Scopoli's yet recorded in Scottish waters.)

## **Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis***

c. 522 (1950–2004): 9,214: 3

(excluding 'at sea' records)

**Table 4.** Accepted records of Great Shearwater in Scotland, 2011.

**2011: Orkney** Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 27 August (P.J. Donnelly).

**Orkney** Dennis Head, North Ronaldsay, 9 September (M.D. Warren).

**Outer Hebrides** Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvlue), South Uist, 2 September (J.B. Kemp).

Great Shearwater was a rare bird in Scotland throughout most of its recorded history up to 2004, but its perceived status appeared to be in need of revision following the large number of sightings during 2005–07. Since then, however, no more than six birds have been recorded in any one year, if 'at sea' records are discounted.

This underlines the exceptional nature of the influxes witnessed in the mid-2000s.

This species is almost exclusively an autumn visitor to Scotland, with most sightings from islands in the north and west. The three birds reported in 2011 are typical in terms of date and location.

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

**Continental Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* 2: 20: 6**

**Table 5.** Accepted records of Continental Cormorant in Scotland, 2011, with an additional record for 2010.

- 2011: **Lothian** Seafield Pond, adult, 22 April to 8 May, photo (M.A. Wilkinson).  
**Lothian** Musselburgh, two (including one adult), 22 July, photo (J.J. Andrews).  
**North-east Scotland** Ythan estuary, adult, 17 August, photo (P.R. Massey).  
**Shetland** Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, adult, 29 May, photo (R. Riddington).  
**Shetland** Scatness, Mainland, first-summer, 1–3 June, photo (R. Riddington).  
 2010: **Lothian** Musselburgh, adult, 21 July to 8 August, photo (G. Morgan).

Continental Cormorant is a rare visitor to Scotland, with most records along the east coast or in Shetland between the months of December and June. As recently as the beginning of 2007, there were only three accepted Scottish records, but there have been several sightings each year since then and claims of Continental Cormorant from 1 January 2013 will no longer be assessed by SBRC (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012; see also Appendix 2).

With the addition of the six birds reported here from 2011 and the late acceptance of one in Lothian in 2010, the total number of individuals in Scotland becomes 28. Of these, half (14) were seen either on Mainland Shetland or at Musselburgh (Lothian). This unusual distribution pattern is likely to be a consequence of the activities of the small number of observers who have taken an interest in this taxon.

Nevertheless, as Continental Cormorant is a visitor from the Continent it is not surprising that sightings on the east side of Scotland predominate. To date, the only bird observed in the western half of the country was an individual at Prince's Dock, Glasgow (Clyde), in December 2005 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010a).

(*P. c. sinensis* breeds throughout central and southern Europe and has expanded recently into parts of northern Europe; outside the breeding season it occurs both inland and on coasts through much of Europe, including England. *P. c. carbo* breeds in north-west Europe including Iceland, Norway and the British Isles.)

**Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* 46: 7: 0**

**Table 6.** Additional record of Night-heron in Scotland, 2010.

- 2010: **Outer Hebrides** Creag Ghoraidh (Creagorry), Benbecula, adult, 22–23 June, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Night Heron is a less-than-annual visitor to Scotland, with a spring peak corresponding to presumed continental overshoots and a scattering of sightings through the rest of the year. There is a wide geographical spread but the most likely areas of occurrence in Scotland are the south, the Northern Isles and the Outer Hebrides. In the past this picture was clouded by the existence of a free-flying colony of Night Herons at Edinburgh Zoo (Lothian), but the number of free-flying birds in Scotland has decreased over the past decade or so.

There were no Scottish records of this species in 2011. The 2010 Benbecula individual reported here is the first since 2008, when there was a spring bird in North Uist (also Outer Hebrides).

(Holarctic with four subspecies, nominate *nycticorax* breeding in mainland Europe and into Asia, and *N. n. hoactli* in North America. Both populations move south in winter.)



Plate 85. Cattle Egret, Loch Stiapabhat (Stiapavat), Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 29 September 2011. © Tony Marr



Plate 86. Great White Egret, Balnamoon Farm, Brechin, Angus & Dundee, 12–16 December 2011. © Jon Cook

### Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* 3: 4: 2

Table 7. Accepted records of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2011.

2011: **Argyll** Croig, Mull, 27 October (R. Atkinson, B.A. & S. Fuller); same, Whitehouse & Hough, Tiree, 17–25 November, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).  
**Outer Hebrides** Loch Stiapabhat (Stiapavat), Lewis, 29 September, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).

Although Cattle Egret now has a tentative foothold in southern England as a breeding species (Holling *et al.* 2012), it remains very rare in Scotland, with just seven records to the end of 2010. Both birds in 2011 were seen on islands in the west of the country, and indeed it is possible that all the sightings relate to a single wandering individual.

Of the nine accepted individuals to the end of 2011, five were on islands and four on the mainland. Argyll and the Outer Hebrides account for four of the island birds, with the fifth in Shetland, while the mainland sightings come from Dumfries & Galloway (two birds), Angus & Dundee, and Caithness.

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

### Great White Egret *Ardea alba* 37: 33: 9

Table 8. Accepted records of Great White Egret in Scotland, 2011, with additional records for 2010 and 2009.

2011: **Angus & Dundee** Loch of Kinnordy, 5–8 June, photo (A. Guthrie *et al.*).  
**Angus & Dundee** Montrose Basin, 21–27 November, photo (T. Craig, C. Twister *et al.*).  
**Angus & Dundee** Balnamoon Farm, Brechin, 12–16 December, photo (J. Bardner, J. Cook *et al.*).  
**Argyll** Inveraray, 21 May (P. Daw).  
**Highland** Tain Bay, Ross & Cromarty, 21 May, photo (D. & H. McAllister, B. Urquhart *et al.*).  
**Moray & Nairn** Between Tugnet & Bogmoor, 27 November 2010 to 22 February (see below).  
**Perth & Kinross** Carsebreck Loch, 26 October (M. Bell).  
**Shetland** Various locations, Whalsay, two, 24 October to 5 November, with one remaining to 31 December, photo (J. Dunn, J.L. Irvine, B. Marshall, N. Poleson *et al.*); Out Skerries, same as one of Whalsay birds, 6–19 November, photo (E. Tait *et al.*).  
**Upper Forth** Kinneil Lagoon, 26 October, photo (C. Smith).  
 2010: **Moray & Nairn** Between Tugnet & Bogmoor, 9 January to 1 May, photo (M.J.H. Cook, D. Spencer *et al.*); probably same, 27 November to 22 February 2011, photo (I.P. Green *et al.*).  
 2009: **Argyll** Sound of Islay, 16 October (S. Pinder).

Great White Egret is a rare but increasingly frequent visitor to Scotland, with sightings in most areas and most months. It is likely that some duplication of records occurs as individuals move from site to site.

The nine birds seen in 2011 do not match the total for 2009 (15, with the addition of the late acceptance reported here) but exceed the number seen in any other year to date. They include the first for the Perth & Kinross recording area. Further increase can be expected in future for a species whose recent expansion in western and central Europe has been described as ‘amazing’, with breeding confirmed for the first time in England in 2012 (Pitches 2012).

Note that the record of a Great White Egret at Kilconquhar Loch, Fife, in December 2009 was inadvertently repeated in the following year’s report (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011, 2012). The required downward adjustment in the species totals is offset by the additional 2009 bird reported here, and the addition of a further new bird from 2010 increases the total number of Scottish records to the end of 2010 by one to 70.

As from 1 January 2013, records of this species in Scotland will be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (see Appendix 2).

(Occurs on all continents outwith polar regions. In Europe, nominate *alba* breeds from central Europe eastwards, wintering from Africa and the Persian Gulf to China and Korea; *A. a. egretta* breeds in the Nearctic, with northern populations wintering in the south; two other subspecies.)

Plate 87. Purple Heron, second-calendar-year, Mires of Funzie, Fetlar, Shetland, 20 April 2011. © Malcie Smith



### Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* 22: 0: 3

Table 9. Accepted records of Purple Heron in Scotland, 2011.

- 2011: **Fife** Mountcastle Quarry, 10 April, photo (N. Elkins *et al.*).  
**Moray & Nairn** Loch Spynie, second-calendar-year, 19–25 April (A. Bowie, D.A. Gibson *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Mires of Funzie, Fetlar, second-calendar-year, female found dead, 20 April; specimen at National Museums Scotland (NMS.Z.2013.87) (M.I. Smith).

Purple Heron is a very rare visitor to Scotland, with a peak of sightings in spring (May and June), and the majority of the remainder occurring in September and October. The 22 birds recorded between the first sighting in 1872 and the end of 2010 were split almost equally between the mainland (12 birds) and islands (ten). Most of the mainland records come from the east side of the country, especially Lothian and North-east Scotland, while on the islands there have been sightings in the Outer Hebrides, Orkney, Fair Isle and Shetland.

The three 2011 individuals reported here, all seen in April, are the first in Scotland since 2002 and the most ever seen in a single year. It is tempting to link this with the increase in numbers farther south that culminated in the first confirmed breeding of this species in England in 2010 (Holling *et al.* 2012). As for some other rare herons and egrets, we may witness a sustained increase in sightings in the future.

(Breeds from western Europe across to south-east Asia, and also in sub-Saharan Africa, where Western Palearctic populations winter. These populations belong to the nominate subspecies *purpurea*, with two other subspecies breeding in Madagascar and the eastern part of the range respectively.)

**Black Kite *Milvus migrans* 19: 8: 5**

**Table 10.** Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2011, with an additional record for 2010.

- 2011: North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, 8–9 May (T.W. Marshall *et al.*).  
**North-east Scotland** Miltonhaven, St Cyrus, 10 June (P.A.A. Baxter, P.D. Bloor).  
**Orkney** Observatory, North Ronaldsay, second-calendar-year, 2 May, photo (M.D. Warren *et al.*).  
**Orkney** Fara, Scapa Flow & Tankerness, Mainland, 28–29 May (A. Upton, K.E. Hague *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Various locations, Yell, Unst and Whalsay, 5–9 May, photo (R.M. Tallack, R.J. Brookes, J.L. Irvine *et al.*).  
**2010: Highland** Port Rìgh (Portree), Isle of Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, 30 May, photo (D. Brown per R. McMillan).

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most individuals have been seen in spring, from April to June, with just a handful of sightings later in the season, though there have also been instances of summering and a single case of hybridisation with Red Kite *Milvus milvus*.

Including the late acceptance reported here, more birds (four) were seen in Scotland in 2010 than in any previous year. However, this total was exceeded in 2011, when five individuals were observed, equivalent to the total for the seven-year period from 2003 to 2009. It remains to be seen whether the recent steep increase will be maintained.

In line with the majority of previous records, all the sightings reported here were during May or early June. All were in recording areas with multiple previous sightings.

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



**Plate 88.** Montagu's Harrier, first-summer female, Sumburgh Farm, Mainland, Shetland, 9–17 May 2011. © Roger Riddington

**Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* 45: 2: 1**  
(excluding young from known Scottish nests)

**Table 11.** Accepted records of Montagu's Harrier in Scotland, 2011.

- 2011: Shetland** Sumburgh Farm, Mainland, first-summer female, 9–17 May, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*).

Montagu's Harrier is a very rare migrant to Scotland, mostly occurring in spring in North-east Scotland, Angus & Dundee or Perth & Kinross. A few breeding attempts have been successful, though none more recently than 1955, and the total of 47 birds to the end of 2010 excludes fledged young from these breeding attempts.

Perhaps surprisingly, there had only been two sightings in Shetland prior to 2011, both involving males on Mainland in May: one at Spiggie in 1954 and another at Sumburgh in 1982. As described by Riddington (2012), the identification of the 2011 individual was arrived at in retrospect from photographic evidence, several months after the sighting. This highlights the fact that harrier identification is difficult, and also perhaps that expectations regarding Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* might be leading today's observers to overlook Montagu's when considering the possibilities for a ring-tailed bird that does not look right for Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*.

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

**Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus***

c. 325 (1968–2004): 30: 10

**Table 12.** Accepted records of Rough-legged Buzzard in Scotland, 2011.

- 2011: **Fair Isle** Swey, second-winter, 12–13 November, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).  
**North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, adult, 27 April (D. Funnell).  
**North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, juvenile, 28–29 October, photo (N. Littlewood *et al.*).  
**Orkney** Harray & Rendall, Mainland, juvenile, 13–20 October, photo (B. & J. Wright *et al.*).  
**Orkney** Stembister, Toab & Langskaill, Tankerness, Mainland, second-winter, 17–24 November, photo (K.E. Hague).  
**Shetland** Valla Field, Collaster, Burrarfirth & Colvadale, Unst, juvenile, 29 December 2010 to at least 23 March, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2012).  
**Shetland** Valla Field, Collaster, Burrarfirth & Colvadale, Unst, juvenile, 1 January to at least 23 March, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al.*); this or the bird present since 29 December 2010 remained to 8 April.  
**Shetland** Toft & Dales Lees, Mainland, juvenile, 5 January to 9 May, photo (M.S. Chapman, J. Laurensen, B.H. Thomason *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Laxobigging, Mainland, juvenile, 5 November to 2012, photo (M.S. Chapman *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Isbister, Houll & Vatshoull, Whalsay, juvenile, 18–21 November, photo (J.L. Irvine, B. Marshall *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Hill of Caldback, Unst, 1 December (B.H. Thomason).

Rough-legged Buzzard is a scarce passage migrant to Scotland, occurring mostly on the eastern side of the country and in the Northern Isles, with numbers tending to peak in late autumn. In addition, a few birds overwinter.

With ten birds, 2011 is the first year since 1994 for which the Scottish total reached double figures, although this was a regular occurrence in the 1970s and 1980s. As usual, the majority of sightings were in late autumn, with the Northern Isles accounting for all but two of the birds seen. Two individuals wintered on Unst (Shetland) at the beginning of the year, with another apparently doing the same on Mainland Shetland at the end of the year.

It is possible that some of the autumn records involve repeat sightings of migrants on their way south, and thus the actual number of individuals involved could be fewer than ten.

As from 1 January 2013, records of this species in Scotland will be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (see Appendix 2).

(Holarctic, with four subspecies; nominate *lagopus* breeds from Scandinavia east to Siberia and migrates south to winter in an area extending from France to central Asia. *B. l. sanctijohannis* from North America is a potential vagrant to Scotland.)

**Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus***

81: 12: 0

**Table 13.** Additional record of Red-footed Falcon in Scotland, 2007.

- 2007: **Highland** Bundalloch, Dornie, Skye & Lochalsh, adult female, 20–27 October, video (S. Reekie).

Red-footed Falcon is mainly a rare late-spring migrant to Scotland, with most sightings coming from Shetland, Orkney and North-east Scotland. Although it is not quite annual, since the late 1960s there has been at least one sighting every other year, with the exception of the three-year period 1986–88, when no birds were seen.

Following three birds in 2010, there were none in 2011. However, the late acceptance for 2007, reported here, increases the total for that year to two birds. This was the first record for Skye & Lochalsh and also one of the few late-autumn sightings of this species in Scotland.

(Breeds from Hungary and the Czech Republic east to China, wintering in southern Africa.)

**Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus***

29: 2: 0

An adjustment is made here to the total number of accepted records to the end of 2004. Details of an occurrence on Stronsay (Orkney) in 1998 were not submitted to SBRC, and the total is reduced from 30 to 29 (see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2011).

**American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica***

72: 69: -

**Table 14.** Additional record of American Golden Plover in Scotland, 2007.

- 2007: **Outer Hebrides** Ormaclait (Ormaclate), South Uist, juvenile, 15–20 October (A. Stevenson *et al.*).

American Golden Plover is a scarce, but annual, visitor to Scotland from the Nearctic, seen mostly on islands, particularly the Outer Hebrides, during September and October.

As from 1 January 2010, records of this species in Scotland have been assessed locally rather than by SBRC (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

(Breeds at high latitudes in North America and north-east Siberia, migrating over the western Atlantic to winter in the south of South America.)

### Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

15: 2: 1

**Table 15.** Accepted record of Kentish Plover in Scotland, 2011.

2011: **Lothian** Tynninghame, female, 18–19 April (J. Ellison *et al.*).

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

Lothian remains the recording area with most observations (seven), with the beaches of Aberlady and Tynninghame being the favoured sites for this species.

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

### White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

69: 46: 16

**Table 16.** Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2011.

2011: **Argyll** Gott Bay, Tiree, adult, 4 August, photo (J. Bowler).

**Argyll** The Reef, Tiree, adult, 15 September, photo (J. Bowler).

**Lothian** Musselburgh, adult, 30 September to 4 October, photo (D. Allan *et al.*).

**Moray & Nairn** Hopeman, adult, 23 September, photo (M.J.H. Cook *et al.*).

**North-east Scotland** Ythan estuary, adult, 29 July, photo (C. Gibbins *et al.*).

**North-east Scotland** Loch of Strathbeg, 19 August (D. Funnell).

**Outer Hebrides** Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvue), South Uist, adult, 15 September, photo (S.E. Duffield, J.B. Kemp).

**Outer Hebrides** Cille Pheadair (Kilpheder), South Uist, adult, 21–22 September, photo (J.B. Kemp *et al.*).

**Outer Hebrides** Geirinis (Gerinish), South Uist, 7–8 October, photo (A. Hogg *et al.*).

**Outer Hebrides**, Còig Peighinnean (Fivepenny), Ness, Lewis, juvenile, 10 October, photo (B.A.E. Marr, M. Shrubbs).

**Outer Hebrides** Bornais (Bornish), South Uist, juvenile, 10–11 October, photo (S.E. Duffield, J.B. Kemp *et al.*).

**Outer Hebrides** Còig Peighinnean (Fivepenny), Ness, Lewis, juvenile, 15–18 October, photo (B.A.E. Marr, M.S. Scott *et al.*).

**Outer Hebrides** Baile Gharbhaidh (Balgarva), South Uist, juvenile, 20–22 October (S.E. Duffield).

**Outer Hebrides** Orasaigh (Orasay), South Uist, juvenile, 6–9 November, photo (S.E. Duffield, J.B. Kemp *et al.*).

**Perth & Kinross** Loch Leven, adult, 13 October, photo (N.F. Mitchell, J.J. Squire).

**Shetland** Fetlar, 31 May (M. Devine, M.I. Smith).

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

Following an influx of 27 birds in 2005, reported occurrences declined with just two birds in 2009 and a single in 2010. But numbers then increased again with 16 seen in 2011. These annual fluctuations reflect the incidence of westerly weather patterns across the North Atlantic during peak migration times, both for adults principally in August/September, and juveniles in October/November. The rarity of spring records reflects the species' migration routes: in autumn, the birds follow a western Atlantic route to South America, but in spring they move north through inland North America (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Two mainland records possibly refer to the same individual: photographs of the adult birds observed in Lothian and Perth & Kinross show close plumage similarities.

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



Plate 89. White-winged Black Tern, Ancum Loch, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 9–10 July 2011. © Richard Else

**White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* 59: 11: 2**

Table 17. Accepted records of White-winged Black Tern in Scotland, 2011, with an additional record for 2010.

- 2011: Fair Isle Setter, adult, 16 July, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).  
Orkney Ancum Loch, North Ronaldsay, 9–10 July, photo (P.A. Brown, R.J. Else *et al.*).
- 2010: Perth & Kinross Vane Farm, juvenile, 22 August, photo (G. Sparshott *et al.*).

White-winged Black Tern is a rare visitor to Scotland, mostly observed along the east side of the country between late spring and late autumn. The records from 2011 and 2010 fit into this established pattern of occurrence.

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

**Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis* 132: 31: -**

Table 18. Additional record of Ring-billed Gull in Scotland, 2008.

- 2008: Outer Hebrides Loch Sanndaraigh, North Uist, adult, 22 April to 4 May, photo (B. Rabbitts *et al.*).

Ring-billed Gull is a scarce visitor to Scotland, with most observations on islands along the west side of the country. Birds are typically seen from January to April, often in flocks of migrating Common Gulls *Larus canus*. A few individuals have returned to the same locations over a number of years.

The 2008 bird reported here was the only one seen in the Outer Hebrides that year.

As with American Golden Plover, 2009 was the last year that records of Ring-billed Gull were assessed by SBRC (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

(Breeds widely in North America, wintering along the south-eastern seaboard, south to Central America and the Caribbean.)

**Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* 12: 7: 3**

Table 19. Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2011.

- 2011: Ayrshire Doonfoot, adult, 1 March (A. Hogg).  
Dumfries & Galloway Loch Ryan, second-summer, 26 July to 5 August, photo (P. Berry, P.N. Collin *et al.*).
- Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvue), South Uist, second-summer, 9 May, photo (A. Stevenson).

Yellow-legged Gull is very rare in Scotland, though found at scattered locations throughout the country, usually in groups of other large white-headed larids, often Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus graellsii*. Birds, predominately adults, have been found at all times of the year, sometimes remaining for extended periods.

The Loch Ryan individual was the first accepted record for Dumfries & Galloway, and the South Uist individual the first for the Outer Hebrides. All records in 2011 were in the west of Scotland.

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

**Alpine Swift *Apus melba* 34: 2: 1**

**Table 20.** Accepted records of Alpine Swift in Scotland, 2011.

2011: **Shetland** Laxo, Mail & Cunningsburgh, Mainland, -29 September to 2 October, photo (D. Gray, C. Green, N.W. Hagley, S. Meredith, M. Potts *et al.* per Local Recorder).

Alpine Swift is a very rare visitor to Scotland, seen usually between mid-April and late July. Spring occurrences probably involve overshoots from breeding grounds on the Continent, while those in summer relate to wandering non-breeders. There are very few autumn records, and thus the 2011 Shetland individual, which remained for several days, was exceptional.

(Ten subspecies. Breeds in southern Europe from Iberia to the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and Africa, with northern populations moving south to winter.)



**Plate 90.** Woodchat Shrike, adult male, Port Nis (Port of Ness), Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 6–7 May 2011. © Tony Marr

**Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* 86: 8: 3**

**Table 21.** Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2011.

2011: **Fair Isle** Various locations, female, 14–16 June, photo (W.T.S. Miles, S. Money *et al.*).  
**Outer Hebrides** Port Nis (Port of Ness), Lewis, male, 6–7 May, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).  
**Outer Hebrides** Cladach Bhàlaigh (Claddach Vallay) & Solas (Sollas), North Uist, male, 10–29 June, photo (N. Thomas, J. Wilkinson, B. Rabbitts *et al.*).



**Plate 91.** Alpine Swift, Laxo, Mail & Cunningsburgh, Mainland, Shetland, 29 September to 2 October 2011. © Jim Wood

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland. Most occurrences involve juveniles seen in the Northern Isles in autumn. However, in 2011 three individuals were observed in spring, between 6 May and 29 June.

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

**Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* 286: 44: 8**

**Table 22.** Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in Scotland, 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 23.

2011: **Argyll** Oronsay, 1–5 October, photo (M.A. Peacock *et al.*).

Short-toed Lark is found annually in Scotland in very small numbers, mostly in spring and autumn, with almost all observations in the Northern Isles. It is very rare elsewhere, particularly on the mainland.

For the fourth successive year, there was a sighting of this species away from the Northern Isles. The Oronsay bird was the third for Argyll, following autumn birds on Tiree in 2008 and 2010.

Another seven birds were seen in the Northern Isles, where claims of this species are assessed locally. Only two of these occurred in spring, the remainder being noted over a prolonged period in autumn, lasting nearly three months.

**Table 23.** Summary of accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2011.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	2	13 May	7 Aug–7 Oct
Orkney	-	2	-	21 Sep–3 Nov
Shetland	1	1	20 Jun–7 Jul	18 Sep

Annual totals in Scotland reached double figures on five occasions during the 1990s but have only done so twice since (2006 and 2010), although the total during 2011 is one of the four largest in the last decade. The spring arrival in Shetland represents a notable late date.

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

**Woodlark *Lullula arborea***

**68 (1950–2004): 14: 4**

**Table 24.** Accepted records of Woodlark in Scotland, 2011.

- 2011: **Orkney** Kirbest, North Ronaldsay, 9 October (M.D. Warren).  
**Shetland** Hamister, Whalsay, 10–26 April, photo (J.L. Irvine *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Upper Sound, Lerwick, Mainland, 27 October, photo (D. Coutts, E. Manson per Local Recorder).  
**Shetland** Skaw, Unst, 14 November to 16 January 2012, photo (R.J. Brookes *et al.*).

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

All four of the 2011 records were from the Northern Isles, with three of them being in autumn. One individual remained to winter, a phenomenon which has been observed in Scotland previously (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

Of the 18 birds seen in Scotland during the period 2005–11, 16 have been in the Northern Isles and only two elsewhere (in Lothian and Highland).

(Two subspecies breed from the Middle East across to Morocco, extending north as far as Finland, Norway and England north to Yorkshire, where the population is increasing. Most populations move south to wintering areas, with more northerly populations moving the farthest.)

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

**40: 23: 5**

**Table 25.** Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2011.

- 2011: **Argyll** Ballygowan, Mull, 5 July (C.J. Smith).  
**Fair Isle** Kirki Geo, 3 May, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).  
**Orkney** Lady, Sanday, 9 June, photo (S.R. & T. Thorne *et al.*); same **Highland** Talisker, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, 17–29 June, photo (I. Fulton, S. & R. Hamilton).  
**Outer Hebrides** Butt of Lewis & Loch Stiapabhat (Stiapavat), Lewis, 9–11 May, photo (B.A.E. Marr *et al.*).  
**Shetland** Loch of Hillwell, Mainland, adult, 19–21 July, photo (R.M. Fray *et al.*).

Red-rumped Swallow is observed in Scotland annually in small though increasing numbers from April through to November, mainly along the east coast and on islands. This recent increase is thought to reflect a northward expansion of the Continental breeding range.

Almost all occurrences are thought to relate to the Western Palearctic subspecies *rufula*, the closest breeding populations of which are in France. However, an individual found on Sanday (Orkney) and then remarkably refound at Talisker, Skye, in June 2011 showed the characteristics of an Eastern Palearctic subspecies, either *japonica* or *daurica* (Thorne 2011). This bird's subspecific identity is currently being considered by BBRC and BOURC.

(Eleven or 12 subspecies. Breeds widely from southern and eastern Europe eastwards across the Palearctic region, and in sub-Saharan Africa. Northern populations are migratory, wintering in Africa and southern Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western areas.)

**Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides***  
158: 24: 6

**Table 26.** Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 27.

**2011: North-east Scotland** Collieston, 24–25 August, photo (P. Stronach *et al.*).

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

With the single bird at Collieston, North-east Scotland maintains an impressive track record for this early-autumn migrant, accounting for all but one of the nine Scottish records away from the Northern Isles during 2005–2011.

In Scotland, Greenish Warbler has a consistently narrow spread of arrival dates in both spring and autumn, and the dates reported for 2011 are typical.

**Table 27.** Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2011.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	-	9–10 Jun	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	4	-	14 Aug–18 Sep



**Plate 92.** Greenish Warbler, Collieston, North-east Scotland, 24–25 August 2011. © Peter Stronach

(*P. t. viridanus* breeds from the Baltic east through Russia to the Yenisei and south to Afghanistan, and winters in the Indian subcontinent and south-east Asia. There are four records of Two-barred Greenish Warbler *P. t. plumbeitarsus* from eastern Siberia in England.)



**Plate 93.** Dusky Warbler, Cliffturn Gully, Arbroath, Angus & Dundee, 27–30 October 2011. © Jon Cook

**Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus***  
60: 12: 11

**Table 28.** Accepted records of Dusky Warbler in Scotland, 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 29.

**2011: Angus & Dundee** Cliffturn Gully, Arbroath, 27–28 October, then two 29–30 October, photo (S.R. Green, R. Bramhall, D. Douglas *et al.*).  
**Isle of May** First-winter, 14 November, photo (M. Newell *et al.*).  
**North-east Scotland** Balmedie, 4–12 November, photo (C. Gibbins *et al.*).  
**North-east Scotland** Girdle Ness, 15 November (A.J. Whitehouse).

Dusky Warbler is a rare but more or less annual visitor to Scotland, with the autumn migration period accounting for all records but one. Like Radde’s Warbler, it occurs mainly in the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally. Nearly all other sightings have been on the east coast.

The four records in eastern Scotland in 2011 were the first outside the Northern Isles since 2005. The occurrence in Angus & Dundee was the first for the recording area, and the first time in Scotland that two birds have been seen in the same place at the same time. The Isle of May registered its second Dusky Warbler, following the first in 1985. The two birds in North-east Scotland doubled the total for the recording area.

In addition, six individuals were observed in the Northern Isles between mid-October and mid-November. The total of eleven birds in one year is a record for Scotland, the previous highest number being eight in 1993.

**Table 29.** Accepted records of Dusky Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2011.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	-	2	-	27 Oct–3 Nov
Shetland	-	4	-	14 Oct–15 Nov

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

**Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans***

194: 38: 10

**Table 30.** Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler (excluding the subspecies *albistriata*) in Scotland, 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 31.

2011: Outer Hebrides Greinetobht (Grenitote), North Uist, 22–29 April, photo (J. Boyle, S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Subalpine Warbler occurs annually in Scotland as a rare migrant, mainly in spring. The overwhelming majority of birds are seen in the Northern Isles, where records of nominate *cantillans*, and birds not assigned to any particular subspecies, are assessed locally. Scottish claims of any other subspecies are assessed by BBRC.

**Table 31.** Accepted records of Subalpine Warbler (excluding *albistriata*), in the Northern Isles, 2011.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	2	-	24 Apr–31 May	-
Orkney	2	-	25 Apr–5 May	-
Shetland	2	-	24 Apr–5 May	-

There were ten accepted records of this species in Scotland in 2011, comprising seven *cantillans* or individuals not assigned to subspecies (above), and three *albistriata*: in Shetland in April and in May/June, and on Fair Isle for a prolonged period from late April to

early June (Hudson *et al.* 2012). Thus the bird at Greinetobht (Grenitote) was the only Subalpine Warbler seen away from the Northern Isles during the year, and the first in the Outer Hebrides since 2008.

Turning to previous years, the totals have been adjusted as a result of several recent acceptances, all relating to the Northern Isles. Four pre-2011 acceptances of *albistriata* were published by Hudson *et al.* (2012); in Shetland in May 2010, Orkney in May 2009, and Shetland in May 2006 (two birds). In addition, a claimed *albistriata* from Scousburgh, Mainland (Shetland), 19 May 2009, is now accepted as a Subalpine Warbler of undetermined subspecies (*Shetland Bird Report 2011*). Finally, a bird of the subspecies *cantillans* at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shetland) on 20 May 2008, published in the *Shetland Bird Report 2008* as a pending record, has been accepted (M.S. Chapman, *in litt.*); this was within the date range for other Shetland records that year (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010b).

(*S. c. cantillans* breeds from Iberia to Italy; *S. c. albistriata* from the Balkans to Turkey; *S. c. moltonii* in the Balearics, Corsica, Sardinia and northern Italy. Migrates to winter in the sub-Saharan Sahel.)

**Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta***

52: 4: 2

**Table 32.** Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2011, with an additional record for 1998.

2011: Fair Isle Auld Haa, 26 August, photo (W.T.S. Miles, D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Fair Isle Schoolton to Shirva, first-winter, 12 September to 3 October, photo (W.T.S. Miles *et al.*).

1998: Orkney Netherstove, Deerness, Mainland, first-winter, 26 September (K.E. Hague).

Melodious Warbler is a very rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, recorded in most years but not all: for example, 2001, 2004, 2005 and 2009 were blank years. About three-quarters of occurrences have been in the Northern Isles, with almost identical totals for the three recording areas. This species has not been recorded in Scotland outwith Fair Isle and Shetland since 2003.



Plate 94. Melodious Warbler, Schoolton to Shirva, Fair Isle, first-winter, 12 September to 3 October 2011. © Larry Dalziel

The late August to early October dates for the birds reported here are typical for autumn Melodious Warblers. Most in Scotland have stayed for no more than a few days, though birds in the last ten years have been recorded over longer periods. This may be a reflection of observer effort. The Fair Isle individual in 2011 lingered for 22 days, still some way short of the 44-day record set by a bird in Shetland in autumn 2007.

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

**Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris***  
 many: c. 193: 16

Table 33. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 34.

2011: Isle of May 7 June, trapped, photo (J. Conner, L. Swift).

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

For the second successive year there were no records on the Scottish mainland. The bird trapped on the Isle of May occurred at a typical period for this species on the island.

Table 34. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2011.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	7	-	26 May–21 Jun	-
Orkney	2	1	18 Jun–1 Jul	31 Aug
Shetland	4	1	31 May–5 Jul	6–8 Sep

Fewer Marsh Warblers were recorded in the Northern Isles in 2010 (12 birds) and 2011 (15) than in the previous few years. The fluctuating annual abundance of this species is related, for spring birds at least, to variation in the prevalence of easterly winds, which are presumed to cause birds to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Most occurrences in 2011 involved birds that stayed for no more than a few days. The exception was a singing male that was present from 11 June to 5 July on Unst (Shetland), where breeding was confirmed in 2005 and 2008 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010b).

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

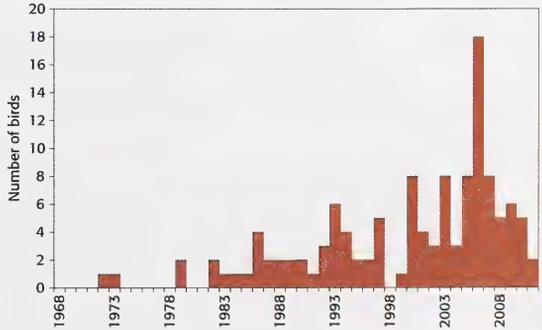
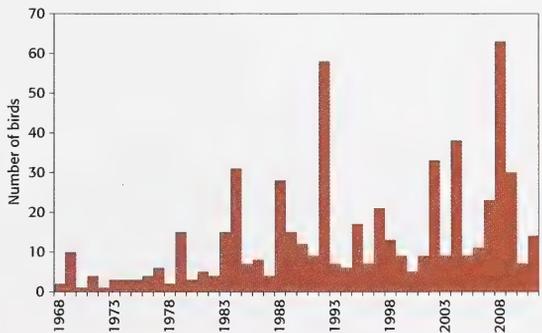


Figure 1a–b. Annual occurrence of Marsh Warbler in Scotland in spring (top) and autumn (below), 1968–2011.



**Plate 95.** Nightingale, Vaul, Tiree, Argyll, 3–8 September 2011. © Mark Fanshawe

**Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

139: 9: 2

**Table 35.** Accepted records of Nightingale in Scotland, 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in the text.

**2011:** Argyll Vaul, Tiree, 3–8 September, photo (K. Gillon *et al.*).

Nightingale is a very rare, but almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland. Spring records predominate, and Fair Isle and Shetland account for the vast majority of sightings.

The bird at Vaul was the second for Tiree, following one in May 2004. It was the fourth for Argyll and the first there in autumn, the other records being in April 1973 and May 1989.

In the Northern Isles, claims are assessed locally. In 2011, a late spring arrival was trapped on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) during a brief stay on 17–19 June. Mid- to late June arrivals are rare in Scotland, though the last Orkney record (2002) was also on 17 June.

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

**Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* 44: 4: 2

**Table 36.** Accepted records of Tawny Pipit in Scotland, 2011.

**2011:** Orkney KIRST, North Ronaldsay, 18 August, photo (M.D. Warren *et al.*).

**Shetland** Nestie Voe, Noss, 9–11 May, photo (C. Dodd, G.A. Tyler *et al.*).

Tawny Pipit is a very rare bird in Scotland with just four individuals seen during the period 2005–10, all being presumed spring overshoots on islands.

The North Ronaldsay bird in 2011 was only the third for Orkney, following records on Stronsay in 1988 and North Ronaldsay in 2010. The August date is the earliest autumn occurrence in Scotland to date, the sole other bird in this month being one in Moray & Nairn on 22 August 1988. The Shetland individual was on a typical spring date.

Note that a record in North-east Scotland in 1981, included in Forrester *et al.* (2007), was not accepted by BBRC, and thus the total to the end of 2004 has been reduced by one to 44.

(Nominate *campestris* breeds in dry, sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to western Siberia; two other Asian subspecies. Winters in Africa, the Middle East and India.)

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*

135: 13: 0

Red-throated Pipit is a rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, found almost exclusively on islands, with most sightings on Fair Isle and in Shetland.

A review and rejection of records on Fair Isle in 1957 (one) and 1936 (six) (Shaw 2004) was not taken into account by Forrester *et al.* (2007). The total number of birds in Scotland has now been revised accordingly, with the number of records prior to 2005 falling from 142 to 135.

(Breeds widely in northern boreal Palearctic regions, migrating to winter in Africa and south-east Asia.)

**Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* 86: 27: 3**

**Table 37.** Accepted records of Water Pipit in Scotland, 2011, with an additional record for 2010 and a revised record for 2009.

- 2011:** **Ayrshire** Seamill, 29 November 2010 to 28 March, photo (D. Given, A. Hogg *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2012).  
**Clyde** Ardmore Point, Helensburgh, 10 December 2010 to 4 April (see below), another 2 March to 4 April, photo (A.D.W. Tongue *et al.*).  
**Dumfries & Galloway** Wigtown, 6–10 February, photo (G. & A. Chambers *et al.*).  
**Lothian** Barns Ness, 28 October 2010 to 5 April, photo (J. Ellison *et al.*), see also ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2012), but note revised dates; same, 25 October to 2012 (E. Forbes *et al.*).  
**Lothian** Broxmouth, Dunbar, 5 November, photo (K. Gillon, M. Griffin *et al.*).  
**2010:** **Clyde** Ardmore Point, Helensburgh, 10 December to 4 April 2011, photo (A. Nicol *et al.*).  
**2009:** **Perth & Kinross** Vane Farm, 21 November to 6 December, photo (K.D. Shaw, G. Sparshott *et al.*); note revised dates (*cf.* ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

Water Pipit is a rare winter visitor to Scotland, often found among seaweed on beaches with Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus*. Its seasonal distribution features a late-autumn arrival, overwintering by a few individuals, and a secondary peak in spring. The majority of sightings to the end of 2011 were in Ayrshire and Lothian.

Three apparently overwintering birds were present at the beginning of 2011, having been first noted in late 2010. Details of two of these were published by ap Rheinallt *et al.* (2012) and are repeated here for 2011, but the third, a bird first seen in December 2010 in Clyde, was accepted more recently. This individual was joined by a second during March to April 2011. Together, they constitute the sixth and seventh birds for Clyde, and the second occasion that two individuals have been present together in this recording area.

There were two other new records in 2011: a spring bird in Dumfries & Galloway was the second for the recording area (following one in January 2009), and another was observed in Lothian in late autumn.

As from 1 January 2013, records of this species in Scotland will be assessed locally rather than by SBRC (see Appendix 2).

(Nominate *spinoletta* breeds from the highlands of Iberia east to the Balkans and Turkey, dispersing widely in Europe in non-breeding season; two other Asian subspecies.)

**Arctic Redpoll *Carduelis hornemanni* 366: 60: 1**

**Table 38.** Accepted record of Coues's Redpoll in Scotland, 2011.

- 2011:** **Borders** Bell Wood, Cranshaws, 4–30 January, photo (D. Graham *et al.*).

Arctic Redpoll is a scarce though annual visitor to Scotland. Most sightings since 2005 have involved the race *C. h. hornemanni* (Hornemann's Redpoll), claims of which are assessed by BBRC, while most earlier occurrences were referred to *C. h. exilipes* (Coues's Redpoll). All but four of the 60 birds during 2005–10 were in the Northern Isles, and the majority of them occurred in autumn. Claims of Coues's Redpoll in the Northern Isles are assessed locally.

The Borders bird was the only occurrence of this species accepted in Scotland for 2011. It was just the third record of Arctic Redpoll in Borders. The two previous sightings in this recording area were also in the month of January (1985 and 1996), and all three have been close to Whiteadder Reservoir.

There were no accepted records in 2011 of Hornemann's Redpoll in Scotland (or indeed elsewhere in Great Britain), the first blank year for this taxon in Scotland since 2005 (Hudson *et al.* 2012). Rather than indicating a decline, this apparent decrease may simply reflect the irregular nature of dispersal from the breeding grounds.

One record of Hornemann's Redpoll from Fair Isle in October 2006 was recently accepted by BBRC (Hudson *et al.* 2012). The species total has been adjusted accordingly.

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

**Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana***  
**many: 31: 2**

**Table 39.** Additional record of Ortolan Bunting in Scotland, 2010. Northern Isles records for 2011 are summarised separately in the text.

**2010: Isle of May** First-winter, 22 September, photo (A.W. Lauder, K.M. Morton, M. Osborne *et al.*).

Ortolan Bunting is a rare and declining, but still annual, passage migrant to Scotland. In recent years the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally, have accounted for more than 90% of occurrences.

There were only two individuals in Scotland in 2011. One was on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) from 16–21 September and another was on Whalsay (Shetland) on 4 October, both typical dates for autumn migrants. This total is the lowest since the single birds seen in 2004 and 2005. The general trend of declining numbers appears to be continuing.

An additional record for 2010 brings the Scottish total for that year to eight birds. This was the second of two Ortolan Buntings on the Isle of May in September 2010, the first being noted 12 days earlier (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2012).

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

**Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* 276: 33: 4**

Rustic Bunting is a scarce annual vagrant in Scotland with the majority of birds appearing in the Northern Isles. Numbers have declined in recent years.

As in the three previous years, the only occurrences in 2011 were in the Northern Isles, where claims of this species are assessed locally. Three birds were seen in spring and one in autumn, all on typical dates.

**Table 40.** Accepted records of Rustic Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2011.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	-	21–25 May	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	2	1	15–22 May	4 Oct

(Breeds from Fennoscandia to Siberia; winters mainly in Japan, Korea and China.)

**Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* 593: 93: 19**

**Table 41.** Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2011. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 42.

**2011: Outer Hebrides** Bàgh Shiarabhaigh (North Bay), Barra, 2–10 October, photo (S.L. Rivers *et al.*).

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

Occurrences in Scotland in 2011 correspond well to the established pattern, with all but two of the 19 birds being seen in autumn, and all but one being in the Northern Isles. Only two Little Buntings since 2000 have been on the mainland.

**Table 42.** Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2011.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	4	21–25 May	18 Sep–14 Oct
Orkney	-	1	-	18 Sept
Shetland	1	11	7 May	25 Sep–16 Nov

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

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## Appendix 1

List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

- 2011: White-billed Diver Row Head, Sandwick, Mainland, Orkney, 20 April. St Combs, North-east Scotland, 13 November. Cory's Shearwater Dunbar, Lothian, 17 September. Rough-legged Buzzard Loch Assynt, Sutherland, Highland, 25 October. Nightingale Loch Aineort (Eynort), South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 9 May. Water Pipit Broughty Ferry, Angus & Dundee, 13 September.
- 2010: White-billed Diver Burghhead, Moray & Nairn, 21 March. Yellow-legged Gull Lossie Estuary, Moray & Nairn, 13-20 March. Alpine Swift RAF Kinloss, Moray & Nairn, 20 May. Continental Cormorant Duddingston Loch, Lothian, 30 January.

## Appendix 2

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) and other committees, 2011-2013. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included, with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species assessed by SBRC have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC but not shown here.

2011	2012	2013	
■	■	■	Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
■	■	■	Black Brant <i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>
■	■	■	Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i>
■	■	■	White-billed Diver <i>Gavia adamsii</i>
■	■	■	Cory's Shearwater <i>Calonectris diomedea</i>
■	■	■	Great Shearwater <i>Puffinus gravis</i>
■	■	■	Wilson's Petrel <i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
■	■	□	Continental Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>
■	■	■	Night-heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
■	■	■	Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
■	■	□	Great White Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>
■	■	■	Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>
■	■	■	Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
■	■	■	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>
■	■	■	Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i>
■	■	□	Rough-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo lagopus</i>
■	■	■	Red-footed Falcon <i>Falco vespertinus</i>
■	■	■	Stone-curlew <i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>
■	■	■	Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
■	■	■	White-rumped Sandpiper <i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
■	■	■	Continental Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa limosa</i>
■	■	■	Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus michahellis</i>
■	■	■	Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>
■	■	■	White-winged Black Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
■	■	■	Franz Josef Land Little Auk <i>Alle alle polaris</i>
■	■	■	Alpine Swift <i>Apus melba</i>
■	■	■	Woodchat Shrike <i>Lanius senator</i>
■	■	■	Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
■	■	■	Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>
■	■	■	Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>
■	■	■	Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>
■	■	■	Greenish Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
■	■	■	Radde's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>
■	■	■	Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
■	■	■	Dartford Warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>
■	■	■	Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans</i> (except <i>S. c. albistriata</i> )
■	■	■	Eastern Subalpine Warbler <i>Sylvia cantillans albistriata</i>
■	■	■	Melodious Warbler <i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
■	■	■	Aquatic Warbler <i>Acrocephalus paludicola</i>
■	■	■	Marsh Warbler <i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
■	■	■	Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
■	■	■	Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>
■	■	■	Red-throated Pipit <i>Anthus cervinus</i>
■	■	□	Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
■	■	■	Serin <i>Serinus serinus</i>
■	■	■	Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni</i> (except <i>C. h. hornemanni</i> )
■	■	■	Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll <i>Carduelis hornemanni hornemanni</i>
□	■	■	Scottish Crossbill <i>Loxia scotica</i>
■	■	■	Parrot Crossbill <i>Loxia pytyopsittacus</i>
■	■	■	Girl Bunting <i>Emberiza cirius</i>
■	■	■	Ortolan Bunting <i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
■	■	■	Rustic Bunting <i>Emberiza rustica</i>
■	■	■	Little Bunting <i>Emberiza pusilla</i>

■ = BBRC; ■ = SBRC; ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland); ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides; ■ = SBRC outside core range (see [www.the-soc.org.uk/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills/](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills/)); □ = local assessment

### Appendix 3

Corrections to previous SBRC reports:

2006: Nightingale Fair Isle, 16 June 2006 (not 2005).

2009: Caspian Gull Ugie Estuary, Peterhead, North-east Scotland, second-winter, 10 January.

2010: Subalpine Warbler Punds, Foula, Shetland, female, unraced, 26-27 May.

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The advertisement features a large image of a puffin on a rock. In the background, several birds are flying. The text is arranged in a clear, readable layout. A QR code is located in the bottom left corner. Logos for the Scottish Seabird Centre, the Year of Natural Scotland 2013, and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are also present.

## Did Red Kites breed in Caithness in the 19th century? A review of the two supposed breeding records

At the beginning of the 19th century the Red Kite *Milvus milvus* bred throughout much of mainland Scotland. Its population was, however, in decline and by the end of the century it had been completely eliminated from northern Britain. It bred as far north as Sutherland, but was extinct there by about 1850 (Holloway 1996). Evidence for its occurrence in Caithness rests solely on Baxter & Rintoul's (1953) comment that "Harvie-Brown [1887] knew of no instance of their occurrence in Caithness, *but in the British Museum there are two clutches, one taken in May 1854 and the other in May 1884, both from Caithness*". This note presents the results of a critical re-examination of these two records.

### Eggs taken in May 1854

The earlier of these two clutches is recorded in the card index of the egg collection of the Natural History Museum (NHM), London as follows:

**Reg. numbers:** BMNH E/1901.2.25.192 and .193

**Date:** 4 May 1854

**Locality:** Sir John Sinclair's estate, Caithness, Scotland

**Collection:** Crowley Bequest

**Set mark:** G.S.7 [or G.5.7]

**Number of eggs:** 2 and 4

Some of this information has been written on the eggs themselves (Plate 96). We suspect that the date on index card is a misreading of this and that the day of the month is actually the clutch size, that is, the date should simply read May 1854.

There are a number of 'Sir John Sinclair's' to which the finding locality might refer. The most obvious is Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster (1754–1835), the renowned land 'improver', popularly known as 'Agricultural Sir John' (Mitchison 1962). He, however, seems to be ruled out on the grounds that he had died almost 20 years before the 1854 set was said to have been taken. Alternatively the person referred to may



Plate 96. Red Kite eggs said to have been taken in Caithness in May 1854. © Harry Taylor/NHM  
(a: left) BMNH E/1901.2.25.192. (b: right) BMNH E/1901.2.25.193.

be Colonel Sir John Sinclair of Dunbeath (1794-1873), who succeeded to his baronetcy in 1842, and who had an estate at Barrock House, near Wick. This is certainly credible as regards date, but on habitat grounds (absence of trees) and being an estate where sporting activities took place seems an unlikely place to find breeding Red Kites. In short, neither of these two Sir John Sinclairs or their respective estates is really compatible with the location details quoted on the card index and it appears that the finding locality is not as clearly designated as it might at first seem.

The 1854 set of two eggs was acquired by the British Museum in 1901 as part of a bequest made by Philip Crowley (1837-1900). The catalogue of his original collection, formerly in the possession of his nephew, Reginald A. Crowley, is now presumed lost; however certain pages, including the entries for Red Kite, were photographed in the early 1900s by the ornithologist and egg collector Thomas Parkin (1845-1932) whilst researching some of Crowley's specimens he had purchased at auction. The entry for the 1854 Caithness clutch shows that Crowley had obtained the eggs from Charles Ottley Groom (1839-1894) in 1860. The provenance from Groom is confirmed by the set mark, which is of the form that the latter habitually used. Groom was one of the more colourful of the British collector-naturalists of the Victorian age. Latterly he referred to himself as Charles Ottley Groom Napier, Prince of Mantua & Montferrat and created an elaborate family tree showing his descent from King David of Israel (Davenport-Hines 2004). In 1883 he issued a catalogue of the contents of his private museum, which is now thought to have been largely bogus, and between 1886 and 1890 there were financial irregularities in his dealings with the City of Genoa Waterworks Co. Unsurprisingly, his contemporaries characterised him as 'a notorious rogue and thief' (Davenport-Hines 2004). How Groom came by the 1854 set of eggs is unknown, but most of the Red Kite clutches from Scotland that passed through his hands were recorded in Crowley's catalogue as having been taken by a gamekeeper called Andrew Gunn. Several people by this name can be found in the 1841, 1851 and 1861 censuses for Scotland (see

www.ScotlandsPeople.gov.uk), but none of them is obviously the person referred to in Crowley's catalogue. Two other persons, P. Samuelson and Levit Knocke, are also mentioned as having supplied Groom with Red Kite eggs from other parts of Scotland, but they too have proved impossible to trace via the census returns.

Another odd feature of the Red Kite sets taken in Sutherland and Wester Ross that passed through Groom's hands was the number of four-egg clutches. The records show that four of the six clutches were said to have had four eggs, whilst the other two each had three eggs. Modern evidence is that Red Kites rarely lay four-egg clutches (e.g. Cramp & Simmons 1980), and it appears that Groom was not above claiming that his eggs came from larger clutches than was actually the case.

In summary, the information derived from Groom has proved to be either inconsistent with what is now known of the Red Kite's biology (clutch sizes), not apparently compatible with other facts (date of collection and name given to location where eggs taken), or not capable of independent verification (gamekeepers' names) and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that some or all of the details have been modified or made up to obscure the provenance of the eggs. Fraud in the sale of eggs was certainly not unknown in the 19th century as Harrop *et al.* (2012) have highlighted. Individually, these points do not fully invalidate the 1854 Caithness record, but taken together, and bearing in mind Groom's reputation, they cast serious doubt on its authenticity and, indeed, of any specimens linked with Charles Ottley Groom.

### Eggs taken in May 1884

There is no evidence for the 1884 set in the Natural History Museum collection and it is tentatively concluded that this record is an error. Quite how it came about is unclear, but given the similarity of the two dates, it is possible that 1884 was a transcription error for 1854. 1884 is an extremely late date for this species to have bred in Caithness, and the record seems very improbable on these grounds alone. By this date, a substantial part of the county was given over to sporting interests and it had become one of

the most intensively kept parts of Scotland. Furthermore, none of the county's early ornithologists make any reference to the occurrence of this species in Caithness and it was not, for instance, included in the first list of the county's birds (Thomson 1845).

**Conclusion**

Neither of the two records dealt with here stands up to scrutiny; the 1854 record should be rejected as suspect unless further evidence is forthcoming, and the 1884 record seemingly lacks any support. In answer to the query posed in the title of this note, there is currently no satisfactory evidence that Red Kites bred in Caithness in the 19th century.

**Acknowledgements**

We are indebted to Raymond Connor for much helpful advice concerning the provenance of the eggs dealt with here and for kindly making available a copy of the Red Kite section from Crowley's catalogue. We thank also Harry Taylor (Natural History Museum) for the photographs of the eggs shown in Plate 96.

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*Revised ms accepted March 2013*

**Robin ejecting a pellet**

13 December 2012 was a very cold day with persistent hard frost throughout; at 3:55 pm I noticed a Robin land on top of a gatepost in my garden in Breasclate, Isle of Lewis. I don't see Robins very often at Breasclate, so it was a nice sighting. Then to my astonishment, the Robin proceeded to eject a pellet, which landed firmly on the fencepost c.2 cm in front; then it flew off.

The pellet measured c.13 mm long x 6 mm at widest point. It was composed of exoskeleton parts, mandibles(?), spider spp., fur/hair and wing cases.



**Plate 97.** Pellet ejected by a Robin, Isle of Lewis, December 2012. © Richard Holland

Tucker (1944) quotes a report that “a wild Robin disgorge[d] a pellet, described as the size of a small haricot bean, consisting of the chitinous remains of beetles, etc.” David Lack (1965) kept some Robins in an aviary and it seems the habit is not uncommon, but rarely seen in wild birds as it happens so quickly.

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## Peregrine retrieving prey from water

I was watching various duck species from one of the hides at the RSPB Vane Farm Reserve (Perth & Kinross) on 5 February 2013 when the birds becoming agitated and alarmed. None flew, but they all moved into the water and Wigeon *Anas penelope* and Teal *Anas crecca* began calling. Initially I thought there may be a Fox *Vulpes vulpes* about but, within a few seconds, a female Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* appeared flying very low and slowly across the water. The Peregrine then dipped its feet into the water and grabbed a Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* which had presumably been killed above the water, but had fallen in after being struck. The Peregrine dragged the pigeon a short distance before giving up and having a rest on the edge of the pool. Then a male Peregrine joined in, grabbed the pigeon and dragged it another few feet before stopping for a rest. After a few minutes the female had another go and failed again. The male took over and eventually managed to get the pigeon ashore by swimming using his wings to propel himself through the water while dragging his prey with his talons. The two Peregrines then plucked and ate the pigeon.

I have seen Peregrines kill prey above water and lose it in the water before, but I have never seen such co-operation between a pair of birds. The whole episode only lasted about 30 minutes, but it was amazing to witness.

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Plates 98–102. *Peregrines retrieving Woodpigeon from water, Vane Farm, Perth & Kinross, February 2013. © G. Ruthven*





George Smith has commented: "Though it is not unprecedented for Peregrines to kill prey over water and subsequently retrieve it, in the main the prey items are picked from the surface and carried off. There are records of Peregrines attempting to carry heavy prey items from both fresh and salt water situations, but, in the majority of cases, the Peregrine gives up the attempt. Ratcliffe (1980) noted 'that Peregrines

occasionally pick prey from water, when they have chased it in, or when it is wounded, and they will also retrieve kills which have fallen into the water'. He also noted a Greylag Goose, *Anser anser*, killed over the Solway, but which the falcon was unable to lift. Cant (2009) saw a Peregrine drop heavy prey into Haweswater in the English Lake District which a Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*, then unsuccessfully tried to retrieve. Dekker (2009) in his study of breeding Peregrines on Langara Island, British Columbia, records 15 occasions when Peregrines were seen to successfully attack seabirds, The majority of prey captured was small alcids, such as murrelets and auklets. Ten were struck on the surface of the ocean and retrieved after one or more return passes. In addition, two flying alcids were grabbed in the air, and two phalaropes were seized on the water or just after they flushed. Reid (2012) recorded an instance of two Peregrines unsuccessfully attempting to lift a dead dove from the sea off South Africa.

"Peregrines are normally able to pick up and carry a prey item the size of a Woodpigeon, but the added weight of the water-saturated plumage would have made it impossible in this instance for the birds to get clear of the water. They have made a determined and successful attempt using their wings in a paddling motion to recover a valuable item of prey. Such an event has rarely been recorded.

"It is of note and unexpected that it was eventually the smaller male which got this prey item to shore. It is also worth noting that most records of recovery/attempted recovery of prey items from water involve both adults working collaboratively as was the case in this instance."

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## Dr Dorothy (Betty) Rowling (1915–2012)

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SOC members throughout Scotland were saddened to learn of the death of Dr Betty Rowling at the beginning of August. She was 97.

After leaving school Betty studied medicine, in the days when a woman doctor was the exception rather than the rule, and then qualified as a surgeon. Most of her working life was spent as an orthopaedic surgeon in the Victoria Hospital in Kirkcaldy, where she acquired a reputation as something of a martinet in the operating theatre. But those who knew her realised that behind the no-nonsense manner there lay a deeply caring clinician whose patients' welfare was absolutely paramount. Outside the hospital environs, though, her passionate interest was birdwatching.

Betty was a long-standing and generous member of the SOC, and it gave her huge pleasure to attend the annual conference, meeting old friends and learning about the latest trends in ornithological research. She was a strong supporter of the Club's group in Fife too, and quietly made it her business to take young members under her wing and to encourage their burgeoning interest in bird-watching.

The world was Betty's study area. She travelled the world, camera and bins at the ready, with one or other of the specialist tour companies, in many a remote corner of distant continents, sometimes in conditions that were less than comfortable. After these trips her friends were invited to her home at Star of Markinch, where they enjoyed not one but two of her other enthusiasms; her skill with a camera and her obvious pleasure in cooking scrumptious meals for her guests. When Betty entertained she did it in style. And what photographs!

Once retired, she moved from Star to Blebo Craigs near St. Andrews. Here her house backed up against the Kemback woods, and her garden was not only filled with nest boxes and feeding stations, but was large enough for her dogs, to which she was devoted, to exercise in bad weather. Eventually, though, the aches and pains of old age caught up with this energetic, multi-talented, forthright character. Betty would have hated to be fussed over in a care home, but she was able to go on living in her own house with the support of caring neighbours until her last illness; she died in the new St. Andrews Community Hospital. She is survived by her brother John, to whom we offer our condolences.

### Lt-Commander Frank Spragge

## James Anderson Stout (1911–2013)

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James A. Stout died in January 2013, a few weeks short of his 102nd birthday. He was the last of the Fair Isle men who had known all the key people involved with the discovery of Fair Isle as a hotspot for migratory birds and those involved with the establishment of Fair Isle Bird Observatory. It is no exaggeration to say that 'Mires Jimmy' was valued and respected for his ornithological knowledge and his friendship in equal measure, not only by every Obs warden but by all the 'birdy folk' who spent any time on the isle.

Jimmy was born on Fair Isle, at Field, on 7 March 1911, to George and Helen Stout. In 1941 he married Edith Eunson and they lived in the house at Midway, adjoining the old Mires croft. The couple had five children: Jimmy, Teddy, Edith Ann, Andrew and Maurice (Teddy and Maurice pre-deceased their father). In December 2008, Jimmy moved to a care home at Levenwick, mainland Shetland, where he was able to receive 24-hour care.



**Plate 103.** In January 1941, Jimmy watched as a German Heinkel 111 bomber crash-landed on Vaassetter, killing two of its five-man crew. When the pilot, Karl 'Heinz' Thurz, returned to Fair Isle in 1987, Jimmy (right) was the first person to welcome him back to the isle. © Dennis Coutts

Jimmy's father, generally known simply as Fieldy, was one of three islanders who were enlisted to help the early ornithological pioneers who visited Fair Isle. After his first visit, in 1905, William Eagle Clarke trained up first George Wilson Stout, of Busta, and Jerome Wilson, of Springfield. Clarke's successor was John H. Stenhouse, who first visited the isle in 1921, and Fieldy effectively became Stenhouse's protégé. In the interwar years, Fieldy and Jerome Wilson were instrumental in maintaining the recording effort on the isle.

It is clear that Jimmy inherited his father's interest in birds at an early age. Jimmy was an astute observer and a decent shot even then – and he kept those qualities sharp until well into his old age. The first of his landmark ornithological achievements came when he was just 14 – the discovery of Britain's first Pechora Pipit on 23 September 1925 (his attention was drawn to the bird by its unfamiliar call). Stenhouse shot the bird the following day and its identity was confirmed. Two days later, Stenhouse, Jerome Wilson and Fieldy came across Britain's first Paddyfield Warbler, later shot by Fieldy. Those of us who have seen Fair Isle at its best can only imagine the effect of such a spell on the enthusiasm of a youngster. Stenhouse was staying at Field (as he did habitually) and throughout his life Jimmy spoke with enthusiasm and respect for the man.

Jimmy played a key role in another addition to the British List: Pallid Harrier in 1931. A second-summer male, present on the isle from 24th April, was eventually shot by Jimmy on 8 May. The bird, confidently identified by Fieldy, was sent away for confirmation. The specimen was sent to the NMS in Edinburgh initially, where its identity was questioned, but Fieldy was robust in his reply and the bird was eventually sent to London, where the identity (as Pallid) was confirmed. Two other exceptional records from Jimmy include a Crested Lark seen near the Chapel on 2 November 1952 (this remains the only Scottish record); and a bird shot by him in October of about 1928, thought to have been a Calandra Lark. That would have been the first British record too, but alas the specimen was lost in the post.

Between the wars, there was a great demand for specimens from museum-based ornithologists, and Jimmy was paid a small sum for each rare bird he shot – for a really good one, it might have been as much as a guinea (£1.05). While the money was an incentive, there is no doubt that Jimmy had a genuine interest in the birds as well. A more lucrative market was that for Woodcock, which the Fair Isle men shot in late autumn, and which were shipped to game dealers on the mainland. Jimmy was a regular on the hill with his gun in late autumn and, in later life, he would recount tales of good Woodcock days with particular relish.

Mires Jimmy was an approachable, articulate and unassuming man who would undoubtedly have described himself as a crofter rather than an ornithologist. His life revolved around his family, Fair Isle, the croft and the sea (he was a crew member of the *Good Shepherd*, the island ferry, for 36 years, latterly its skipper). The hospitality offered by Jimmy and Edith was legendary, and the conversation there might range across any number of subjects, but there is not one person who came away from a visit to Midway without the feeling that their life had been enriched by the experience.

**Roger Riddington and Dennis Coutts**

## Philip Newman (1954–2013)

Philip Newman was born in 1954 in South Wales, one of twin brothers, and raised in the village of Caerphilly just north of Cardiff. His interest in birds began at an early age on the moors and fields around his home. His father was a professional photographer, but Phil was 22 years of age before he started to take a keen interest in photographing birds.

He graduated in Geology from Bristol University and joined BP working in Aberdeen, Gabon and Nottingham, but in the early 1980s he joined Britoil in Glasgow and lived in Kilmalcolm. In 1982 he joined the famous Paisley Colour Slide Club and learnt a great deal about basic composition, lighting and the importance of paying attention to detail. The quality of his own photographic work was quickly recognised.

Phil continued with Britoil in a variety of roles in exploration geology. He became particularly knowledgeable about the geology of the Southern Carboniferous Basin off the coast of Norfolk. He worked on one prospect from defining and applying for the acreage, right through to drilling a successful discovery well. However, at this time BP acquired Britoil and Phil found himself in the position of receiving a bonus for his work on gas discovery one week and a few weeks later being told he was being made redundant!

Phil then moved to Halliburton, Aberdeen where he was in charge of the geological laboratory and finally to Banchory, Aberdeenshire. After less than a year Phil was offered a job with Elf and in 1992 started work in a senior position. He also was responsible as a mentor to many young geologists in the company. In this role he had an excellent reputation of being realistic, giving praise where it was due, but could be brutally honest if somebody had not come up to scratch.

During this time his bird photography continued to develop with many trips to local sites around Aberdeen and in particular the Ythan Estuary, a firm favourite. He met a number of other serious bird photographers at this time and in 1989 saw a big step forward

when he joined the Zoological Photographic Club (ZPC). This society was founded in early 1899 and its members all enthusiastic wildlife photographers. Phil was a very active member and was the current President when he died.

He was also a member of the Nature Photographers' Portfolio (NPP) with an almost equally long established history. These two societies allowed Phil to share his interests with like-minded photographers across the U.K. His contributions of both his own photographs and comments on other people's work made him one of the most highly regarded and popular members.

In 1999 Elf was taken over by Total. As is typical in the cyclical oil industry, there was another downturn. Phil was not made redundant, but told that as he was at the top of this grade he would not be progressing further. He could easily have moved to another employer, becoming a senior manager in many other companies but he was happy working in Aberdeen and considered it very important not to uproot the family. He always put his family first.



Plate 104. Raven. © Philip Newman



Plate 105. *Black Grouse*. © Philip Newman

Eventually the block on his grade was removed and he became a senior advisor, specialising in the early stages of exploration, when he would recommend which block of acreage the company should bid for. At this time he also was involved in outreach programmes and would take a geological programme to schools where he would talk to the children about the geology of the North Sea and encourage them to think of geology as a career. His empathy with others meant that he was very skilled in carrying out this kind of work.

In 1999 he made his first trip abroad to take bird photographs with a visit to Florida. It made a big impact on him. For the first time he had day after day of perfect photographic weather, a big change from Scotland and an endless supply of approachable birds that did not need use of a hide to be photographed. He was now hooked on foreign travel and quickly organised a second trip to Florida followed by

more to Bosque del Apache, Lesvos, Bharatpur in India, Namibia, Oman, Gambia and Alaska.

More often than not the people he travelled with were members of either the NPP or ZPC. He was an easy man to be with. He was never too cold, too hot, too hungry or too tired to do anything other than seek the next picture. When we waited for hours for a bird to appear and it seemed futile he would just accept it and suggest we wait some more. Always enthusiastic.

In between trips he continued to photograph locally and spent endless hours on the Ythan Estuary especially. He was an excellent photographer who knew his subject well. He had that special talent that can't be taught or given; an instinct to be in the right place at the right time.

He was particularly keen on photographing birds in action, especially flight and no one did it better than him. Although he did not try to make a living from his photography, his work was represented by several photographic agencies and appeared frequently in books and magazines.

He also joined the prestigious Royal Photographic Society and although he did not remain a member in later years, he did become a Fellow (FRPS) of this organisation with a panel of pictures of birds in action. An FRPS in nature photography is very difficult achievement.

He was a great follower of Glamorgan County Cricket Club and almost equally keen on following the England team. When it came to Rugby it would only be Wales he would support.

Although he had been ill for almost a year he had thought his problems were behind him and was looking forward to more trips abroad and getting out in the field. His death was sudden and unexpected and a great shock to all who knew him. Wildlife photography has lost one of the best.

He leaves his wife Debbie, children, Claire, Richard and Sarah and his five grandchildren.

**Mike Lane and Gordon Holm**

# Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Edinburgh, 16 March 2013



Plate 106. Conference venue, *Our Dynamic Earth*, Edinburgh. © *Our Dynamic Earth*

With the publication of the Bird Atlas 2007–11 imminent (autumn 2013), it seemed fitting to dedicate this year's one-day event to celebrating our achievements and sharing our experiences as bird observers for this mammoth project, while also providing a preview of the final statistics. *Our Dynamic Earth*, a five-star facility situated in the heart of Edinburgh, provided an appropriate venue for a conference entitled 'All change for Scotland's birds'!

Around 130 delegates arrived in the pouring rain (which persisted throughout the day), including a few students from local universities, taking advantage of a special discount. The full booking fee of £39.50 this year was unusually high, as a result of hiring a first-class venue. This could be a contributing factor to the slightly disappointing number of bookings for the event, where we expected at least 200 attendees (and had capacity for 300!). We would be interested to hear from anyone who didn't attend the event because of the higher price or any other factors. Such feedback is most welcome and extremely helpful in planning future one-day conferences. Please send your comments to [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk)

SOC President, Ken Shaw, opened the conference and welcomed delegates and event partners, BTO Scotland and BirdWatch Ireland. He acknowledged that everyone in the room was present because of a close connection to the Atlas and so they were in for a fascinating

and entertaining day, with an excellent line-up of speakers, spanning all aspects of involvement with the project - from the formal down to the outright informal!

## The new Atlas: a critical tool for bird conservation - *Jeremy Wilson*

Jeremy Wilson, Head of Conservation Science at RSPB Scotland was first to take to the stage. This new Atlas, Jeremy emphasised, has the key advantage of showing comparisons with the previous ones. Its beautiful maps, generally six for each species, show (a) the up-to-date Britain-and-Ireland distribution, (b) the distribution-*change* since last time (with colour for unchanged presence, and symbols where no



Plate 107. *Wendy Hicks and Jeremy Wilson*. © *Stan da Prato*

longer present and where newly present), and (c) abundance distribution, for summer and winter for each species. So this book will be a critical tool for conservation. By studying the maps for where individual bird species or groups have shrunk from former areas or shifted to altered areas (of habitat, altitude, etc), this will allow bird organisations to diagnose conservation problems, define conservation priorities, design necessary new surveys, and make recommendations. Jeremy then looked at some examples.

For Ring Ouzel, guidance from the provisional Atlas maps has already been used to design a 2012 survey investigating why the species has disappeared from many areas. For Twite, the Atlas is confirming on a wide scale what RSPB studies had shown in certain places; that Twite distribution is limited to the farmland edge of moorland rather than more generally over moorland, and this helped the design of the 2013 Twite survey. For farmland birds in trouble, Corn Bunting is easy to choose where to investigate as its distribution is now so restricted, while for larger-scale factors, the Atlas maps of five farmland passerines combined into one, including Linnet and Yellowhammer, help to choose geographical locations for research surveys.

Our breeding waders, Jeremy emphasised, are reaching a crisis point in their widespread declines. Lapwing, which in the 1990s showed their steepest declines in southern England, are now shown by the coming Atlas to be diminishing range fastest in Scotland and northern England. The Curlew, of which the UK has 40% of Europe's breeding birds, the Atlas

shows to have diminished even more alarmingly than the Lapwing. Cuckoo, Willow Warbler, House Martin and Sand Martin are all shown to have gained ground in north and north-west Britain and contracted in the south-east. On a positive note, however, Jeremy rejoiced in the increasing signs of public interest in volunteer survey work.

*Harry Dott*

### **Why atlasing hits the button: from lochs to loughs - Stuart Benn**

The title of his presentation gives the impression of a pleasure only just discovered, but Stuart's record in Scotland with the RSPB since 1988 belies the idea of suddenness and we were plunged into a long and exciting project often involving very harsh and challenging conditions. Great emphasis was given to time in the field, much of it solitary except for his constant canine companion, but he also paid tribute to the 17,000 other people who were involved in the Atlas. Local organisers received special praise, with Hugh Insley and Pete Gordon given a particular mention.

Stuart's local area was the vast uninhabited area east of Inverness and we were treated to some very dramatic photographs of Loch Hourin in winter. Individual species mentioned in the coverage included remote pools with swan and Coot and Golden Eagle in the Monaliadh and also on the Donegal coast. A casual mention of Braeriach to Cairntool demonstrated that the high tops as well as the coast were negotiated. My personal knowledge of Irish geography is decidedly scanty, but farmland was also atlased and Choughs were recorded. Plenty of Whinchats were present in the Rannoch area, but no Stonechats were seen, perhaps indicative of the previous two bad winters.

No long dry methodology in this talk since the listeners were expected to be familiar with the practices. Although Stuart did make mention of the use of tape lures to aid counting Tawny Owls. The entire talk radiated enthusiasm and demonstrated the importance of persistence and devoting time to coverage in the field.

*Campbell McLellan*



Plate 108. Stuart Benn. © Stan da Prato



Plate 109. Bob Swann. © Stan da Prato

### 1101 squares - we visited, we recorded, was it worth it? - Bob Swann

In his (probably) final talk on the Atlas during his tenure as Scottish Organiser, Bob set the scene by describing the huge differences in coverage across Scotland, from the well-populated regions where coverage was complete to the remotest expanses where 'hit squads', expeditions and some paid fieldworkers were drafted in to fill the enormous gaps, often in squares with no roads and in poor weather, especially in winter. Very successfully, it seems, as every one of Scotland's 1101 10-km squares were covered and only 12 of the requisite tetrads in winter and four in summer were not visited, despite the two severe winters that both hindered fieldwork and had a marked effect on the birds.

Bob then illustrated the extent of the data added to the Atlas database, from raptor study groups and bird clubs, through JNCC, RSPB and RBBP records to other BTO databases. He highlighted the massive validation process which ensures that every mapped record is genuine. Coming as it does after three previous atlases since 1970 (two breeding and one winter), there will be a host of maps showing relative abundance, distribution and changes. To include as many as possible, text will be kept to a minimum.

Showing us some species maps illustrating gains, losses and dramatic changes across the country, Bob pointed out the very worrying decreases in species such as Ring Ouzel,

Redshank, Snipe and Pochard and the increases of Grasshopper Warbler, Magpie, Canada Goose and even the very rare breeding Wood Sandpiper. The Atlas will pose new questions, will inform the next 'Birds of Conservation Concern' and set the researchers and conservationists new challenges. Well done, Bob, for organising us all and, yes, it was well worth it!

*Norman Elkins*

### The Atlas in Ireland: mapping birds, setting priorities - Alan Lauder

When I first went to Ireland back in 1962, as a keen 16-year-old, eager to assist in the manning of the infant Cape Clear Bird Observatory, I didn't meet a single Irish birdwatcher! Back then, Irish birders were as rare as hen's teeth, and at the time of the first Atlas (1968–72) the surveying in Ireland was co-ordinated by less than 20 people, although every 10-km square was eventually visited as least once.

Things have improved since those days but, as Alan Lauder reminded us in his excellent talk, even now there are only about one tenth of the number of active birders in Ireland as there are in England, and about one third as many as there are in Scotland. Accordingly, when fieldwork for the current Atlas was being planned by BirdWatch Ireland, it was decided to only conduct quantitative surveying in every other 10-km square (the 'chequerboard approach'), and it was realised that some professional and hit-squad surveying would be needed to fill the gaps.

Despite these limitations, the target coverage of Ireland was completed, and the data generated is already guiding the formulation of conservation strategies. Species action plans with stakeholder involvement can now be written for birds with very specific habitat requirements (such as the Corncrake) or with a restricted world-wide range (such as Greenland White-fronted Goose).

There have been some welcome expansions of range (Little Egret, Great Spotted Woodpecker) and some unexpected increases in overall population size (House Martin, Sedge Warbler). However, some groups are showing worrying declines (waders, farmland birds, raptors), and the scale of these declines is best illustrated by

the data for the Curlew, which was only found breeding in 25 10-km squares, and whose total population may be down to some 50 pairs! The famous Fields of Atheny, "where once we watched the small free birds fly", no longer ring to the calls of the Curlew. That is a message which needs to be understood by Ireland's politicians.

*Cliff Davies*



Plate 110. Ian Jardine. © Stan da Prato

**From fact to action: how SNH can make full use of the efforts of 3,500 expert birdwatchers - Ian Jardine**

As the CEO of Scottish Natural Heritage, Ian Jardine hailed the new Atlas as a major triumph and was keen to show how the findings of bird surveys inform every aspect of the work of SNH. He praised amateur birdwatchers' passion for (or should it be tolerance of?) being organised.

Periodic mapping of bird populations can show the effects of human changes like agricultural practice, and climate change. This knowledge can then be used for setting the priorities for SNH's work. Site surveys such as WeBS often provide vital information in relation to development proposals. He suggested that our estuaries are the best documented in the world; but there is still room for more information, including more low tide surveys and matching data more closely with site designations. Annual indices from the Breeding Bird Survey produce good data for common birds; and special groups like raptors and seabirds are also well covered. However, species that are uncommon,

but not actually rare, are often the hardest to monitor, and may be best covered by periodic sample surveys. Seabird tracking data are likely to be particularly important in the near future in considering the many developments being proposed for marine areas.

Ian suggested that two of the biggest dangers for SNH are that either they could miss a major change in populations or that they could spot what is happening but have insufficient data to convince ministers that action needs to be taken. In light of this, SNH will be supporting the What's Up? project to find out more about upland birds; and he also stressed the usefulness of Birdtrack lists and roving records to monitor changes and movements. Children nowadays often lack a connection to the countryside, and active birders need to communicate their enthusiasm and show them how we are recording birds.

*Roger Hissett*

**Mapping Arran's birds: the challenges of a small island - Jim Cassels**

Arran is often described as 'Scotland in miniature' - this small island set in the Firth of Clyde is only some 20 miles from north to south, 10 miles west to east, and only about 60 miles in circumference, yet it has both highlands in the north, rising to some 874 metres on Goatfell, and lowlands in the south, and its bird populations reflect this extraordinary diversity,



Plate 111. Jim Cassels. © Stan da Prato

with Golden Eagles in the north, an internationally important population of Hen Harriers largely in the south, and Arctic Terns breeding on one offshore island, with a total of 184 species being recorded during the Atlas period.

Jim gave a typically enthusiastic and upbeat description of how all 139 tetrads were covered, albeit taking five years to complete. The efforts of the very few SOC or BTO members resident on the island were significantly supplemented by members of Arran Natural History Society, as well as by the many people who holiday on the island and are regular visitors; wide publicity to encourage participation included regular articles in the local paper, the establishment of the Arran birding website and organized talks and walks including during the Arran Wildlife Festival week, resulting in a total of 700 people submitting a magnificent 36,330 Atlas records! With so many involved, it was inevitable that some strange reports were received, but one wonders whether any other Area Organisers had to challenge a report of a penguin!

Jim went on to consider the way ahead in producing a local Atlas. With so much information now available, he foresaw the possibility of producing a wide variety of maps, both of individual species, of richness of diversity, and of changes over time such as the decline of Yellowhammer and increase of Mute Swan. And then onto the big decisions that still have to be made - should a book be produced, or a disc? He felt that a booklet plus disc was the most likely outcome. Whatever the decision, we can expect a very professional result which, judging by the prompt publication of the annual Arran Bird Reports, will not be too long coming. As Jim summarised, Arran is a very special place with very special birds, and he is looking forward optimistically to the next bird Atlas!

*Mike Betts*

### **Atlassing in HD on our homepatch**

- *Ian Andrews*

To help me in writing this review, Ian kindly sent me a copy of his Powerpoint presentation, and so I have been privileged to see again at my leisure the wealth of data and maps contained within it. Consequently, I am again truly amazed



**Plate 112.** *Ian Andrews.* © Stan da Prato

and inspired by the possibilities of what can be done with modern IT to illustrate the changes in local (and by implication, national) bird populations over previous decades.

Ian stressed that he was speaking on behalf of the South-east Scotland Bird Atlas working group, and that he was only a 'small part' of a large army of nine organisers and 500 contributors. His role is to keep track of data and to produce the maps. The previous Lothian Atlas was compiled during the breeding seasons of 1988–94, on paper, and included 71,000 records from 89 squares - a mammoth task. Twenty years on, 381,000 records (and counting) from 1770 squares or tetrads are being analysed electronically, and therefore much more high definition detail is available. For instance, Ian explained that by using GPS and on-line mapping tools, it is even possible to see on a computer screen countable images of nests in the Duddingston heronry! However, most of the talk showcased the huge variety of maps, demonstrating seemingly endless ways in which the carefully collected field data can be illustrated and compared with that of 20 years ago.

For instance, winter maps for Blue Tit can confirm simple presence (yes/no) or different levels of abundance (numerical categories e.g. 0-10, 0-2, 3-6, etc). Breeding maps can likewise indicate presence, abundance in designated number categories, or three levels of proof. Other parameters, e.g. altitude, can be included - histograms showed that breeding

Blue Tits have moved 'up the hill' between the two atlases, but that they do not change altitude between winter and summer. Yellowhammer has a slightly wider distribution in summer than winter, and do move up to breed, but are being lost from the upland fringe.

Data can be extracted for each month separately. Oystercatcher moves inland particularly during February, compared to earlier winter months, and Song Thrush also spreads out to breed.

Declines are well illustrated by various map types and histograms. A dramatic decrease in Grey Partridge distribution is particularly marked at higher altitudes and in the Borders and West Lothian. Short-eared Owl shows dramatic decline, Pied Flycatcher is now 'effectively lost' from the region and the Wood Warbler map reveals very sparse dots which may relate to migrants, singing for a few days only before moving on.

On the plus side, Buzzard and Nuthatch numbers have both markedly risen, the former filling in at mid and lower altitudes. Chiffchaff has expanded into medium and higher altitudes, and Sand Martin has also unexpectedly increased, especially at mid-altitudes.

Data for species groups, e.g. farmland birds and waders, can be extracted, and again shows losses in most areas, and at lower altitudes for the latter. As the 1988–94 Atlas did not include winter counts, other sources of data, e.g. South Forth WeBS counts, can be included to further

demonstrate trends - usually downwards - of specific waders and ducks, and may reflect losses in roost sites.

Ian finished by reminding us that there is still one more summer season to go for data collection and that full coverage will then have been achieved. Winter maps are already being produced and the writing of species accounts has started. He discussed the possible means of publication of all this data - as a book, and possibly eventually on CD - and commented on the wealth of information and almost infinite variety of illustrative maps that can be produced, especially useful for future conservation planning. A tremendous task, with brilliant results - well done to all concerned!

*Kathy Evans*

### **We went, we counted, what's next?**

*- Dawn Balmer*

Dawn, the lead organiser of the Atlas project, gave the final talk of the day. In the 20 years since the second Breeding Atlas (and 25 since the Winter Atlas) how much had changed? The task at the outset had seemed formidable but thanks to a large army of volunteer observers it had been completed better than hoped. Complete coverage had been achieved in Britain, and effectively so in Ireland thanks to the chequerboard method described earlier in the day by Alan Lauder. Species richness, defined as the ratio of species found compared to those expected, had been over 90%. Achieving such results, and putting the data together so quickly, had been immensely helped by the use of technology unavailable for previous atlases - very few returns had not been made on-line - though regional organisers had had to put in a lot of effort to validate the returns.

There had been variation in the density of observers leading to some gaps, e.g. the Highlands and Islands, but these had been filled by drafting people in to cover them. Dawn asked for views on which OS square had contained the largest number of observers. To general surprise, this had not been a square containing Thetford or Cley, but NT27, the Edinburgh square, with 119 volunteers. She then gave a flavour of the outcome with a few selected results. Breeding



Plate 113. Dawn Balmer. © Stan da Prato

waders were doing badly virtually everywhere, as almost every speaker had already indicated. Research was needed into why this was, possible causes being habitat loss and predation. Summer migrants were doing badly in the south and east, but not in the north and west, with birds wintering in humid zones doing worse than those using arid areas. This possibility, and differing migration routes, needed to be looked at. On the other hand raptors, on the whole, were doing better. This might be a result of better protection and/or habitat changes. She also mentioned a few individual species: Cuckoo, on which research and modelling were underway; Nuthatch, with the well-known move into Scotland, which was now in 35% more squares than hitherto; Hobby, also moving north.

What to do next? Attempts were being made to predict the effects of climate change, already visible to some extent. Work was ongoing on the effects of wind farms - a loss of up to 5% of Golden Plover breeding range size over 25 years having been suggested. She said there was a need for coverage of more squares for the Breeding Bird Survey, particularly in more remote areas. Dawn ended by thanking everyone who had been involved in the project, and looked forward to the next Atlas starting about 2027!

*John Davies*

In addition to an excellent programme of talks, attendees were treated to a glass of champagne for a special pre-lunch 'Toast to the Atlas' made by Graham Appleton (BTO, Director of Communications) and kindly sponsored by ACE Surveyors. Alcohol also featured in the form of a bottle of whisky presented to Bob Swann in recognition of his vital role as Scottish Organiser of the Atlas, and a bottle of Bass Rock single malt (donated by SOC Lothian branch) quickly snapped up in this year's raffle, which raised £270. Other prizes included generous gifts from exhibitors - BTO Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Seabird Centre, SOC and The Wildlife Detective. We were also pleased to have Second Nature selling their usual impressive collection of antiquarian books.

The conference ended with some closing remarks by Head of BTO Scotland, Chris



**Plate 114.** *Chris Wernham.* © Stan da Prato

Wernham, who once again thanked everyone who has given their time and energy to the Atlas project, both out in the field as well as behind the scenes e.g. staff, local volunteer coordinators, and reminded attendees that between now and 2027, help will be needed with a host of other surveys, starting with the What's Up? project!

## BIRD MIGRATION TOUR

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# NEWS AND NOTICES

## New SOC members

**Ayrshire:** Mr A. Fyffe, **Borders:** Mr J.D. Bryden, Mr & Mrs A.R. Yeomans, **Central Scotland:** Mr K. Buchan, Mr & Mrs D. Parker, Mr W.A. Rylie, Mr R. Stewart, Mr & Mrs A. Stewart, Mr G.H.W. Thomson, Mr A.C.H. Valentine, **Clyde:** Dr I. Duncan, Mr M. Hutson, Mr M. Kerr, Miss M. McElney, Mr T.N. Tait, **Dumfries:** Mr J. Lethbridge, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr E. Ansell, Mr J. May, Hon. Alderman T. Sherratt, **Fife:** Mr & Mrs S. Noy, **Grampian:** Ms A. Addison, Mr M. Ashdown & Ms S. Matthews, Mr M. Hammonds, Mr & Mrs D. Jefferson, **Highland:** Mr P.J. Batten & Miss D.C. Lloyd, Ms C. Love, Mr & Mrs C. Ross, Dr A. Sanford, **Lothian:** Mr & Mrs A. Anderson, Ms K. Basley, Mr & Mrs K.C. Bowler, Mr W. Engels & Mrs E. Maclure-Engels, Ms N. Goodship, Mr G. Hull, Ms J. Ingleby, Mr & Mrs R. Kidd, Mr D.A. Leighton, Ms J. Leitch & Mr A. MacGilchrist, Ms C. Little, Ms T. Macvarish, Mr T. Railley, Mr C. Russell, Mr T. Schwarz & Ms D. Jarrett, L. & O. Sheridan, Mr M. Starr, Ms M. Wood, **Orkney:** Mr J. Branscombe, Mr M. Rendall, **Scotland - no branch:** Mr W. Binns, **Stewartry:** Mr & Mrs G. McGeachie.

## 200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **February: 1st** £50 Mrs A. White, **2nd** £30 I.T. Craig, **3rd** £20 J. Melrose, **4th** £10 S. Manson. **March: 1st** £30 Dr Cuthbert, **2nd** £20 W. McKechnie, **3rd** £10 A. Duncan. **April: 1st** £30 Mrs F. Hewlett, **2nd** £20 Mr A. Bastable, **3rd** £10 C. Mlyne.

## Branch updates

**Change in Grampian Branch name:** At the branch AGM on 8 April 2013, members agreed to change the name of the branch from 'Grampian' to 'North-East Scotland' in line with general use including the regional bird report (since 1974) and local books on birds.

**New Tayside Secretary:** Brian Brocklehurst, 146 Balgillo Road, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 3EB, Tel: 01382 778348, Email: brian.brocklehurst1@btinternet.com

**New Highland Recorder:** Pete Gordon, 2 Craigmore Crescent, Nethy Bridge, PH25 3RA, Tel: 01479 821339, Email: gordon890@btinternet.com

The Club welcomes Brian and Pete on board in their new roles and gives thanks to their predecessors, Brian Boag and Hugh Inley respectively, for all their hard work and commitment.

## SOC Annual Conference 2013, Marine Hotel, Troon, 25–27 October

The title for this year's weekend event is 'The Thick of it - Birds and Politics.' The programme and booking form are enclosed with this issue.

## Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference

**Saturday 22 March 2014, Aberdeenshire** (venue to be confirmed)

## 2014 Dumfries Branch 50th Anniversary Year

2014 will be the 50th year that the Dumfries Branch has been in existence, and to mark the occasion the branch is planning to produce a calendar with photographs taken by its members. Watch this space!

## The Watson Birds Festival 2013

SOC members will find many events of interest at this year's Watson Birds Festival at St John's Town of Dalry from Friday evening 20 September to Sunday afternoon 22nd. Our project celebrates the work of Donald and Jeff and seeks to inspire others on birds, nature and the arts.

We have two sessions to discuss important bird and nature conservation issues. On Friday evening, we will focus on the interaction between birds and wind farms with the award of the Watson Raptor Science Prize to a Spanish team headed by Miguel Ferrer on the 'Weak relationship between risk assessment studies and recorded mortality in wind farms'. The second on Saturday afternoon will be a presentation by Richard Evans and colleagues of their highly commended paper 'The history of eagles in Britain and Ireland: an ecological review of place-name and documentary evidence from the last 1500 years' published in *Bird Study*.

We will be formally opening a walking trail and a car/cycle trail to locations where Donald painted: expert guides will be there. We will also be

holding our first nature photography master class led by the renowned Laurie Campbell, with local-based photographers Ted Leeming and Morag Patterson; watch our web site ([www.watsonbirds.org](http://www.watsonbirds.org)) for details and booking information as numbers are limited. And we will have our normal range of activities: the art exhibition with well-known bird and wildlife artists including John Threlfall, Lisa Hooper and Darren Woodhead; bird ringing demonstration; and music for a Saturday evening.

**Aaron Edgar, phone: 07917 034450,  
Email: [aaron@watsonbirds.org](mailto:aaron@watsonbirds.org)**

### Waterston House art exhibitions

Forthcoming exhibitors at the Donald Watson Gallery are:

- Lucy Newton, 8 June–24 July
- Paul Howey and Edward Davidson, 27 July–18 September
- Keith Brockie, 21 September–13 November



Plate 115. Redstart by Lucy Newton.



Plate 116. Eider by Paul Howey.

### New batch of local bird reports uploaded

A further large batch of local bird reports is now available on the online Scottish Bird Report page of the Club's website ([www.the-soc.org.uk/publications/scottish-bird-report-online/](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/publications/scottish-bird-report-online/)). These include back issues of the Shetland, Fife, Caithness, Perth & Kinross and Argyll Bird Reports, and an update to 2008 across Scotland (where available). The resource now contains over 100,000 species accounts, which can be searched by species, year and recording area. The project has one more year to run, after which time we should have close to 100% coverage.

*Ray Murray, Ian Andrews and Stephen Hunter*

### SBRC - seeking a new committee member

The Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) is seeking a new member for the committee to replace Alan Lauder, who retires later this year. To maintain geographical representation across Scotland SBRC would prefer a candidate from south-east Scotland. Any potential candidates should send their name to the Secretary ([Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk)). If more than one name is put forward, a ballot will be instigated with Local Recorders having one vote each.

*Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC*

### Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) in Scotland

With the breeding season imminent, the BTO is trying to increase coverage of the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) in Scotland. As part of this drive, they are looking for experienced birders to pass on their skills and knowledge to a new generation of bird surveyors. If you would like to help mentor a volunteer new to the survey on their BBS square (or take one out on your own), then please contact James Bray at BTO Scotland ([james.bray@bto.org](mailto:james.bray@bto.org) or 01786 466560). Full details are available on the BTO website: [www.bto.org/whats-up](http://www.bto.org/whats-up)



Plate 117. Puffins by Edward Davidson.

### **SOC-funded radio-tracking of Short-eared Owls in Perthshire**

Thanks to grant funding from the SOC, Tay Ringing Group and others, the movements of four Short-eared Owls were recorded during the breeding season on moorland in Perthshire permitting a comparison of their ranging behaviour between day and night. The owls tended to hunt more over higher ground (where heather tended to be more abundant) at night than they did during the day time. They also tended to use the higher ground more in the later part of the breeding season. This suggests that assessments of risks to breeding Short-eared Owls of developments on moorland (e.g. wind farms) based on diurnal observations alone may not reflect the true scale of potential impacts. These would also need to consider nocturnal behaviour. The study is due to be published in the journal *Bird Study* early in 2013 (Calladine, J. & Morrison, N. *In press* Diurnal and nocturnal ranging behaviour by moorland breeding Short-eared Owls *Asio flammeus* in Scotland. *Bird Study* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00063657.2012.736471>)

**Neil Morrison**

Email: [karen.morrison2@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:karen.morrison2@hotmail.co.uk)



Plate 118. Dr Bryan Nelson. © Scottish Seabird Centre

### **World's Gannet expert honoured with special role at Scottish Seabird Centre**

The Scottish Seabird Centre's long-standing trustee and supporter, Dr Bryan Nelson, has retired from the charity's Board of Trustees. With his reputation as the world's leading expert on Gannets and his long-term commitment to the Seabird Centre, the trustees have decided to

recognise Bryan's support with the honorary role of Special Ornithological Advisor for the award-winning visitor attraction and charity.

### **New wildlife habitat plans in East Lothian**

Birdwatchers in Lothian have long bemoaned the lack of coastal freshwater habitat and any local reserves with dedicated visitor facilities. News that this may change has been warmly welcomed. The signing of a memorandum of understanding between Lafarge Tarmac and RSPB Scotland in January will allow RSPB to advise on habitat restoration and creation to benefit wildlife, particularly birds, at the White Sands Quarry (also known as North West Quarry) at Dunbar. Limestone quarrying ceased here in 2007 and, following discussions between interested parties, including SOC, there was general agreement that the conservation interests and wildlife-viewing potential of the site should be the priorities for future use. Lafarge Tarmac will fund a one-year project officer post to investigate possibilities for the site and to draw up a feasibility plan for its restoration and development for wildlife and environmental education. The plan will include habitat creation and the provision of carefully managed access with trails and hides. The area is already good for wildlife, especially wildfowl, Short-eared Owls and Sand Martins, and there is potential for so much more. Please be aware that while the ground settles, the area remains an 'active quarry' with no public access. The site may, however, be viewed from the perimeter fence. Birders are asked to respect these restrictions so as not to compromise future access and use and to ensure that wildfowl, in particular, are not disturbed.

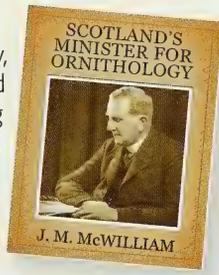
**Ian Andrews**

### **Publication of new collection by J. M. McWilliam**

A new collection of papers by the Rev. J. M. McWilliam, first honorary president of the SOC, has been published as an ebook.

*Scotland's Minister for Ornithology*, named after the affectionate title given to him by SOC members, includes numerous papers contributed by McWilliam to journals like *Zoologist*, *British Birds* and *Scottish Naturalist*, as well as amusing chapters from a previously

unpublished autobiography, extracts from his bird notebooks and fascinating recollections by former SOC presidents Sir Arthur Duncan and Donald Watson. Of special interest is a series of papers detailing McWilliam's 1939 discovery of the Scar Rocks Gannetry in the Solway Firth and tracing its growth over subsequent years.



nocturnal life-style. So, it is not always appreciated that they sometimes call during the day and, remarkably, they often do so in bright sunshine. With this in mind, we have for some time wondered why a bird with a nocturnal reputation, should be out calling in the middle of the day. We know that some observers (or listeners) are so familiar with this behaviour in daylight that they do not consider it unusual, while others have never heard them call by day, despite a lifetime of birdwatching. Owing to a lack of published records, the daytime hoots were omitted from *Owls of Europe* by Heimo Mikkola (Poyser).

The ebook has been compiled by SOC member Roger Ratcliffe, who last year republished as ebooks McWilliam's two avifaunas, *The Birds of the Island of Bute* and *The Birds of the Firth of Clyde*. The three ebooks are now available from Amazon Kindle, Kobostore and Apple iBookstore. For further information [www.facebook.com/jmcmwilliam](http://www.facebook.com/jmcmwilliam)

#### **Request for information: Tawny Owls calling in daylight**

We are carrying out a study looking at the occurrence of daylight calling by Tawny Owls. To date we have received a large number of records from southern England, but the further north you go the records become fewer. We only have one record from Scotland (on Mull).

With its acute hearing and sensitive night vision, the familiar Tawny Owl is well adapted to a

Consequently, we intend to explore this subject, initially to establish the months of the year when this can be heard most frequently, and also the most common time of day when this occurs. Can you help? If you think you can, then please send for an on-line recording form to [jeff.r.martin@btinternet.com](mailto:jeff.r.martin@btinternet.com) We would also greatly welcome submissions from all European mainland countries.

Due to possible confusion with Jays, we are only collecting records of hooting birds and between the hours of 09:00hrs and 15:00hrs throughout the year. However, due to Scotland's extended daylight hours in the summer months we are happy to receive records from 08:00hrs to 16:00 hrs in May, June and July.

*Jeff Martin and Heimo Mikkola*



Plate 119. Daytime Tawny Owl. © Ralph Hancock

### Request for information: Urban gull sites in Scotland

I'm building a register of urban gull sites in UK & Ireland and would be grateful for help in identifying places where Herring and/or Lesser Black-backed Gulls have been confirmed as breeding on rooftops in Scotland.

I've been trying for a considerable time to persuade Government that whilst rural gulls may be in decline, urban gulls are thriving and that there are many more of them and many more colonies than they have been led to believe. The debate in the Scottish Parliament was 11 years ago. What's happened since? Nothing in terms of research as called for by Scottish Executive, but plenty in terms of pest control for promised 'solutions' to the tune of millions of pounds. Government's position is that we don't need to know anything more about gulls because we know enough already and that the UK and Ireland urban gull population hasn't moved on since *Seabird 2000*. The bottom line is that we're going to have to learn how to manage the situation in a sensible and sensitive way.

So, how do you identify a small urban gull colony? First, you need to see a few gulls on roofs looking like they're staying for a while. If you can get a look over the roof from a higher point, you'll see nests. If not, that's when you need to talk to the people working or living there. Someone will know. Of course, if you see a plastic Eagle Owl on the same roof, take it as read; they're breeding up there!

The register is a first step. At this stage, it's important only to know where breeding occurs. So, even a small colony counts as a site. So far, I've



Plate 120. Herring Gull roof colony. © Peter Rock



Plate 121. Nesting and unscared gull. © Peter Rock

listed 97 sites in Scotland, but I'm certain there are more and with your help I'm sure we'll prove it.

Peter Rock

Email: [pete.rock@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:pete.rock@blueyonder.co.uk)

### Request for information: Sightings of colour-ringed Shags

As part of a long-term study of Shags in north and east Scotland a large number of individuals breeding on the Isle of May have been marked with darvic colour rings (different colours in respective years), each inscribed with three letters which can be easily read in the field. In winter, these birds are found at regular wintering sites along the coast from north-east England all the way up to the Northern Isles. Winter 2012/13 has seen a far greater than normal incidence of birds being found dead along the coast of north-east Scotland. Observers are requested to send details of any colour-ringed birds found dead, or seen alive to Mark Newell at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. Email: [manew@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:manew@ceh.ac.uk).

For further details of the project and to report your sightings please see [www.ceh.ac.uk/sci\\_programmes/WinterdistributionofIsleofMayshags.html](http://www.ceh.ac.uk/sci_programmes/WinterdistributionofIsleofMayshags.html).

### Call for help: feathers of dead gulls and Eiders wanted

*In support of a research project at the University of Glasgow*  
Gull populations have undergone very substantial declines over the past 40 years. We want to investigate the cause of these declines

by using feathers to analyse differences in feeding patterns. We need members of the public help us by sending us feathers from Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Eiders (which act as controls) that are found dead. Detailed instructions about what we need and how to get them to us are below.

**Feathers to sample:** Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls - gulls moult and grow feathers at different times of year and so we need a variety of feather types to help us with our work.

- The innermost primary feather (P1) - illustrated below.
- The outermost primary feather (P10) - illustrated below
- Five feathers from the head
- Five feathers from the brood patch area (between and in front of the legs)
- Eiders - 5 body feathers from anywhere on the body

**What to do with the feathers:** For each bird please record the date that the bird was found, the species and the approximate location and put the feathers in a labelled bag or envelope. Please consider wearing gloves or protect your hand with a plastic bag when handling a dead bird. It would be very helpful if you could label each type of feather.

Then send the bag to Ruedi Nager, Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G128QQ. We will keep you informed about the results of our work so please do enclose your email address so that we can keep you in the loop.

If you have any questions please contact Ruedi by email: [ruedi.nager@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:ruedi.nager@glasgow.ac.uk) or phone: 0141 33059076.

### New SOC website

It's arrived! You might already have noticed that our brand new SOC website is now up and running! Composed of nearly 23,000 files, we gave it a few days to settle in and make sure everything was working okay before broadcasting it to our members, volunteers and supporters on Facebook, Twitter and at the 2013 Scottish Birdfair. Since then, Chris Packham, The Urban Birder, RSPB, BTO Scotland and others have all been tweeting about it and we're delighted with how it's been received! In the fortnight since 'go-live', we've been inundated with your fantastic bird images from around Scotland and welcomed our first online joiners to the Club!

If you haven't managed to have a look yet, please do! We're at the same website address of [www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk) and would love to hear your feedback - you can use the contact form on the website to get in touch with us!

## SOC and Scottish Environment LINK

### A. FOX

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment organisations. It has over 30 member bodies, representing a wide range of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. The Club has now been part of Scottish Environment LINK for almost a year, having rejoined after a gap of over ten years.

LINK works mainly through its taskforces, which are groups of members working together on topics of mutual interest, exploring the environmental issues and developing advocacy strategies to promote those issues to other interests, the

public and decision-makers. SOC is represented on the LINK marine and wildlife taskforces. More information about the work of LINK and details of publications can be found at [www.scotlink.org](http://www.scotlink.org).

An informal group of volunteers has been set up to work alongside SOC Council and represent SOC within LINK. Members of the group are David Bryant, Keith Morton, Stan da Prato, Karen Dick, Richard Leslie, Ian Thomson, Hannah Grist and Alan Fox. If members have particular concerns about Scotland's birds and conservation, they are encouraged to contact the group via Club headquarters at Waterston House.

SOC's representation within LINK, helps to contribute the wide expertise of Club members to environmental work in Scotland. We also hope that by being part of LINK we can help individual Club members to contribute to promoting the conservation of Scotland's birds and their habitats to decision-makers. In this context, there is a series of very important Scottish Government consultations on marine plans and marine protected areas coming up this summer. The consultations are relevant to Scotland's internationally important seabird populations.

### Seabirds need you

As any local or regular visitor to Mull Head on Orkney will know, seabird numbers have been falling for the past two decades. The Kittiwake population across the island has declined by over 50% in just 10 years and sadly this is not a localised problem. Recent advice from Scottish Natural Heritage ([www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B1163280.pdf](http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B1163280.pdf)) is that most seabird species around Scotland's coast experienced similar declines - as much as 80% for some populations (see article on "Long-term declines in Scottish seabird populations" on pages 145–152).

Many factors could be causing these declines, but new research has found that less - and poorer quality - fish are being brought back to the colony to feed chicks. That has dramatically affected the young's ability to fledge and the birds' ability to maintain population levels (Wanless *et al.* 2005). These findings highlight both an opportunity and a chronic gap in seabird protection. Although many Scottish seabird breeding colonies are protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Special Protection Areas, which are statutory designations, anyone who has sea-watched, observed colonies in the morning or taken pelagic trips out to foraging grounds will know that seabirds are marine animals and spend much of their time at sea. Despite that, marine areas are still largely unprotected and are managed in ways that have very obviously made conditions unfavourable for seabirds. To recover our seabird populations, we must do something about that.

In 2010, the Scottish Government began the process of identifying sites for a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) that will be

managed for the protection and *recovery* of Scotland's marine biodiversity. Amazingly, seabirds were almost completely sidelined during this process. Apart from the Black Guillemot, the current proposals will not consider seabirds at all.

The proposed MPA network will come up for public consultation this summer and we are encouraging SOC members to be part of the debate. The consultation will invite respondents to answer questions about the MPAs and the government's proposed management of the areas. **Although most seabirds are not currently considered in the proposals, there is still the opportunity for proposals to make a difference to Scotland's seabird populations** if areas are managed in a way that benefit seabirds and seabird prey species. This is where you can help. We encourage SOC members to respond to the proposals in the consultation and participate in a series of Government-led open meetings that will take place around Scotland's coastline throughout the autumn. As part of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce, we will be developing public information packs to highlight the best options for Scotland's marine species and habitats to help to inform consultation responses and participation in the open meetings. Whether using this material or not, we encourage SOC members to be involved in these vital stages of the MPA process.

By collectively calling for MPAs to take account of seabirds, we can send a clear message of support for management that will enable our seabird colonies to return to their historic and thriving status. More information will continue to be made available via [www.savescottishseas.org](http://www.savescottishseas.org) in the coming months, so check that and the SOC website for regular updates.

### Reference

Wanless, S., Harris, M.P., Redman, P. & Speakman, J.R. 2005. Low energy values of fish as a probable cause of a major seabird breeding failures in the North Sea. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 294: 1–8.

*Alan Fox on behalf of SOC's LINK group*



Plate 122. An adult Arctic Tern and its chick, holding a small sandeel. © Robbie Brookes

## Long-term declines in Scottish seabird populations

W.T.S. MILES

In October 2012, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) published online a *Trend Note* entitled 'Biodiversity: Seabirds in Scotland'. The document is a factual summary of trends and changes in Scotland's seabird populations, based on long-term seabird monitoring data (Foster & Marrs 2012). This article aims to draw attention to the *Trend Note* and to the long-term declines observed in many species of seabird breeding in Scotland.

### Seabird monitoring data sources

Complete surveys of all Scottish seabird colonies are not attempted annually because they are very costly and labour intensive. There have only been three such major surveys to date: *Operation Seafarer* (1969–70), *The Seabird Colony Register* (1985–1988) and *Seabird 2000* (1998–2002). However, data presented in the SNH seabirds *Trend Note* comes from the Seabird Monitoring Program (SMP); a partnership for data collection at a large sample of Scottish seabird colonies every year, which was established in 1986, is led by the Joint Nature

Conservation Committee (JNCC) and is carried out by volunteers and professionals (see <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1550>).

Included in this sampling, among others, are colonies at the JNCC 'Key Monitoring Sites', three seabird islands selected for relatively intensive annual monitoring and their broadly representative geographical locations around the Scottish coast: Canna in the west, Fair Isle in the north, and the Isle of May in the east. A defined set of methods are used to collect the SMP data (see Walsh *et al.* 1995), which is primarily concerned with population numbers and breeding success, but also records information on survival and diet. Seabird monitoring gives a rare insight into the state of ocean habitats and marine ecological communities, because in terms of marine food chains seabirds sit right at the top of the card-house, and because there are very few such marine organisms that can be studied directly on land (Furness & Camphuysen 1997, Parsons *et al.* 2008). It is normal for there to be a lag of 1–2 years between the collection of annual

seabird monitoring data and its publication, in which time the data is collated, checked and analysed. The SNH *Trend Note* presents SMP data on population numbers and breeding success for the period from 1986 to 2011.

**Declining numbers of seabirds**

Long-term trends in breeding numbers of seabirds are calculated from annual monitoring data and presented in the *Trend Note* for 11 of the 24 seabird species that breed in Scotland. Selection of the species included was directed by limitations in annual data, such as low representative coverage for some species and, ultimately, whether or not overall annual figures and long-term trends could be calculated (Foster & Marrs 2012). Line graphs showing index values of abundance and 95% confidence limits, plotted for each year (1986–2011), are presented for each species; as well as Table 1, which shows that calculated values of overall percentage change in abundance from 1986 to 2011 are negative for ten out of the 11 species.

Such values provide a useful summary of the data. However, they can be misleading, because they do not describe the exact duration of declines (or increases) and the influence of short-term fluctuations in numbers through the years. For example, the overall value for percentage change in abundance from 1986 to 2011 for Fulmar is -7% (Table 1), but the graph of abundance for this species (Fig 1) does not show a trend of continuous decline, instead one of small fluctuations in numbers and relative stability overall. The only other

species to show a pattern of overall stability in numbers since monitoring began is the Black Guillemot (Fig 1), the only species with a value for overall long-term population change that is positive (although still very low, and this value based on just two data points; see Table 1).

In contrast, the other nine seabird species in the *Trend Note* all have negative values of overall percentage change in abundance and which seem to indicate patterns shown in the respective graphs of abundance reasonably well. Here included are Shag, Arctic Skua, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake, Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern, Common Tern and Guillemot. For these species, values for percentage change in abundance from 1986 to 2011 are relatively highly negative (-24% or lower) and the corresponding graphs of abundance each show at least one period of clear, long-term decline in numbers, continuing through seven or more years.

The most severe changes in percentage abundance from 1986 to 2011 were observed in Arctic Skuas (-74%), Kittiwakes (-66%) and Arctic Terns (-72%). The graphs of abundance for these three species are startling. A clear trend of steep decline in numbers through almost the entire monitoring period (22 years or more) is shown in each (Fig 1). Outwith those species included in the *Trend Note*, similarly the general picture seems bleak, with the Gannet now the only species of seabird breeding in Scotland for which numbers are increasing at most colonies and new colonies are being formed (Wanless & Harris 2012).

**Table 1.** Changes in abundance of 11 species of Scotland’s seabirds (1986–2011). \*This figure for Black Guillemot is based on the change between the last two national censuses (1985–1988 and 1999–2000). After Foster & Marrs (2012).

Species	% change in abundance
Fulmar	-7
Shag	-47
Arctic Skua	-74
Herring Gull	-58
Great Black-backed Gull	-53
Kittiwake	-66
Sandwich Tern	-48
Common Tern	-43
Arctic Tern	-72
Guillemot	-24
Black Guillemot	<+1*



**Plate 123.** Kittiwake, a breeding species that has seriously declined in Scotland. © Robbie Brookes

### Variable seabird breeding success

Long-term breeding success (productivity) data are presented in the *Trend Note* as line graphs, with productivity values plotted for each year (1986 to 2011), for ten species of seabird breeding in Scotland (those named in Table 1, minus Black Guillemot). Unequivocally, breeding success is highly variable through the monitoring period, with frequent, large fluctuations seen throughout the data for all ten species. There are no clear long-term trends of incline or decline in the data for Herring Gull,

Sandwich Tern, Common Tern and Arctic Tern (Fig 2), high variability is the only pattern.

For the other six species, the data is similarly very variable, but some general trends of increase or decrease are apparent. Shag is the only species for which breeding success has apparently gradually increased through the monitoring period, although the plot is far from compelling (Fig. 2). For Arctic Skua, there was no clear trend in the data up until 2000, but thereafter breeding success tended to be relatively low (Fig 2).

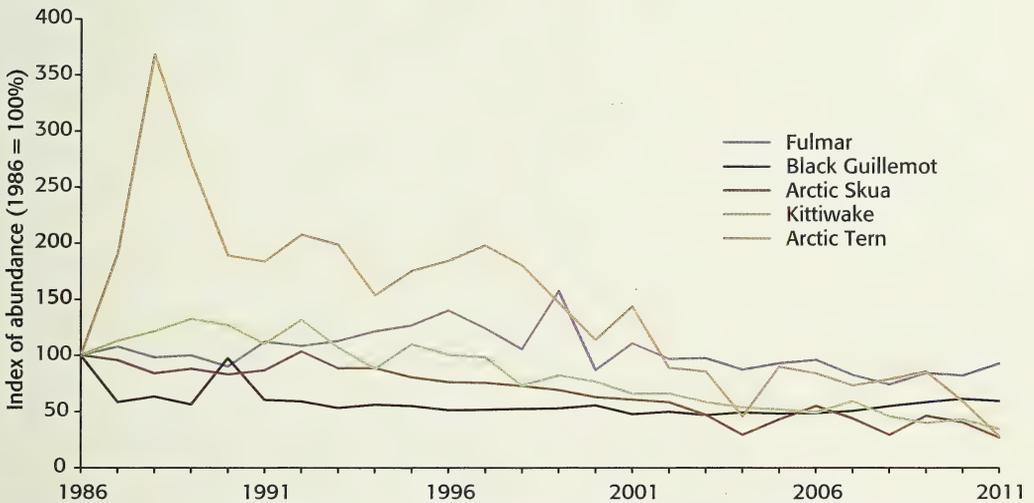


Figure 1. Fulmar, Black Guillemot, Arctic Skua, Kittiwake and Arctic Tern breeding abundance in Scotland (1986 to 2011). After Foster & Marrs (2012).

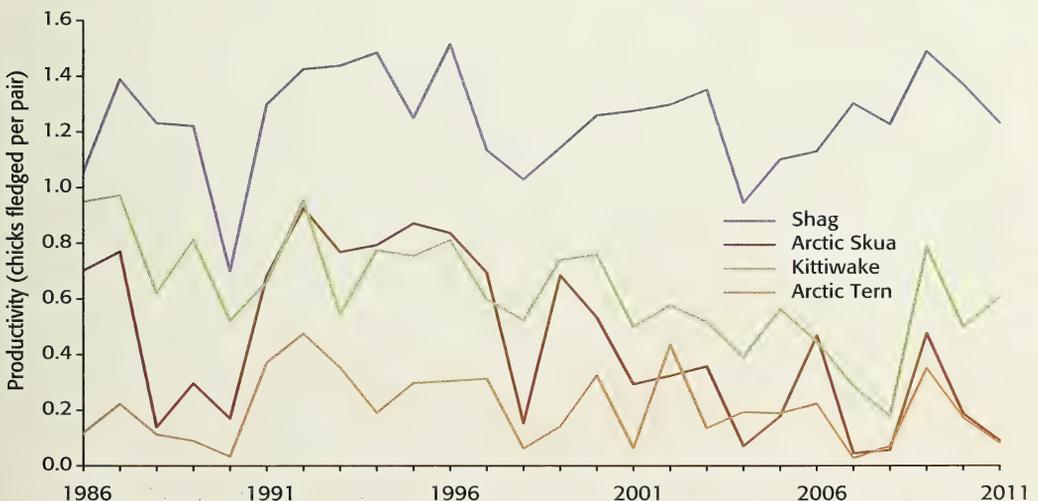


Figure 2. Shag, Arctic Skua, Kittiwake and Arctic Tern breeding productivity in Scotland (1986 to 2011). After Foster & Marrs (2012).

Breeding success for Guillemot is shown to have declined gradually from 1986 to 2002, to have declined steeply between 2002 and 2007, and from then onwards remained relatively low. General trends of gradual yet continual decline in breeding success throughout the monitoring period are seen for Fulmar and Great Black-backed Gull, and a general trend of continual decline is also shown for Kittiwake, although for this species the downwards pattern is relatively steep (Fig 2).

Annual data on breeding success give an indication of short-term, within season conditions for seabirds raising young. Conditions naturally vary from year to year but variation in breeding success is not always consistent between species; while some species at a particular site may have a good season, others may do badly. The reasons for this are often complex and gaining a greater understanding of them is a priority for current research (Wanless & Harris 2012). Interpretation of breeding success data, even for a single species, is often further complicated by it greatly differing between regions (the west, north and east of Scotland for example). Seabird species are long-lived and their populations resilient to sporadic breeding. However, for many species at many sites, in the last ten years or so breeding success has markedly declined and been poor relatively consistently (Foster & Marris 2012, JNCC 2013).

### The Seabird Indicator for Scotland

SMP data on population numbers and breeding success are aggregated each year, and index values for overall seabird abundance and overall seabird productivity for Scotland are calculated. This forms the Seabird Indicator for Scotland, one of a series of *State Indicators* that are used by the Scottish Government to assess changes in biodiversity, at species, habitat and ecosystem levels (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/trends/scotlands-indicators/biodiversity-indicators/>). The SNH *Trend Note* presents the Seabird Indicator for Scotland for the years 1986 to 2011 (Foster & Marris 2012). This shows that overall seabird abundance in Scotland declined throughout the period (Fig 3), with a trend of relatively steep decline occurring since the late 1990s (-53% decline overall). Also, that overall productivity was very variable between 1986 and 2011 (Fig 3), with no clear pattern of increase or decrease from 1986 to 2000, but with a clear trend of decline thereafter (-37% decline overall).

### Causes of declines

Seabird monitoring data allow us to see changes in breeding numbers and productivity, but factors that cause such changes can normally only be diagnosed from separate research. The most recent data presented in the *Trend Note* in many cases form a continuation of declines seen through the last ten years or

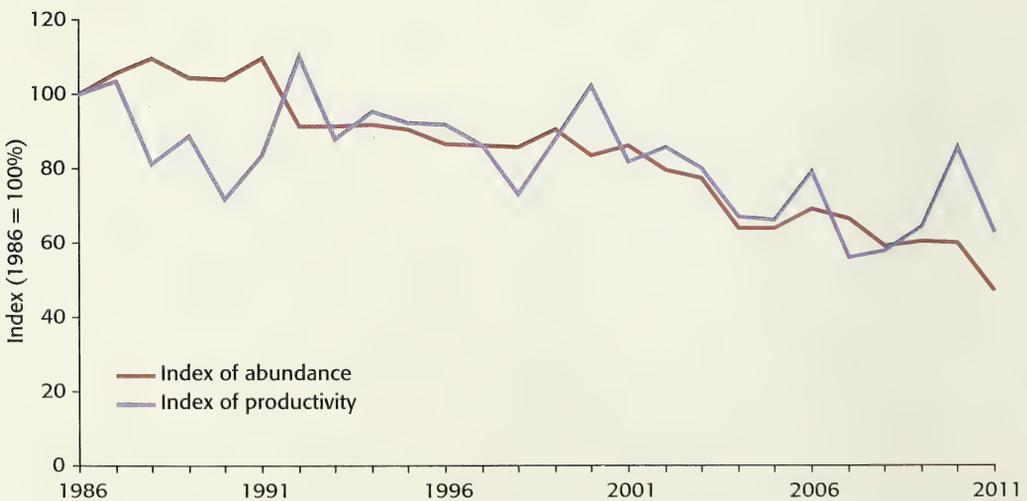


Figure 3. The Seabird Indicator for Scotland: overall abundance and productivity of breeding seabirds in Scotland (1986–2011). After Foster & Marris (2012).



**Plate 124.** Arctic Skua in Shetland. Calculated values of percentage change in the abundance of Scottish breeding seabirds (Foster & Marris 2012) show this is the species that has declined the most since 1986. © Brydon Thomason

more - trends that have attracted research attention from early on. Factors identified to cause declines can be split into two general categories: sea-based and land-based factors. For each of the species included in the *Trend Note*, declines are thought to have been caused by a combination of two or more different factors, without exception including at least one sea-based and at least one land-based (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Forrester *et al.* 2007, Foster & Marris 2012, Wanless & Harris 2012).

One, if not *the*, major sea-based cause of declines in Scottish seabirds is localised reductions in the availability of small fish, including sandeels, a common prey-type of the majority of species (Furness & Tasker 2000, Furness 2003, Mavor *et al.* 2003, Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Forrester *et al.* 2007, Wanless & Harris 2012). Major reductions of these fish can occur via shifts in oceanographic conditions associated with climate change, removal of large amounts by industrial fisheries, and changes in underwater habitats following human construction developments at sea. Global climate change presents a huge threat to biodiversity both on land and at sea. It impacts severely on seabirds; for example, by causing localised shifts in environmental conditions (such as sea temperature and salinity), that mean annual food 'blooms' (large amounts of plankton and, in turn,

fish) may occur at odd times and in new places that are out of seasonal-synchrony and foraging 'reach' of seabirds (e.g. Durant *et al.* 2003, Durant *et al.* 2006, Frederiksen *et al.* 2006, Dulvy *et al.* 2008, Sandvik *et al.* 2012). Species in the SNH *Trend Note* affected by reduced availability of small fish and sandeels include the Shag, Arctic Skua, Kittiwake, Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern, Common Tern and Guillemot, but Razorbills and Puffins are also seriously affected (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Harris & Wanless 2011, Foster & Marris 2012, Wanless & Harris 2012).

Reduced availability of fish is also a cause of decline for Great Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls; however, this is most likely via reductions in fish offal and 'by-catch' discarded overboard from fishing boats, which are scavenged in large quantities by these species, and by other gulls, skuas, and Fulmars (Foster & Marris 2012, Wanless & Harris 2012). Other sea-based factors that threaten or potentially affect breeding Scottish seabirds include oil spills (auks and shags most vulnerable), capture on long-lines (Fulmar particularly vulnerable), ingestion of marine litter such as plastics (worst in Fulmars), displacement from foraging patches by the construction and presence of industrial developments at sea, collision with renewable energy turbines, entanglement in fishing nets and discarded tackle, small fish being in poor condition and of low energy value as prey (apparent in auks), ingestion of chemical pollutants, and mass-mortality and exhaustion from extreme weather at sea (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Wanless *et al.* 2005, Forrester *et al.* 2007, Foster & Marris 2012, Wanless & Harris 2012). This last factor is becoming increasingly frequent and severe in the breeding period (April–August), as well as in winter, it impacts most on seabirds when it coincides with very high tides, and is strongly linked to climate change (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Frederiksen *et al.* 2008).

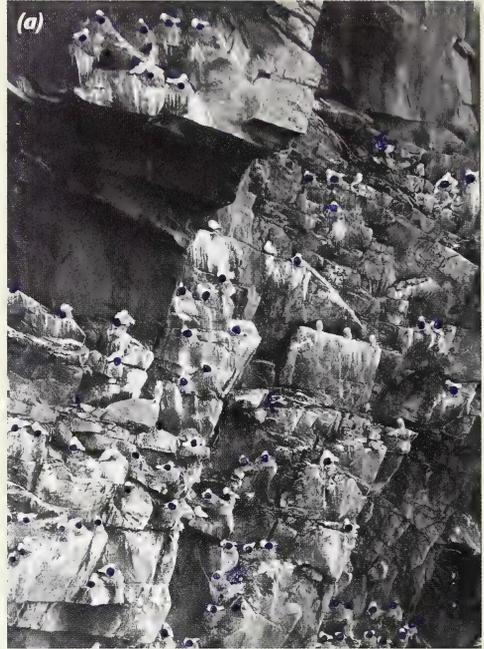
On land, seabird eggs, chicks and adults are eaten by a variety of mammalian predators. Brown Rats have been introduced by humans to many Scottish seabird islands; American Mink colonised mainland Scotland, Lewis and Harris following their importation by humans and escape from fur farms; and cats have travelled with humans to many remote mainland and island locations in

Scotland (Mitchell *et al.* 2004). These three predators, plus human interactions with them, have caused declines in breeding seabird populations more than any others, and affected populations of all of the species listed in the *Trend Note*, as well as all other seabird species that breed in Scotland (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Foster & Marris 2012, Wanless & Harris 2012).

Indigenous birds such as gulls, skuas, raptors, corvids and sometimes owls can also pose a threat to Scottish seabirds via direct predation. Numbers of seabirds predated by large gulls and Great Skuas can be considerable. In the case of Great Skuas, this phenomenon is localised to areas where the breeding distributions of predator and prey species overlap, such as on Shetland and St Kilda (Phillips *et al.* 1999, Votier *et al.* 2004). Other threats on land include permanent loss of nesting habitat from vegetation succession, storm erosion or sea level rise; extreme weather (and tidal) events during the breeding period that can wash out nests, eggs and chicks (shags, auks, terns and burrow-nesting petrels most vulnerable); colony disturbance by humans; changes in food availability on farms and refuse tips (gulls worst affected); and diseases such as botulism and puffinosis (Mitchell *et al.* 2004, Forrester *et al.* 2007, Foster & Marris 2012, Wanless & Harris 2012).

### Conservation challenges

For conservation management action to work it has to be underpinned by scientific knowledge from research and monitoring; and for seabirds, this process is considerably more straightforward on land than at sea. Long-term studies of seabirds on land have resulted in a number of conservation measures being implemented, to try to protect species from land-based factors that cause declines. For example, a range of predator control programs have helped to conserve Scottish seabirds on land; most notably the total eradication of rats from several small islands with large seabird colonies, including Ailsa Craig, Handa and Canna (Zonfrillo 2001, Stoneman & Zonfrillo 2005, Bell *et al.* 2007, Ratcliffe *et al.* 2009). However, the most wide-scale seabird conservation measures on land in Scotland have been the establishment, over the years, of laws to protect seabirds and of many



**Plate 125.** Comparative photographs from Fair Isle of (a) an active Kittiwake population monitoring plot in South Gunnawark in 1986 (blue dots = apparently occupied nests of which there are 70 in total) © NCC. (b) the whole lower South Gunnawark Kittiwake colony area (including the monitoring plot outlined in red) in 2012. Kittiwakes no longer nest there, both within and outwith the monitoring plot. © Will Miles. Photographs taken from different vantage points.

legally protected areas and reserves. For example, under the EU Birds Directive, 50 sites on land have been designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) with seabirds listed as a feature of interest, protected under the Scottish Habitats Regulations (Foster & Marrs 2012, Scottish Natural Heritage 2013).

As a conservation strategy, the combined approach of legislation, reserves and, in many cases, active management has worked well for a number of species of bird on land in Scotland, and not just seabirds. However, seabirds are unusual in that many species spend nearly their entire lives away from land, out at sea, and it is sea-based factors, often out of human sight, which now present the greatest threats to their populations. Gaining detailed insights into the lives of seabirds at sea, through research and monitoring, and to direct conservation measures for seabirds at sea, presents a considerable challenge. However, great advances have been made using temporarily-fitted remote tracking and data-logging devices on the larger species. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) has been deploying such devices on a range of species on the Isle of May for over 25 years, with recent work focussing on links between overwintering ecology and demography (Daunt *et al.* 2006, Bogdanova *et al.* 2011). In addition, several other seabird tracking and data-logging projects are now running in Scotland, the largest-scale of which to date have been the RSPB's Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment (FAME) and Seabird Tracking and Research (STAR)



**Plate 126.** A Shag spreading its wings in the sun. Unusually, the plumage of this species of seabird is not totally waterproof so individuals must come on to land frequently to dry off their feathers, ensure their primary means of insulation does not become waterlogged and useless, and to keep warm. © Robbie Brookes

projects. The main aims of these two have been to identify the areas of open sea that are crucial to the feeding and breeding ecology of seabirds; and those areas which, for seabird conservation, would be most worthwhile to designate as protected reserves. The legislation and reserves approach for nature conservation, proven to work on land, is now slowly being applied to marine life at sea by the Scottish Government, through the identification and designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Given the declines seen in Scotland, seabird stakeholders hope that this process will include seabirds in the broadest possible terms, and to aid with it, that crucial insights into the lives of Scottish seabirds at sea continue to be made.

### Acknowledgements

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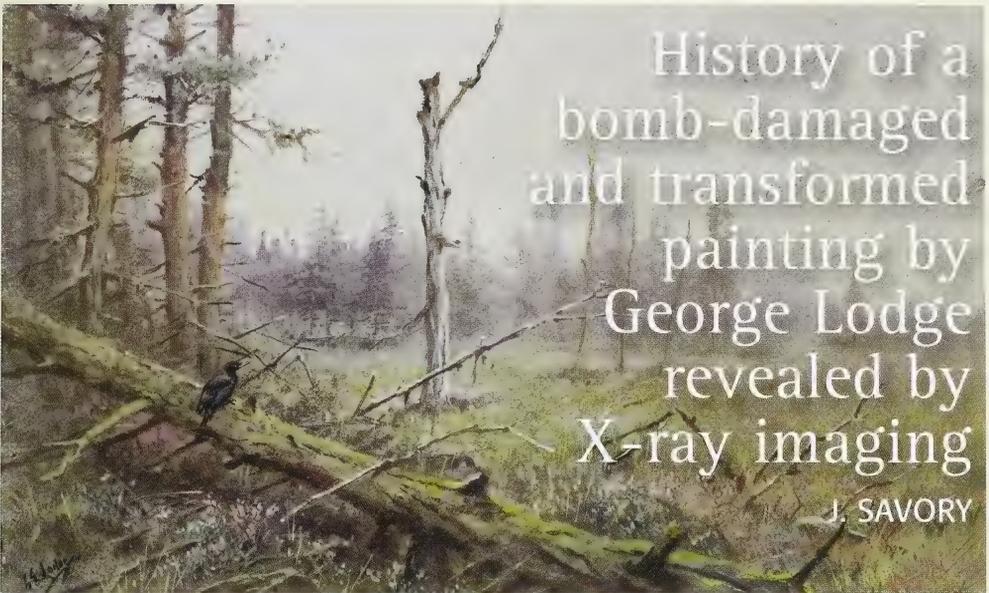


Plate 127. *The bomb-damaged and transformed painting of Black Woodpeckers.* © J. Savory

Further to my previous article entitled *Bannerman and Lodge* that was published in *Scottish Bird News* in 2006 (no.79, pp.7–9), I write again to report a recent discovery concerning a painting by wildlife artist George Lodge (1860–1954). My father, Harry Savory (1889–1962), first met Lodge at a British Falconers' Club meet at Avebury in the early 1930s, and they remained good friends for the rest of Lodge's life. He was actively involved in falconry from 1886 to 1939 and is famed to this day for his superb paintings of raptors. He never married and lived with his niece Brenda in 'Hawk House' in Camberley. After his death, Brenda very kindly gave my father a painting with an interesting history. It is of Black Woodpeckers in a forest landscape (probably Norwegian) and is one I used in my book *George Lodge: Artist Naturalist*, published by Croom Helm in 1986. Like many of Lodge's paintings it was done in tempera on board and measures 44 cm x 29 cm. My father had the picture framed by a Bristol framer in 1954, and on a label on the back he wrote the following: *It will be observed that this drawing is in two parts, torn through from top to bottom. This occurred in a London Blitz during 2nd World War. The upper portion on the right was punctured with splintered glass. George Lodge had it back to his studio, mounted the 2 parts*

*together and painted the tree trunk and the top branch over the join. Incidentally, he then painted in the black woodpecker, where previously there had been a sparrowhawk nearer base of trunk.* Perhaps my father had not spotted the unmistakable distant silhouette of a second Black Woodpecker on the dead tree hiding the join.



Plate 128. *The reverse side of the damaged painting showing labels and the join.* © J. Savory

In two *Fake or Fortune* series on BBC television in 2011 and 2012, personalities Fiona Bruce and Philip Mould investigated the authenticity of paintings thought by some to be works of important artists like Monet, Degas and Turner. As well as old-fashioned detective work, a company called Art Access and Research in London (<http://artaccessresearch.com/about/services/imaging>) provided crucial evidence by

scanning pictures using high resolution, infrared and X-ray photography. Inspired by these programmes, I approached Art Access and Research to see if their technology could be used to reveal the original "Sparrowhawk" my father had indicated was in the bomb-damaged painting I had lived with since 1954. They agreed to examine my painting for a fee that was acceptable. So when I took it to them recently, we removed it from its frame and mount, and they then used infrared and X-ray imaging to scan it.



Plate 129. The X-ray image showing the original composition. © J. Savory

The painting's original composition was revealed only faintly in the infrared image but much more obviously in the X-ray image. When I saw it I was amazed because it was unlike what my father had indicated (the larger slanting tree was unexpected and the bird on it seemed too big to be a Sparrowhawk), and because I recognised it immediately. By a huge and fortunate coincidence, when I was doing my research back in 1984 for my *George Lodge: Artist Naturalist* book, the Tryon Gallery in London had sold me a black-and-white photograph of a Lodge

painting entitled 'Goshawk on Windblown Pine'. The Tryon acquired copyright on most of Lodge's work long ago, they have been the main dealers of it, and this painting passed through their hands in 1982/1983. They gave me much help with my book.

I had always been aware that the woodland background in this other (photographed) painting was essentially the same as that in my Black Woodpecker one. This did not surprise me because there were instances where Lodge had used other similar compositions in different paintings. However, now I saw that the two paintings (mine in its original state) were virtually identical in all respects. My interpretation of all this (which may of course be wrong) is that someone, presumably the owner if still alive, took the bomb-damaged painting to Lodge and asked him to paint an exact copy of how it was, thus restoring the Goshawk to perfection. This copy ('Goshawk on Windblown Pine') is what was sold at the Tryon many years after World War II and the photograph of it came to me. Rather than discard the damaged original, most of which still showed the atmospheric landscape well, Lodge repaired it and painted over the damage to create the new, Black Woodpecker, composition. Presumably the transformed painting remained in his possession until his death, and presumably when Brenda Lodge gave it to my father there must have been some misunderstanding about its original appearance. This would explain why some of the facts on my father's written label were incorrect. The present whereabouts of the 'Goshawk on Windblown Pine' is unknown.

John Savory



Plate 130. Close up of the Goshawk in the original composition. © J. Savory



Plate 131. The copy of the original painting - "Goshawk on Windblown Pine". © J. Savory

## Branch Spotlight - Tayside Branch



**B. McCURLEY**

**Plate 132.** Joint field outing of the Tayside Branch and Angus & Dundee Bird Club, St Cyrus, North-east Scotland, August 2012. © Bob McCurley

Researching the beginnings of the Tayside Branch has been a very interesting nostalgic experience and challenge and has highlighted many stalwart, long-serving members who have rendered great service to the branch over the years. From this research it would appear that the branch was first formed in 1952, with the first Chairman being John Gordon, with Jack Grierson as Secretary. The second Chairman was Hunter Sutherland (1960), whose daughter Janet (Crummy) recalls birding with her father and Ron Summers and going to Broughty Ferry to see a Collared Dove in a lady's garden; this species first colonized the UK in 1952. She also recalls attending indoor meetings at the Art Gallery at the top of Reform Street (McManus Museum). Janet went on to become President of the SOC. Ron Summers remembers attending field outings of the early days of the Tayside Branch when there was a 'split' between the keen birdwatchers and others who enjoyed the social aspect more! It was through attending these outings that he met Mike Nicol, Norman Atkinson (both Arbroath Loons!) and Jim Dunbar also from Arbroath but working at HMS Condor as a driver and eventually Strathbeg RSPB warden. The four of us, under the guidance of David Oliver (the only qualified ringer in the area and based in Fife), learned

bird ringing and we eventually formed the Tay Ringing Group about 1970. So, the SOC helped in bringing together kindred spirits, as well as teaching birding skills to youngsters.

Bruce Lynch joined the SOC in 1971 and went on to become branch Chairman (1978–81). He did sterling work in the 1970s organising many Angus Glen Surveys plus a survey of the Inner Tay Estuary from Invergowrie to Port Allen. Bruce recalls an amusing tale at an indoor meeting when the speaker, who had taken the usual pre-lecture meal in the Tower Building restaurant had several whiskies after the meal. On the night, the slide projector had to be advanced by hand and Bede Pounder (another former Chairman) asked the speaker to tap a wooden pole on the floor when he was ready for the next slide. A combination of the whiskies and the heat in the lecture theatre resulted in the wooden staff being thumped with increasing vigor as the lecture proceeded! One lecture that really went with a bang (or two)!

The Tayside Branch has been served and given over the years outstanding long service support from members that I personally have had the pleasure of associating with in my time as a member of the branch (since 1986). Arthur

Bastable, who joined the Club in 1953, is still very much involved in local branch activities. In interesting conversations with Arthur, he can recall some magic moments when he enjoyed the company of such Club stalwarts as George Waterson, Kenneth Williamson and Chris Mylne - to name but a few - keep up the good work Arthur! Another former Chairman deserving of mention would be Vince Ellemore and his wife Joyce; they made a fine team, with Joyce producing a fine newsletter covering branch activities. Another long-serving member who supports our local branch activities is David Merrie who joined the SOC in 1961 and is still as active as ever. Jeremy Greenwood, another well-known figure in Scottish birding circles, joining the Tayside Branch in 1967, is still supportive of the branch and is booked to give the branch a talk which we all look forward to. Jeremy recalls after leaving Dundee to take up his position with the BTO, he returned some years later to give a talk to find that the attendance was disappointingly low (only 20 members) compared to what he had seen in earlier years (70 to 80). Other Chairmen of the branch in more recent times that have rendered service and deserve mention are Dave Thomson, James Whitelaw, Lesley Dron and our long-serving Secretary Brian Boag, who stepped down just recently having been our Secretary for c.27 years. Our current Chairman is John Campbell.

The branch programme consists of eight indoor meetings per year and receives great support from HQ in arranging some excellent speakers over the season, with four meetings arranged by the branch. Our outdoor programme covers Tayside from January to November and a recent change to include mid-week outings has been a great success with our members. We now hold joint outings with the Angus and Dundee Bird Club, as most who turn out are members of both clubs. We work closely with the Bird Club who took over joint responsibility for producing the annual bird report. We are well catered for in selecting a venue for our field outings with the Angus mountains and glens, Montrose Basin and the Tay Reed Beds giving us many options for our choice of habitat. The Isle of May too is a popular venue for a spring/summer trip and always well supported. In addition to this, members are very much



**Plate 133.** *Green Woodpeckers, Montreathmont Forest feeding station, Angus & Dundee, May 2012. The woodpeckers are frequently seen from the hide at the feeding station. © Gordon Linton*

involved with national survey work such as monthly WeBS counts, national Atlas work, winter thrush monitoring, plus ongoing ringing activity with the Dipper population being well-monitored in Tayside. Ringing controls recently have produced some very interesting results with birds such as a Ringed Plover seen in Lunan Bay bearing a coloured leg flag, coming from Norway to spend the winter in Scotland. Also, for the first time, a local juvenile Osprey was fitted with a satellite tracker and its journey progress was monitored as it made its first successful journey to its African wintering grounds. The locator was fitted by Roy Dennis and Keith Brockie (Keith was a regular attendee of the Tayside Branch meetings in the 1980s).

We hold a five local group (SOC, SWT, RSPB, ADBC and Dundee Naturalists' Society) joint annual outing to Barry Buddon TA Estate, and the same five groups hold a 'big name speaker' event every two years. This year we have invited David Lindo (the 'Urban Birder') to speak on 9 October 2013 at the D'Arcy Thomson Lecture Theatre at Dundee University.

And last, but by no means least, I would like to thank Colin McLeod for rendering such great assistance in carrying out his excellent research work on the history of the Tayside Branch.

*Bob McCurley, Tayside Branch*

# An unprecedented wreck of Puffins in eastern Scotland in March and April 2013

M.P. HARRIS & N. ELKINS



Plate 134. The heads of 147 Puffins picked up dead at Arbroath on 29 March 2013. © Mark Newell/CEH

Starting in mid-March 2013, large numbers of dead and dying auks were washed ashore on the coasts of eastern Scotland and north-east England. Such wrecks of seabirds, apparently dying of starvation after periods of very rough weather, are not that uncommon in the North Sea (there was one of Shags in December 2012). However, the current wreck was exceptional in that the main species involved was the Puffin. Puffins are rarely found during winter when they are well away from land in the central North Sea or the open Atlantic so that when they die their bodies rarely get washed ashore. By late April, a total of 3055 had been either collected or counted on Scottish coasts, with 1362 in north-east England (Dan Turner pers. comm.). This is over twice the 1642 found in February and March 1983, of which only 168 came from Scotland, making the March/April 2013 wreck the largest recorded for this species. Other auks were not counted on a minority of beaches but, assuming the same species ratios as where they were, then about 600 Guillemots and 240 Razorbills also perished in Scotland. This note is based on counts, observations and photographs of dead auks kindly sent to us by many people, in the six weeks during the main

wreck, and describes the extreme weather conditions leading up to the wreck and presents some preliminary findings on the age and origins of the birds involved.

March 2013 began with a ridge of high pressure over the region, with moderate winds offshore backing from N to S during the first five days. Air temperatures were 5–6°C, with sea surface temperatures (SST) around 6°C and wave heights around 2 m. Winds then backed to between NE and ESE between 6th and 11th, becoming fresh to strong and reaching gale force on 8th, when wave heights exceeded 5 m. Air temperatures dropped on 11th to 3°C as arctic air flooded west. Winds backed N and decreased on 12th and backed further to SW then S by 15th when they freshened. Wave heights decreased to 2 m or less between 12th and 15th, with air temperatures only just above 0°C on 13th. A steady backing of the wind to between ENE and SE brought strong to gale force winds from 17th to 24th, with a brief decrease on 20th and 21st. Air temperatures fell to between 1 and 3°C between 18th to 24th, with SSTs also dropping slightly. Wave heights increased rapidly on 17th/18th with reports of



**Plates 135–137 (top).** Head of an adult Puffin found dead at St Andrews 25 March 2013. This bird was in full breeding plumage except for a few dark winter feathers around the eye and at the base of the bill. **(middle)** Head of an adult Puffin still in winter plumage when found dead at St Andrews on 26 March 2013. **(bottom)** Head of an immature Puffin, probably hatched in 2011, in winter plumage at St Andrews on 27 March 2013. © All Mel Froude

7.6 m on 18th. These fell to 2 m by 21st, but rose again to 5 m on 23rd. Winds moderated on 25th, with wave heights falling to below 2 m.

With a maximum fetch of 700 km (between Heligoland and the Scottish coast), theoretical significant wave heights reached 5 m during the latter gales, with maximum heights probably exceeding 8 m (all supported by actual reports). Sea temperatures were only marginally below normal during the month (more so in the southern North Sea). The prolonged strong to gale E–SE winds, leading to very rough seas (especially along the Scottish east coast) and combined with the very cold airmass would have probably caused significant disruption in seabird feeding (especially near the surface). Although wind chill calculations do not necessarily apply to well-insulated animals, the calculations for well-insulated humans indicated between  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$  over the sea between 18th and 25 March. This would have added to the birds' problems.

Preliminary examinations of reasonably intact Puffins indicated that they were grossly underweight, and had no fat reserves and empty stomachs. Thus the birds appeared to have died of starvation, although it is currently not possible to rule out disease with certainty. The diet of Puffins at this time of year is poorly known so again it is unclear whether starvation would be due to a lack of food or the inability of Puffins to feed or a combination of both factors. Puffins normally feed within the top 20 m of the sea and given the extremely rough conditions this must have been extremely difficult. The extreme roughness of the sea was highlighted by the large numbers of marine invertebrates such as cuttlefish and, further south, lobsters and Velvet Swimming Crabs that were reported stranded on beaches by people out looking for Puffins. Even though as a northern species the Puffin should be well acquainted with severe wind and sea conditions, the extremely low air temperature may have added additional stress. At the southern fringe of the species' range, our birds may not be well-adapted to the combination of prolonged gales in an arctic airmass and may have been already weakened by the period of strong winds earlier in the month. A further problem for 10–15% of the

Puffins was that they had still not completed the growth of their primaries at the end of the main moult of the year during which they are flightless so would have been unable to flee the area.

Puffins are somewhat unusual in that it is not until the bird is 4–5 years old that the bill is fully developed, increasing not in length but in curvature and with more grooves becoming obvious on the outer orange part of the beak. Although a Puffin does not usually start breeding until it is six years old, some at least are sexually mature a year or so before this. Therefore, with experience it is possible to say whether an individual Puffin is in its first year of life, is an immature or a potential breeder. In most seabird wrecks, immatures predominate and in such cases the immediate effect on the breeding population may not be very obvious. However, in the 2013 wreck, of almost 1000 Puffins so far examined about 60% were potential breeders, 30% immatures and 10% chicks from last year. Breeding Puffins had started to return to the colonies in east Scotland just before the wreck started and so not surprisingly ringing recoveries show that the majority of these birds were attached to colonies in the Firth of Forth and the Farn Islands. One can only guess how many Puffins actually died, but it will surely be many times the numbers found and this could potentially have a serious effect on numbers. Fortunately, counts of burrows at all the main colonies in the area were planned for this spring so we anxiously await results from these censuses.



**Plate 139.** Part of a total of 229 dead Puffins collected from the beaches of St Andrews between 24 March and 7 April 2013. © Debbie Russell

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**Plate 138.** Dead Puffin washed up at St Cyrus in late March 2013. © Therese Alampo/SNH

## FIELD NOTE



Plates 140–141. (left) Snipe's attitude on the right. (right) Reacting Snipe. © Frank Gibbons

### Snipe's reactions to birds approaching from above

(Following the "Field Note" in December SB, which featured "Snipe feeding young", comes a report from Frank Gibbons of interesting Snipe behaviour he has observed.)

On 16 September 2012, it was a very dull day at Baron's Haugh RSPB reserve, Motherwell, and some Snipe had come out from the reeds and settled on the mud banks in front of the Causeway Hide. I noted that when Lapwings and gulls were coming in overhead that the Snipe would lean forward with necks outstretched, heads flat to the ground and their rumps in the air. I thought at the time because the light was so poor that the Snipe could not identify the birds coming into land on the mud and hence their reaction - and indeed when the gull or Lapwing had landed, the Snipe immediately relaxed when apparently able to identify that there was no danger.

Plate 140 shows the rear view of a Lapwing flying in to land and the reaction of the Snipe on its right. I watched this interaction for a good 20 minutes. Every time a bird flew in above the Snipe, they would adopt this position. I am assuming that if they were in the marsh grasses, this would be a very good way of hiding from an aerial predator. It happened so often that it seemed like a natural sort of defence mechanism.

Plate 141 is interesting, being taken as the gull was approaching the Snipe from side-on (ie following the same flight angle as my camera lens). The Snipe stuck its rump in the air just as I took the photo but it then managed to very slowly pivot completely around to end up with its

rear facing the landing gull, possibly for better protection or because the underside of the rump is less easy for a predator to identify? This was the first time I had witnessed this kind of behaviour.

Frank Gibbons

(Ed. A search in *BWP* (Cramp et al.) reveals several postures by Snipe against aerial threats where the tail is described as fanned and facing forwards to the threat, showing the "staring" dark eye mark that appears on the upper feathers. It would appear from the photographs and Frank's description that his own observation was quite different.)

### Window strike

An unusual window strike occurred on the morning of 15 October 2012 when an immature male Ring Ouzel was killed at the home of Ian Campbell at Drovers Way on the south side of Peebles. The corpse, which was in good condition, was donated to the National Museums of Scotland.

Vicky McLellan



Plate 142. Ring Ouzel casualty. © Vicky McLellan

# BOOK REVIEWS

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

**Return to One Man's Island.** Keith Brockie, 2012. Birlinn Publishing, Edinburgh, ISBN 978-1-84158-974-9, hardback, 175 pages, £25.00.



Keith Brockie's reprise of his 1984 work on the Isle of May is even more captivating than the

original. Following the format of the previous volume, it fulfils two roles, as a natural history of the island and a treasury of wildlife paintings. An introduction sets out the history and topography of the island, and outlines his methods. Chapters on breeding birds and Grey Seals provide accessible statistics from 2010 showing how the populations have fared in the period since the original book. That on migration explains the significance of the May as a place to observe migration, and illustrates the techniques of ringing and recording. Here, the author's personal highlights include the rescue of an injured White-tailed Eagle and the arrival in June 2009 of a White's Thrush, an event that coincided with his decision to embark on this new volume. A chapter on "Other Wildlife" completes the portrait of the island with material on cetaceans, mammals, lobsters and butterflies.

Working in pencil and watercolour, he ranges from studies of individuals to fully worked paintings. In this entirely new collection, he uses stronger tones on a white base, instead of the muted palette on grey or ochre backgrounds of many of the

sketches in the first work. Whilst the former volume had more of the character of a sketchbook, the new one includes a greater number of developed images, putting the birds and animals against an elaborated background so that they are seen in the context of their habitat, in accomplished paintings that combine an eye for detail with a strong sense of colour.

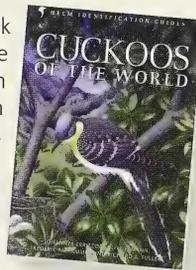
This is an outstanding book, which will inform the naturalist, inspire the artist and provide great pleasure to readers in general.

*Ian Ebbage*

**Cuckoos of the World.** Johannes Erritzøe, Clive F. Mann, Frederik P. Brammer & Richard A. Fuller, 2012. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 9780713660340, hardback, 544 pages, £60.00.

This book follows the Helm Identification Guides series format, with which most bibliophile birdwatchers will be familiar: an introduction, followed by high quality colour painted plates of all of the world species, then detailed species accounts that contain information on taxonomy, field identification, geographical variation and distribution, habitat, behaviour, food, and status and conservation. The species accounts also contain detailed maps and, a new development in the series, colour photographs of birds.

The book covers all 144 species of the family Cuculidae found



throughout the world in great detail. Readers will be familiar with our Common Cuckoo of the genus *Cuculus*, and there are many other cuckoos that, though of different genera, are obviously cuckoos, having a similar shape, size and behaviour, with most being brood-parasites. But this book also covers the 'less obvious' cuckoos, such as the Anis, Pheasant-cuckoos, Roadrunners, Coucals, Couas, Yellowbills and Malkohas, some of which are fascinating and many not being brood-parasites.

I found the text authoritative and well researched, and the photos and plates of a generally high standard, although with the latter I personally preferred some of the paintings to others. All in all, this is a handsome, well-produced volume. Anyone who has an interest in this family of birds should consider buying a copy, although perhaps its high cost might restrict this book to those with a passion for cuckoos.

*Chris McInerney*

**Extremely Rare Birds in the Western Palearctic.** Marcel Haas, 2012. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. ISBN 978-84-96553-83-5, hardback, 244 pages, £28.50.

This book summarises what is known about the occurrences of 157 species of extremely rare birds that have occurred in the Western Palearctic (*sensu* BWP). All species that have occurred less than 10 times during 1800–2008 are included, with some later records included in the



text (but not the tables). The records are listed with references to books and articles, and include a photograph of actual individuals, if available. Many of these images relating to Scottish vagrants were used in *The Birds of Scotland*, but they are smaller than in our publication, often considerably so. The eight photographs relating to Scottish records not in *The Birds of Scotland* are the 1981 Sandhill Crane, 2007 Mourning Dove, 1971 Thick-billed Warbler, 2005 Veery, 1992 & 2008 Asian Brown Flycatchers, 1987 Savannah Sparrow and 1982 Tennessee Warbler. Different photographs are also printed of a further seven birds.

Ian Andrews

**Silent Spring Revisited.** Conor Mark Jameson, 2012. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-5760-2, hardback and eBook, 288 pages, £16.99.



Fifty years after Rachel Carson wrote her seminal book *Silent Spring*, Conor Mark Jameson has revisited the subject. He has produced an important and wide-ranging review of environmental issues

which have continued to unfold since 1962 and their continuing disastrous impact on wildlife today.

His book moves chronologically through the decades, covering an amazing wealth of information, from political history, the evolution of pesticides and herbicides, common agricultural policies, conservation efforts and the growth of the RSPB, to oil spills and climate change and the conflicting pressures between wildlife and population needs regarding land use.

Despite such heavy topics, the book is a fascinating read. For me, it was a journey down memory

lane as well as an intellectual jolt reminding of the many challenges that still lie ahead if the flora and fauna of the world are not to be ruined for ever.

Jameson also describes his own passion for nature, awakened during his childhood in Scotland. He describes several Scottish wildlife experiences, which will echo with Scottish readers. He has worked in conservation for 20 years, is a regular columnist and feature writer for several well-respected birding publications and has been a script writer for the BBC Natural History Unit.

I thoroughly recommend this book for all who love the natural world. It is a well-written, well-researched wake-up call to remind us that we still have a long way to go before we can be sure that Rachel Carson's dire predictions will not come true.

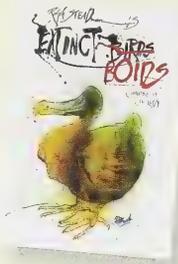
Judy Greenwood

**Extinct Birds.** Ralph Steadman & Ceri Levy, 2012. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4081-7862-1, hardback, 240 pages, £35.00.

In 2011, Levy invited various artists each to contribute a picture to *Ghosts of Gone Birds*, an exhibition intended to raise awareness of the fate of extinct species of birds. After initial uncertainty, Steadman's imagination was fired and he produced not just one painting, but a whole series, which gave birth to this book, and which include not just extinct species like the Great Auk and the Moa, but also some which spring entirely from the author's imagination like the South Eastern Telly Chat, the Nasty Tern or the Needless Smut. Each illustration is accompanied by a brief account of the bird and the reasons for its extinction, and throughout the book there are extracts from the e-mail correspondence between Levy

and Steadman, and from Levy's diary, chronicling the way in which their collaboration developed.

This is a lovely, amusing and informative book. In his characteristic style, Steadman's bold, zany illustrations are a delight, and the book and the exhibition are an imaginative approach to the old problem of arousing awareness of the species loss that has already occurred and the continuing need for action to avert further losses in the future.



Ian Ebbage

**Looking at Birds: an antidote to field guides.** John Busby, 2013. Langford Press, Peterborough, ISBN 978-1-904078-55-5, paperback, 98 pages, £15.00.

Another book from Lothian-based and internationally recognised artist John Busby is always welcome, and any lover of wildlife art will know they are in for a treat.

*Looking at Birds* is described as the first in a series of books on Wildlife Art Techniques from Langford Press, publishers of the acclaimed Wildlife Art Series. In the book, John takes us through chapters on birds in the air, birds in display, birds in water, birds in the imagination and more, with each section stuffed with beautifully observed sketches. His defining genius is his ability to delineate a bird profile with economy and vibrancy, and in Busby's hand, drawing becomes a supremely



elegant descriptive medium. With a wonderful, varying, weight of line, he conveys form and shape in fluid contours. The line takes the viewer on a journey, sometimes through the profiles of dancing Cranes, other times through the contortions of Kittiwakes riding updraughts of air. Busby's drawings are far more than sketches; they have become visual poetry.

There is an insightful text and his words, as ever, are as carefully chosen as his colour and line. It's a joy to learn his thoughts as he shares his bird encounters, and even for a life-long Busby fan there are new discoveries: John's experience on a fog-bound ferry with mixed migrants, and his 'rainbow' moment of a Barn Owl flying beneath an eclipsed moon. There's yet more to learn from a true master.

In the book's introduction Busby sets out his aim to encourage people to see more when they watch birds, and through a sparkling series of deft drawings and exquisite watercolour sketches he delivers another inspiring collection. Furthermore, I can think of no other artist in Britain that has inspired so many artists across several generations to see more, and *Looking at Birds* is another shining example of both his work and philosophy.

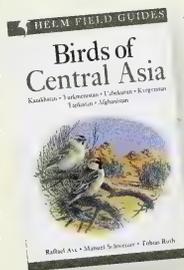
That'll be another book to add to the wish list then.

**Darren Rees**

**Birds of Central Asia.** Rafael Ayé, Manuel Schweizer & Tobias Roth, 2012. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-0-7136-7038-7, softback, 336 pages, £35.00.

This is the first guide to encompass the whole of this important Palearctic region, covering species found in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan,

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The 336 pages include List of Contents, map, Acknowledgements, Introduction, "How to Use This Book", Geography and Biogeography, Organisations & Websites, 143 plates, three appendices, References and Index. The start and end sections contain much useful information, and the illustration quality of the plates is extremely high. Each has a page of drawings, showing differences in plumage between ages and subspecies for each species, and a facing page of text on identification, plus a sentence on habitat. Ideally the distribution maps would be larger, and more information given on movements and seasonal occurrence, but the latter reflects the gaps of current knowledge.



The political instability of parts of the region means it is relatively unexplored by 'outside' birders. Areas are now opening up to ecotourism, creating a new cutting edge of birding with enigmatic breeding species in stunning scenery including near-mythical British rarities such as Pallas's Sandgrouse, White-winged and Black Larks.

This guide fills an important gap and should inspire adventurous birders, and stimulate a rapid growth in knowledge of the region's birdlife. Highly recommended.

**Stuart L. Rivers**

**Recent acquisitions to the George Waterston Library Fauna Scotica: animals and people in Scotland.** Polly Pullar & Mary Low, 2012. Birlinn Publishing, Edinburgh, ISBN 978-1-84158-561-1, hardback, 290 pages, £30.00.

Themed around the habitats of Scotland, this lavishly illustrated book features a wealth of information on hundreds of species and reflects their place in history.

**Birdwatcher's Yearbook 2013 (33rd edition).** Edited by David Cromack, 2012. Buckingham Press, Peterborough, ISBN 978-0-9569876-3-1, paperback, 328 pages, £18.50 (including p&p).

An essential work of reference for active birders and the wider world of ornithology featuring; fully updated checklists of birds, butterflies and dragonflies; details on 395 nature reserves, birding events calendar and much more.

**Studies of Birdlife in Uganda.** R.A.L. and V.G.L. van Someren. 1911. Donated by Peter Barton-Eckett who knew the brothers in Uganda. Contains 25 sepia photographic plates, images crisp and clear, with pamphlet.

**A Gentle Old Fashioned Pursuit - tales from the diary of the 20th century egg collector and naturalist John Christian.** Edited and published by Nick Christian.

**Karen Bidgood (Librarian)**

### Correction

**Birdwatching on Mull and Iona: A Pocket Guide with Maps.** David Sexton and Philip Snow 2011. This is in fact a complete revision and update and not a reprint as was stated in *Scottish Birds* 33 (1). The text has been rewritten and the book given a new look. Apologies to the authors.

# Swainson's Thrushes in Scotland in autumn 2012

D. BROWN, S.L. RIVERS & C.D. SCOTT



Plate 143. *Swainson's Thrush*, Foula, Shetland, September 2012. © Dan Brown

Two Swainson's Thrushes were found in Scotland in autumn 2012: the first was on Foula - the first record for the island and eighth for Shetland; the other was on Barra and was the second record for the Outer Hebrides.

## Swainson's Thrush on Foula 23 September 2012

Foula can be hard work to bird, but when the going's good, it's great. Since arriving on the island, we'd witnessed a superb fall of scarcities but were still awaiting something a little more mouth-watering. Having birded Harrier, the 'northern team' headed south to Burns before continuing onwards towards Ham. A small derelict croft to the west of the road was next on the list of sites to check. As I approached Gossa Meadow, a bird in flight on the far side of the croft caught my attention before dropping into the wet grassland and iris beds. As it took flight again I caught the stunning underwing pattern of a *Catharus* thrush! I radioed the rest of the team knowing that they were close by. The bird ditched again before immediately carrying on over a low rise and out of sight.

Sprinting across the bog, I found the thrush clinging to the top wire of the fence. A few quick shots with the Digital-SLR and then a binocular view confirmed it was a Swainson's Thrush. Paul French quickly arrived alongside me to enjoy

great views of the bird, which had now moved 30 m further down the fence. The remaining crew saw the bird from further back before it took flight across the moor.



Plate 144. *Swainson's Thrush*, Foula, Shetland, September 2012. © Paul French

Fortunately, Garry Taylor relocated the bird down the burn half-an-hour later before it headed out across the moor again. A further half-an-hour later, the bird was finally pinned down to Da Loch croft, where it gave excellent views at times. The bird appeared freshly-in by its unsettled behaviour.

The finding of this bird was an incredibly exciting start to two weeks on Foula, with the teams finding a Blyth's Pipit, two Olive-backed Pipits, two Blyth's Reed Warblers, a Sykes's Warbler, and a number of scarcities.

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### Swainson's Thrush on Barra 2-4 October 2012

Our autumn trip to Barra in 2012 had started slowly. Very few migrants were present on arrival and there seemed little prospect of any decent movement of birds under the prevailing weather conditions. In fact we only logged 84 species by the end of our first week. A Buff-bellied Pipit at Smerclate on the adjacent coast of South Uist was a strong lure, a Scottish tick for SLR, and after three days of few birds on Barra he buckled, and Tony O'Connor and SLR went twitching. Such off-island excursions invite derision from other crew members and reminders of our near miss in 2002 when a trip to see a Snowy Owl on North Uist ended with four of us rushing back panicking that we would



**Plate 145.** Swainson's Thrush, Morghan, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2012. © Angus Hogg



**Plate 146.** Swainson's Thrush, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2012. © Mark Oksien

miss a Red-eyed Vireo found on Barra in our absence, and a much more sought-after prize.

By Tuesday of our second week, the wind had turned westerly and we hoped that would encourage migration. Following the bad example set previously, Calum Scott and Mark Newell left Barra to go in search of the Buff-bellied Pipit - a life tick for both. The derisory banter and "You'll regret it!" comments flowed.

Around midday Iain English and SLR headed south down the east side of the island, and our first stop was the isolated garden of Northbay House at Morghan (not actually in Northbay) on the west side of Loch na Obe. As usual we split up to check different parts of the garden, though shortly before 12:30 we met up again among the trees in the south side of the garden. Having seen nothing new we started to walk back to the car. Iain was ahead of me and had just emerged at the lawn in front of the house while I was a few yards behind, still inside the tree cover.

A bird flew up behind me and landed in the lower branches of a nearby pine. I expected it to be the local Robin or the Song Thrush I has seen earlier. However, it was somewhat intermediate in size and I raised my binoculars for a better look. The bird was facing away from me and I was looking at it from slightly below, but I could see that it was basically thrush-like and that the upperparts and tail were uniformly olive-brown. Interest turned to excitement and I alerted Iain to

the possibility that I was looking at an American thrush. As he walked round to join me the bird turned its head to the left to reveal a huge buffy eye-ring and loreal mark, a buffish-white throat and breast with small blackish spots. I told him I was now certain I was looking at a Swainson's Thrush! A moment later Iain told me he was also certain we were looking at a Swainson's Thrush. A few expletives and words of congratulation followed and we phoned the news out. The lads on South Uist were the first to hear!

The bird spent a lot of time out of view, and was generally secretive, but regularly moved through the trees between a blackcurrant bush by the south stone wall and the small orchard behind the house. It was secretive, but gave good views, and though harassed several times by the resident Robin never flew far from its two favoured sites. On the afternoon of 2 October I twice saw the bird apparently sunbathing for long periods. It remained in the garden until the evening of 3rd, but was not there the next morning.

Early afternoon of 4 October saw Keith Gillon, Tony O'Connor and CDS arrive at the small wooded glen at Creachan, near Brevig. Mark

Oksien was already there with his nets up and had just caught a Red-breasted Flycatcher.

At 13:45 Mark headed off to do his net rounds once more, and I walked with him towards the woodland but stopped to check the garden next to it. As Mark passed through the entrance gate to the wood several birds flew up into a tree within the garden. One immediately seemed interesting, and on raising my binoculars I was rewarded with a three second or so view of a largely obscured Swainson's Thrush! It shifted position and showed itself for a few more seconds, but this time in full view. It then flew SSE past a line of trees on the opposite side of the garden.

Despite a thorough search we could not relocate it. It seemed that the bird had dropped into the impenetrable mass of vegetation inside at the bottom of the next (southernmost) garden and after a while we headed off. My parting words to Mark were that since he had his nets up in the garden already he just might catch it!

Just after 16:10 that afternoon Mark texted that he had indeed caught the bird, and we all enjoyed close-up views as the bird was duly



Plate 147. Swainson's Thrush, Creachan, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2012. © Bruce Taylor

ringed, processed and released. We did not see the bird again, although the fact that tree-felling and coppicing work was undertaken within that garden over the following days hardly helped matters!

### One bird or two?

When CDS found the Swainson's Thrush at Creachan we were in two minds about it being a different individual. The Hermit Thrush on Barra in 2010 had alerted us to the possibility the original bird had moved only a short distance rather than the new location of the find automatically indicating a new individual was involved.

When ringing the thrush, Mark informed us that it had a fat score of zero and showed depletion of the breast muscles. This surprised us at first, since the bird at Morghan had fed well and we expected it to show some result of this. However, we did not know just how emaciated the bird was on arrival, and the bird at Morghan certainly looked exhausted in the first few hours of observation.

Despite close examination of the photographs we can find nothing to indicate that the birds at Morghan and Creachan were different individuals. One feature which suggests that the same bird was actually involved was the asymmetrical colouration of the bill - notably darker on the left compared to the right side. This was observed in the field and photographed on the bird at Morghan, and was evident when the Creachan bird was examined in the hand. We do not know how common it is for young Swainson's Thrushes to show differences in bill pattern/colour development on the two sides, but it seems to be a strong point in favour of the same bird being involved in the sightings.

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### Swainson's Thrush status in Scotland

*This Nearctic species breeds mostly in taiga habitat from Alaska to California east to the Newfoundland coast and south to the Appalachian Mountains and Virginia. The entire population is migratory, with central and eastern*

*populations wintering in small numbers in Honduras and Panama and mostly from Colombia and Venezuela south through western and central South America to northern Argentina.*

*Up to the end of 2004 there were 24 Swainson's Thrush records in Britain with seven of those in Scotland (Forrester et al, 2007). There have been five further accepted records in Britain to the end of 2011, all of them in Scotland:*

**2007:** *One at Houbie, Fetlar, Shetland on 28 September to 4 October.*

**2010:** *One at Lower Stoneybrek, Fair Isle on 15 September.*

**2010:** *A first-winter at Levenwick, South Mainland, Shetland on 2–3 October.*

**2011:** *A first-winter at Dalsetter, Yell, Shetland on 21–23 September.*

**2011:** *A first-winter at Kirbuster, Birsay, Mainland, Orkney on 21 October.*

*Swainson's Thrushes have now been found in Scotland between 15 September and 25 October (the latter at Scatness, Shetland in 1980 lingered to 29 October).*

*Interestingly both British records in 2012 were also from Scotland, and there appears to have been a definite shift in the pattern of occurrence in recent years. Up to 1999 just four of the 18 British records were in Scotland, but from 2000 to date 10 of the 13 records have been in Scotland. Although an increase in observer coverage on the Northern and Western Isles in autumn in recent years could explain the rise in Scottish records, the absence of records from well-watched areas in SW England, and the Isles of Scilly in particular, suggests that there has been a real northward shift in occurrence.*

*The Fair Isle bird in 2010 is the earliest date for an individual found in Britain, with the Yell individual of 2011 the second earliest, and the Foula bird in 2012 the third. This supports the idea that changes in timing of movements of birds along the northern parts of the eastern seaboard of North America and in the timing and track of transatlantic weather systems seem the most likely factors involved with the northerly shift in recent records.*



## White's Thrush, Creachan, Barra, Outer Hebrides, October 2012

C.D. SCOTT

**Plate 148.** *White's Thrush, Creachan, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 13 October 2012.* © Stuart L. Rivers

Barra in autumn 2012 had been a successful trip for me after seeing and finding a range of species, which included the re-location of the Swainson's Thrush that had been present on the island for two days before going missing from its regular haunt.

However, towards the end of the trip things had begun to quieten down though continuing easterlies on the east coast, along with several good birds present there, meant that this could not last for much longer. Indeed, the previous day had seen a small arrival of Redwings and Blackcaps on Barra, and on our last full day, the winds had eased with bright sunshine and calm conditions - perfect weather for rarity finding on Barra.

Several birds were new-in, including hundreds of thrushes, mainly Redwings, but with other species amongst them such as Brambling, Redstart and two Pied Flycatchers. This was good news as the flycatchers were our first of the trip, and Redstart can be a positive rarity at times on Barra. As usual, we had all given our last remaining day on the island our best shot, but by late afternoon it was looking like we had failed to clinch anything solid!

With only around two hours daylight left for birding, I arrived at Creachan Community Woodland, near to Breibhig, where Mark Oksien had set up his usual nets through the middle of the wood. At around 15:40, I heard what I thought sounded like a bird hitting one of the nets, so I walked round and carefully peered down the net ride. There was a bird - a thrush - and as I raised my binoculars, that was when the fun and games began. Was it a Fieldfare? Could it be a White's Thrush? Was it a Hebridean Song Thrush? It's got chevrons on the flanks, it is a White's Thrush! No, it's just a Mistle Thrush. No, it can't be; Mistle Thrush has spots not chevrons! Then, as it moved in the net, there before me was an apparition sent from the birding gods in the shape of a bold black and white underwing pattern along with beautifully chevroned breast and flanks! It would be fair to say that I totally lost it at this point!

I ran screaming like a banshee to Mark Oksien, and as he came running to see what all the clamour was about, I just ran straight past him babbling out "I don't believe it!" and pointing to the bird in the net before jumping in the car and tearing up the road in order to get mobile reception to alert the other lads on the island.

The bird was duly processed, ringed and released into the garden, where it gave fleeting in-flight views up to 17:30. On its release, the large size was evident as it even glided like a Sparrowhawk around the base of a tree and into the undergrowth, showing off its broad white tips to the tail as it went.

*This record has been accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee.*

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### White's Thrush status in Scotland

This species has distinct northern and southern breeding populations, with British sightings all believed to derive from the former, much larger and more widely distributed population (comprised of the subspecies *Zoothera dauma aurea*). This breeds in taiga habitat from just west of the Ural Mountains eastwards through central and southern Russia, northernmost Mongolia, north-east China and Korea to the Sea of Japan and northern Japan. The entire northern population is migratory and winters in southern Japan, through south-east China to easternmost Myanmar, north Thailand, Laos and northern Vietnam.

There have been 76 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2011, with 41 of these in Scotland. *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) has details of the 30 birds seen up to the end of 2004, the 11 individuals in Scotland since then are:

**2005, 28 April:** One at Wester Quarff, South Mainland, Shetland

**2007, 2 October:** A first-winter found dead at Kennaby, Fair Isle.

**2007, 13 October:** A first-winter at Sumburgh, South Mainland, Shetland.

**2008, 1 October:** One at Rippack, Fair Isle.

**2008, 1 October:** One at Heswalls, Fair Isle.

**2008, 8 October:** One at Quoy and Midway, Fair Isle.

**2008, 13–18 October:** A first-winter at Kergord, Central Mainland, Shetland.

**2008, 24 October:** One at Parkhill, Dyce, North-east Scotland.

**2009, 2 June:** A first-summer on the Isle of May.

**2009, 10 October:** One at Hjukni Geo, Fair Isle.

**2010, 26 September:** One at Swinister, Sandwick, South Mainland, Shetland.

The only other British record in that time period was one at Thorgumbald, Hull, in Yorkshire on 21 October 2007. In addition to the Barra individual, three others were seen in Britain in 2012 - one on Inner Farne, Northumberland on 24 September, one at St. Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay, Orkney on 27 September, and one in the Cot Valley, St. Just, Cornwall on 8 October.

The 2005 Wester Quarff and 2009 Isle of May individuals were unusual in that they both occurred in spring, the first records in this season in Scotland. The remaining nine Scottish records since 2004 all fit within the previous established autumn peak of find dates from 21 September (St. Kilda, Outer Hebrides 1993) to mid-November (Fair Isle 1948).

There has been a marked change in the percentage of accepted British records occurring in Scotland in the last decade or so, with 40% of records (21/53) to the end of 1999 being in Scotland, but 91% (20/22) from 2000 to the end of 2011. This may reflect increased observer numbers present on Shetland and Fair Isle, though coverage in these areas has been relatively high for well over a decade, and so real changes in this species vagrancy pattern appear to have occurred.

The distribution of the Scottish records from 2005–11 is even more biased to the north than that seen previously, with nine on Shetland/Fair Isle (82%) compared to 60% up to the end of 2004. The Dyce individual in 2008 was the second record for North-east Scotland following one at Castlehill, Aberdeen on 6 October 1913, while the Isle of May bird in 2009 was the first record for that recording area.

Prior to 2012 there have been three accepted records of White's Thrush on the Outer Hebrides (singles on St Kilda on 21 September 1993; North Tolsta, Lewis on 14–26 October 1998 and Brue, Lewis on 11–12 October 2004) and one on Orkney (Stronsay on 3 October 1990).

# Laughing Gull, Rosehearty, December 2012 - a first for North-east Scotland

H. MAGGS



**Plates 149–150.** *Laughing Gull, Rosehearty, North-east Scotland, December 2012.* © Hywel Maggs

Firsts for the region have been falling like flies in recent years here in the North East. Semipalmated Sandpiper, Pallid Harrier, Paddyfield and Blyth's Reed Warbler being amongst some of the more predictable species to have fallen in the last three years accompanied by a whole host of much rarer species also being added to the regional list. Bonaparte's and Franklin's Gulls were new in 2005 and 2006 consecutively, leaving Laughing Gull arguably overdue - until now.

On 19 December I had been carrying out RSPB agricultural advisory work. Before meeting a Rosehearty farmer, I decided to have my lunch in the harbour on the off-chance there might be a white-winger about. As I drove from Peathill I noticed a large number of small gulls in the grass field next to the road by the golf clubhouse (I try to check this field when I am in the area as there is often a wet pool close to the road that has held waders and gulls in previous years). I quickly noticed a very dark-mantled gull amongst the Common and Black-headed Gulls, which I instantly thought looked 'good'.

I pulled up at the side of the field and binned the bird. My first reaction was it had to be a 'laugher', but the weather was awful (very dull, strong winds and rain) so I wanted to get better views before confirming my suspicions. I started thinking about the key features based on my



knowledge of the literature and distant memories of the last 'laughers' I had seen back in the early 1990s.

Structurally the bird appeared slightly larger than Black-headed, but smaller than Common Gull. The size difference between the Black-headed Gulls and this bird was similar to the size difference between Black-headed and Mediterranean Gull, although the laughers appeared long winged and far more attenuated at the back end. I was actually quite surprised at how slight the bird appeared. My search image of Laughing Gull had included something more robust, but after such a long time since seeing the species, clearly I was a bit rusty. The bill was slightly longer and more robust than Black-headed Gull but not overly, and I would not have described it as being particularly droopy. There was no obvious red spot at the tip and the entire bill appeared black (however, the bird was actively feeding in wet grassland, which may have influenced the appearance of bill colour). The head looked relatively small and the legs were proportionately longer than the nearby feeding gulls. The bird flew closer, which

allowed me much better views through bins and telescope. At this point I called Tim Marshall (whom I had seen earlier in the day) and others. Tim soon arrived with a camera. We quickly got some snaps and put the news out more widely.

The bird showed extensively dusky grey flanks, breast sides and nape. The dark grey became broken at the back of the head by paler feathering before a much darker band extending from the dark ear coverts around the back of the crown, where it became thinner and almost broken. This gave the impression of the bird wearing headphones. The crown and throat were white with some darker flecks. There was an obvious pale crescent above and below the eye. A prominent dark area in front of the eye extended more thinly around the entire eye and joined the ear coverts. At close range this gave the bird a spectacled appearance. The mantle was dark grey. I estimated it to be almost as dark as in Western Lesser Black-backed Gull. There did not appear to be any white in the closed black primaries but from pictures of the open wing, the tips to P7 on both wings was white. The belly and vent were white.

In flight, the upperparts looked very dark, with extensive black on all primaries but with grey on the outer web of the inner primaries which also showed white tips. The primary coverts were also predominantly black with grey on the outer web on the inner feathers. The secondaries were a mix of grey and black with broad white tips. The black formed a distinct dark bar, contrasting with the white trailing edge, which broadened towards the body. The white central tail feathers appeared to have been replaced and looked fresh. The rest of the tail was a little tatty and with a prominent black patch towards the tip of T2 and darker smudges on T3–4. This gave a hint of the faint dark band on the white tail, broken by the two fresh central feathers.

A combination of the features mentioned above suggested the bird was in its second calendar year.

After watching the bird for an hour and 20 minutes, I left to visit the farmer I had arranged to meet. He was actually quite interested in the Laughing Gull and suggested it must have been brought in by the recent sweeping depression

across the Atlantic. He was however quite surprised that anyone would be particularly enthusiastic about a 'seagull'. The bird was subsequently seen in the same field and around the nearby Phingask shore intermittently up until New Year's Eve (at the time of writing) and mainly in the early morning.

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

### Laughing Gull status in Scotland

According to *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007), the first Scottish Laughing Gull was found on Loch Lomond (Clyde) in April 1968. There followed a further 21 records until the end of 2004 with Argyll, Angus & Dundee, Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Fair Isle, Lothian, Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland all adding the species to the regional lists. In years when the species was recorded, most annual tallies amounted to just one bird apart from in 1983, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 2001, when two were recorded.

Post BS3, there have been 20 records according to British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) reports up to and including 2011, which would take the Scottish total to 42 (a record from Shetland in 2005 is mentioned in some literature, but it is not included in the accepted records in the BBRC reports, so is not included here). The species has been recorded in every year since 2005 apart from 2008 and 2010. The highest year count was in 2005 and 2006 when six were accepted in each. Four were recorded in 2009 and two each were found in 2007 and 2011. The west of the country holds approximately 57% of records, with the Outer Hebrides and Argyll being the western 'hotspots'. The majority of eastern records unsurprisingly come from Shetland with only six from the mainland.

Birds in 2005 were part of the UK invasion during November and December. This influx was thought to be the result of Hurricane Wilma, which tracked north eastwards up the eastern seaboard of the US in late October. Over 50 Laughing Gulls were found in the UK during this period. The 22 in 2006 (including the six in Scotland) were probably connected to this influx.

*Hywel Maggs, Newburgh, Aberdeenshire.*

# Chestnut-eared Bunting, Virkie, Shetland, October 2012 - the second record for Scotland

R.M. FRAY



Plate 151. Chestnut-eared Bunting, Virkie, Shetland, October 2012. © Hugh Harrop

During the morning of 23 October 2012, Iain Robertson discovered a very skulking small bunting in a roadside ditch adjacent to the northern shore of the Pool of Virkie, Shetland. It refused to give good views, consistently burying itself in long grass, but the combination of small size, chestnut ear coverts, prominent eye-ring, crown stripe and call led Iain to conclude that the bird was a Little Bunting, albeit one which he hadn't seen particularly satisfactorily. As the site was only a couple of hundred yards from my house, Iain texted me about the bird, and a little later I wandered along the road with my dog to have a look at it.

Initially there was no sign of the bird, but after about 20 minutes of searching it flushed from roadside grass and pitched down in a nearby ditch. The bird was very uncooperative, and



Plate 152. Chestnut-eared Bunting, Virkie, Shetland, October 2012. © Jim Nicolson

stubbornly refused to show itself sensibly. Something didn't seem quite right with it, which I couldn't put my finger on, but I wrongly assumed that Iain had seen the bird better than me and on the views I was getting I couldn't think what else it could be other than a Little Bunting. After an hour or so, the bird gave one reasonable, but very brief view, before flying back along the road and burying itself again in long grass. I managed to take a few photos of it at this time; little did I know how important they would turn out to be!

This would have probably been the end of the story, but just prior to heading for work in the evening I posted a photo of the Virkie 'Little Bunting' on the *Nature in Shetland* facebook page. A couple of hours later, during a lull (i.e. sneaky cigarette break) in work, I checked my phone and was alarmed to note that I had received 28 texts and loads of missed calls. This could only be bad news. A family death? Maybe my house had burned down? No, it was much worse than that: chaos had broken out amongst the birding fraternity and the 'Virkie bunting' was being reidentified by some as a Chestnut-eared. To Iain and my eternal displeasure, neither of us had considered Chestnut-eared Bunting at the time.

Attempting to follow the debate whilst working behind the bar at Sumburgh Hotel proved difficult, but eventually Iain arrived at the hotel armed with back-up in the form of my laptop and a couple of additional pairs of fresh eyes. During quiet periods, we discussed, analysed and

agonised over the photos, and managed to post a couple more on Facebook for further discussion. We could all see the pros and cons for Chestnut-eared, but felt a little less confident than others, particularly given the vagaries of interpreting the identification of a potential second for Britain on the basis of a few poor photographs. The two of us who had seen the bird in the field maintained that it felt 'small', and neither of us had noted any warm rufous tones in the rump when it flew. We plumped for Little. None of us slept very well that night.

The following morning (24 October), Paul Harvey was at the site at dawn, and had two or three flight views of the bird. He could add little to the debate at this time: it looked small, and had given a few Little Bunting-type 'tic' calls, although he noted that it appeared "long-tailed". Along with several other local birders, I arrived at the site a short time later; hearing Paul's comment about the bird being "long-tailed" was enough to provoke me into texting Iain, who was preparing to go to work, to say "I have a horrible feeling this could end badly". After more searching, the bird finally gave itself up and perched on a wall, allowing the first decent view of it. By now we were almost expecting it to be a Chestnut-eared, and so it proved: the combination of chestnut cheeks set in a rather greyish-tinged and subtle head pattern, rufous shoulder patches, relatively dense streaking on the breast gorget and a soft peachy wash on the underparts meant that we had a third for the Western Palearctic on our hands. I rang Iain to give him the 'good' news; neither of us had ever felt so deflated by the appearance of a huge rarity on our doorstep.

With the news out and the weather improving rapidly, the bird, rather predictably, began to behave itself and showed well at times, even feeding in the road on a number of occasions. It was still present, and twitched successfully by a couple of charter planes, on 25 October, but wasn't seen on the 26th, a day of bitterly cold wind and intermittent blizzards.

This represents the second record of Chestnut-eared Bunting for Shetland and Scotland, with the first being on Fair Isle in October 2004. The identification of that bird, which is well covered in the accounts of its occurrence (Shaw, 2004a,



**Plate 153.** Chestnut-eared Bunting, Virkie, Shetland, October 2012. © Jim Wood

2004b, 2008), also caused some initial headaches. The only other Western Palearctic record was of one seen on Understen, Uppland (Sweden) in October 2011. Clearly, with three sightings in western Europe in just eight years, birders should be on the lookout for this subtle, yet attractive, bunting. Hopefully, future finders won't make the same mistakes as we did.

Credit should be given for the correct identification to Owen Foley, Jane Turner and Josh Jones from the photos on the first night and to Mark Chapman, Hugh Harrop and Paul Harvey for ID confirmation in the field next morning.

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

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Plate 154. *Black-throated Thrush, Banchory, North-east Scotland, March 2013.* © Harry Scott

## Black-throated Thrush, Banchory, 25–30 March 2013 - first record for North-east Scotland

### H. ADDLESEE

The food that my mother (Ann) puts out daily in her small suburban garden in the Hill of Banchory in Deeside attracts a good variety of birds. Past highlights have included an all-too-brief Hawfinch, and the occasional Waxwing or Yellowhammer. Great Spotted Woodpeckers provide regular entertainment, as do Siskins and Bramblings according to season, while Tree Sparrows were a nice addition last year and went on to raise three broods in next door's nest-box. Apart from Blackbirds, thrushes are, however, generally scarce, so my mum was happy to report that a Fieldfare had been around for much of the afternoon of 25 March.

Always a nice bird, but I didn't think much more about it until 08:10 the following morning when, as I was making my sandwiches, a thrush appeared on the lawn. Its contrasting dark bib instantly looked interesting, but the light was still quite poor. Rushing off for my binoculars, I firmly requested my mother, who was eating her breakfast at the table, not to move! Unfortunately, when I returned seconds later, I only got a brief glimpse before the thrush flew off; my frustration was compounded by my flushing it by trying my luck from the living room window - I was near-certain of the identification, but a slight doubt remained, and I obviously

wanted to see more of it in any case. The best move seemed to be to top up the food supplies and wait - thankfully I had nothing too urgent at work, and so could be flexible with my hours. Apple, cheese and bread went out, along with the usual nuts and seeds. As time passed, some less welcome species (today, at least) dropped in - Herring Gull, Rook and Magpie, all attracted by the sudden glut of food, and not helpful when hoping for a possibly timid thrush!

After a tense hour's wait, the thrush finally reappeared, and showed well for a full ten minutes: enough for record shots, a bit of note-taking, and to simply enjoy it. Next up was what to do about releasing news. I tried calling Paul Baxter - getting no answer, I sent him a text. It wasn't long before Paul called back; his first words were "You're not going to like this, but...". It turned out that Paul was already aware of the presence of a Black-throated Thrush in Banchory, but he didn't know where, and he had in fact just been on the phone trying to find out! Of course, this news didn't relate to my mum's garden, but to someone else's. It transpired that Tom Gray, living a few hundred metres further west in Banchory, had photographed an unusual-looking bird in his garden the previous day. Through a friend, his photographs had ended up at a ringers' meeting in the evening, where the identification had been confirmed, and the news had then made it to Paul. Anyway, it had since taken more of a liking to my mum's feeders - it was, of course, her "Fieldfare" of the same day.



Plate 155. *Black-throated Thrush*, Banchory, North-east Scotland, March 2013. © Tom Gray



Plate 156. *Black-throated Thrush*, Banchory, North-east Scotland, March 2013. © Harry Scott

Paul passed on the news that it was in our garden to a few trusted people, but I couldn't release it further without checking that my mum, who'd gone out, didn't mind a small invasion of her kitchen/ dining room! The thrush was by now putting in fairly regular appearances, and I was happy for Harry Scott to pop along from Aboyne when he got in touch. Once my mum returned, she agreed on access until about 5 p.m., with Harry kindly offering to linger to assist her if required, as by now I really did need to get to the office and do some work. I settled on releasing the news on a restricted basis on the local text grapevine, with the request not to spread the news further; at least then the keenest local birders/twitchers could get to see it while I considered the implications of any wider access. Or at least that was the theory... Unfortunately, a Birdguides text-alert soon made me aware that the news was out - somebody, probably not directly associated with any of the main news providers, had apparently helpfully tapped into the webfeed from the text-messaging and entirely disregarded my caveats. I trust that the doors will be flung open at their own or their relative's house come the day!



Plate 157. *Black-throated Thrush*, Banchory, North-east Scotland, March 2013. © Harry Scott

Twenty-two birders made it on the 26th, and all departed having had good views.

The following day, we allowed general access for a two-hour slot in the morning, when I held the fort, and another in the afternoon, with Nick Littlewood kindly assisting my mum. The morning session went well, with all 14 visitors connecting. Unfortunately, one latecomer, who somehow knew where to come, but apparently not the viewing times, and who I'd turned away (having checked that it wasn't presently in the garden, and urgently needing to get on with some work) proceeded to make his way through the undergrowth from the track behind the house to peer through the fence. This disturbance may have been the cause of the bird's non-appearance over lunch and throughout the afternoon session, when about eight unfortunates dipped. In terms of general access, this was the end of the story. Negative news had gone out during the session, I was tied up with site work and other commitments

for the rest of the week, my mum had enjoyed chatting to the visitors, but already wanted to get back to her normal routine, and the prospect of an entirely unknown number of Easter holiday twitchers wasn't greatly appealing. The bird did, however, reappear - about five minutes after the session had ended, albeit briefly. It was then regularly in the garden right through to the 30th, after which it wasn't seen again. Various locals continued to visit and see the bird throughout the remainder of its stay, including most of those who had dipped on the afternoon of the 27th. In total, nearly 50 people saw it from inside the house, and I think this includes almost everybody to whom its significance as the first for the region means most. To those who didn't get the chance to see it, I can only hope that you'll understand and that the next one will be somewhere more convenient.

The thrush principally fed on bits of apple while in the garden. Despite being smaller than the Blackbirds, it frequently tried to chase them from around the feeder, and was generally a bit of a bully - for this reason, my mum wasn't sad when it finally went, and her regular birds could get some peace!

The thrush arrived during a period of snowy weather, and there was a fresh covering of light snow most mornings of its stay, though this generally melted away by lunchtime; its departure coincided with a gradual change to milder conditions. I presume it to have been a northbound migrant, but it may perhaps have been displaced from wherever it had wintered by the heavy snowfall across northern England and southern Scotland at the time of its appearance in Banchory.

### Description

The thrush was structurally similar to Blackbird, but a shade smaller and slimmer with shorter legs. Its upperparts were generally grey-brown, with the back slightly paler than the mantle, and the flight feathers and tail blacker. The outer webs of the flight feathers were fringed with buff/off-white. A small amount of rufous colouration was apparent at either side of the tail base.

The base colour of the underparts right through to and including the undertail coverts was a

clean white. The flanks were streaked with brown, but the most striking feature was a scaly bib of black feathering, more streaky on the throat. The lores were slightly darker than the rest of the face, and there were traces of a white supercilium. The eyes were dark. The bill was golden yellow, with a darker culmen and tip. The legs were orange-pink.

Ageing and sexing of Black-throated Thrushes is not always straightforward, but I am led to believe that the growth bars visible in the tail, and the apparent mix of adult inner and juvenile outer greater and median coverts indicates this to be a first-winter bird; note that the pale tips to the juvenile greater coverts are presumed to have worn off, leaving them looking much more similar to the new feathers. The extent of the black gorget, particularly the streaking on the entire throat, confirms it as a male.

The red tinge at the base of the tail is somewhat unusual for a Black-throated Thrush, and may indicate some genetic influence from Red-throated Thrush. Paul Baxter discussed the feature with Arend Wassink, author of *Birds of Kazakhstan*. Arend regularly comes across birds with red in the base of the tail, but is unsure whether this is normal and within the range of Black-throated Thrush or whether it points to a hybrid origin. However, in the absence of any other plumage features indicative of intergradation, it would seem harsh to judge the Banchory bird as a hybrid.

**Hugh Addlesee, Banchory, Aberdeenshire.**

### **Black-throated Thrush status in Scotland**

*Black-throated Thrush* was formerly considered by BOURC to be one of the two forms/races of *Dark-throated Thrush* (together with *Red-throated Thrush*), but in 2009 it was elevated to full-species status (as *Turdus atrogularis*). It breeds from European Russia through the Ural Mountains and central Siberia to the Altai Mountains and NW Mongolia. Though variable (small) numbers may overwinter, the vast majority of the population migrates to wintering areas from Iraq and Iran eastwards through Afghanistan and from southern Kazakhstan to the Himalayas, northern India and SW China.

*There have been 71 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2012, with 37 of these in Scotland. Up to the end of 2004 there had been 27 records in Scotland (see Forrester et al. 2007), with a steady increase in numbers found in recent decades from three in the 1970s, five in the 1980s, 11 in 1990s, 12 in 2000s and four from 2010–12. The ten Scottish records since 2004 are as follows:*

- 2005 Shetland, 1st-winter female, Geosetter, Mainland, 4 October*  
*Fair Isle, 1st-winter female, 21–22 October*  
*Fair Isle, male, 23–24 October*
- 2006 Shetland, 1st-winter female, Foula, 7–9 October*
- 2007 Clyde Islands, 1st-winter male, Isle of Bute, 1 January to 26 March*  
*Fair Isle, 1st-winter female, Steensie Geo, 23 April*
- 2010 Highland, adult female, Melvich, 2 October*  
*Orkney, adult male, Long Hill, Kirkwall, 16 October*  
*Fair Isle, 1st-winter male, Dutfield, 23–28 October*
- 2012 Fair Isle, 1st-winter male, Hill Dyke/Barkland, 6 October*

*The Banchory bird is the fourth record for the Scottish mainland, with all others found on the Northern Isles. The records since 2004 all fit within the previous window of find dates from 23 September to 27 April. The Banchory individual recalls that on the Isle of Bute in 2007, which was also attracted to food put out for birds in a suburban garden. The latter bird was present for at least 67 days which exceeds the previous longest stay for this species in Scotland - 45 days by an adult male on Fair Isle in 1957/58, and similarly attracted to food scraps deliberately put out around the Observatory. The three birds seen in both 2005 and 2010 constitute new best year totals in Scotland - previously sitting at two birds in six different years.*

### **Reference**

- Forrester, R.W., Andrews, I.J., McInerny, C.J., Murray, R., McGowan, R.Y., Zonfrillo, B., Betts, M.W., Jardine, D.C. & Grundy, D. 2007. *The Birds of Scotland*. SOC, Aberlady.



Plate 158. *White-billed Diver, Isle of May, January 2013.* © Will Miles

## White-billed Diver, Isle of May, 23 January 2013 - the first island record

W.T.S. MILES & M.A. NEWELL

**WM:** Early on 23 January, I was standing on the pier at Anstruther feeling happy, lucky, and rather cold. I was with Mark Newell, Jenny Sturgeon and Carrie-Marrell Gunn, joining them for three days of fieldwork on the Isle of May - one seabird island I had long wanted to visit! Following several days of severe, sub-zero, south-easterly storms, the weather had finally calmed and, remarkably, the sea had become passable. However, snow and ice still lay thick on the ground, and now and then we were hit by swirls of loose crystals, swept across the water on the last gusts of a bitter wind. The purpose of our visit was to collect data on the survival, distribution and diet of Shags: by re-sighting live colour-ringed birds, finding any dead individuals, and collecting regurgitated pellets - these contain prey remains which can be identified in the lab.

As we got closer and closer to the May, it became obvious that to the east of the island the sea was still fairly rough, but on the west side it was calm. Here, apparently sheltering

in the lee of the isle, were many Shags, auks, Kittiwakes and ducks, plus a handful of divers. Unlike the mainland, the island was free of snow, the soil was soft and not totally frozen, and it was soon obvious that a good number of migrant land birds were present, foraging over the uncovered earth and sheltering from the snowy weather elsewhere. These included over 50 Woodcock, small flocks of Blackbirds, Redwings and Fieldfares, a Buzzard, Merlin, Kestrel, three Twite and a smart Long-eared Owl.

JS and I reached Rona (the north end of the island) at the same time, around noon, and began to scan west, north and east for dead Shags. Looking west through a narrow gap in the cliff, suddenly I saw a diver pass by. It had appeared and disappeared in an instant, but clearly was big and had a yellowish bill! We ran to a better vantage point and looking down could see the bird well, very close in. Realising the species identification, and feeling rather out of place (away from my home on Fair Isle), I phoned MN.

**MN:** As we neared the island, and approached Kirkhaven, a Red-throated Diver took off from the water - an unusual sighting for me, so close to the isle rather than close to the Fife coast. After landing, I eventually headed north where I met CMG who mentioned seeing a diver off Altarstanes. Reaching this point on the west side a Great Northern Diver was a hundred metres offshore, making it a two diver day on the May.

Seeing WM and JS further north searching Rona, I began working my way back south checking the gullies for dead Shags. I hadn't got far when I received a call from WM in a state of extreme agitation as he announced that there was a White-billed Diver off the west side of Rona. I quickly phoned David Pickett, the reserve manager, and then hurried back north. A rapid scramble across the wet rocks brought me alongside WM and JS, and with DP who had made rapid progress from the south of the island. The White-billed Diver was in full view off North Horn Gully where it was regularly diving but easy to relocate as it drifted south towards West Head before returning to show exceptionally well below us. On occasions, it was seen in the same field

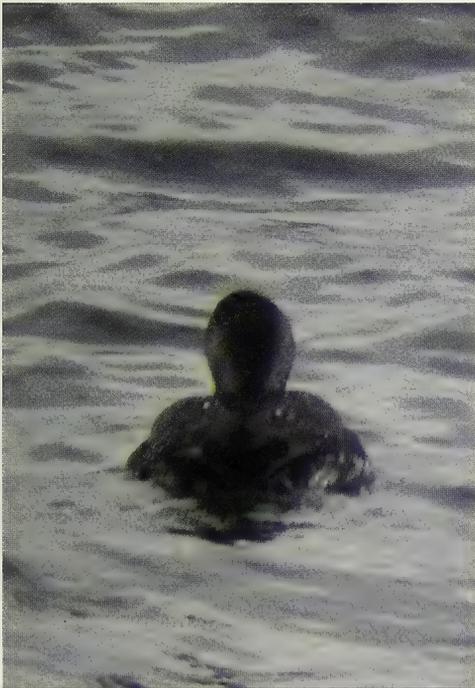


Plate 159. White-billed Diver, Isle of May, January 2013. © Will Miles

of view as a Great Northern Diver, one of at least four off the island, and in itself a record day count for the Isle of May! Further notable birds on the sea that day included two Black Guillemots and a Red-breasted Merganser, neither of which are annual on the island.

We eventually left the bird and carried on with our tasks, although later in the afternoon DP saw it again, further south off Pilgrims Beach. At least three Great Northern Divers were present the next day, but no sign of the White-billed Diver.

### Description

The bird was seen with a Great Northern Diver for much of the time and in direct comparison looked larger and chunkier. The plumage was basically white below and dark brown above. Dark blackish edging and mottling was apparent across many of the mantle, scapular, back and wing feathers, and there was a scatter of white spots over these areas too. The forehead was blackish-brown and very noticeably 'lumped' (more so than the Great Northern), while on each side of the head and neck were two distinctive, large, pale-grey patches. These gave the head a surprisingly stripy, pale-sided appearance when viewed from behind. The eye was small, dark and reddish, with a whitish surround that linked to the bird's white cheeks, chin and throat. The bill was striking. It was long, heavy and mostly pale yellow, shading to pale bluish-grey towards the base. The lower mandible was extremely heavy-looking and very distinctively shaped: angling sharply upwards from middle to tip. The angular, blade-like appearance of the bill was pronounced, and accentuated by the bird's tendency to hold its bill slightly upwards (as though brandishing it deliberately!). When diving, the bird seemed to remain underwater for an incredibly long time compared to the other species of diver around the May that day.

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Plate 160. White-billed Diver, Isle of May, January 2013. © Will Miles

### White-billed Diver status in Scotland

This species has a circumpolar breeding distribution with populations found from Novaya Zemlya eastwards along the north coast of Russia to the Bering Strait, and across northernmost Alaska and Canada. The winter distribution of birds is poorly known: most appear to winter in the northern Pacific, but some are noted annually off the Norwegian coast, with smaller numbers (100+) venturing further south into the North Sea and southern Baltic (Rogers 1997).

In April 2003, up to eight birds were observed near the Butt of Lewis, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, and since then a small spring passage of birds has been recorded annually off Lewis (Scott & Shaw 2008). These birds appear to link up with a small passage of birds that occurs off the coast of Norway (Bell 2006). The wintering area(s) used by the birds seen in north-west Scotland is not known.

The observations from Lewis indicate it is best regarded as a scarce migrant in those waters, and it is recorded virtually annually in Shetland (last blank year 2001) and Orkney (last blank year 2004), but elsewhere in Britain it remains a rare vagrant. There have been 345 accepted records of White-billed Diver in Scotland to the end of 2011. The Isle of May bird above is the first for that recording area, and along the Scottish east coast there has been one previous record in Borders (2007), nine in Lothian (last in 1991), four in Fife (1954, 1965, 1994, 2003), four in Angus (1950, 1952, 1954, 1998) and 21 in North-east Scotland (including a remarkable five different birds off Portsoy in April 2011).

Birds have been recorded in all months in Scotland, with the majority found in spring from mid-April to mid-June, a small peak in autumn and a somewhat larger number from mid-December to the end of March. The first accepted record of this species in Scotland was recently revised following re-identification of a specimen (wrongly labelled as a Great Northern Diver) held in the collection of the National Museum of Scotland and originally collected along the Sutherland coast in January 1890 (McGowan 2011).

### References

- Bell, J. 2006. Spring passage of White-billed Divers off southwest Norway. *Birding World* 19: 62–63.
- McGowan, R.Y. 2011. White-billed Diver: new first Scottish record. *Scottish Birds* 31: 315–317.
- Rogers, M.J. 1997. Migrant White-billed Divers in Britain & Ireland. *British Birds* 90: 292–293.
- Scott, M.S., & Shaw, K.D. 2008. The status of White-billed Diver in northwest Scotland. *British Birds* 101: 241–248.

### Footnote

Our knowledge of the winter/spring distribution of White-billed Divers is advancing rapidly: up to 18 were off Portsoy on 21 April 2013 (11+ from shore and 7+ from a boat): [http://andywebbsblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013\\_04\\_01\\_archive.html](http://andywebbsblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013_04_01_archive.html) & <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ABZ-Rare-Birds/message/8277> and 79 were estimated to be present on the Dogger Bank off Yorkshire in March 2010: [http://www.forewind.co.uk/uploads/files/Zonal%20characterisation%20document%20\(second%20version\).pdf](http://www.forewind.co.uk/uploads/files/Zonal%20characterisation%20document%20(second%20version).pdf).



Plate 161. *Harlequin Duck, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, March 2013.* © Steve Duffield

## Harlequin Duck on North Uist, Outer Hebrides, February–April 2013

### B. RABBITTS

The RSPB Balranald Nature Reserve on North Uist is perhaps best known in spring and summer for Corncrakes and a well-documented passage of Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas. Winter birding there can be rewarding too; for example two different Gyr Falcons were there last December, so I make frequent visits at this time of year. Most of my visits are centred on the area from the visitor centre to Aird an Rùnair and the various lochs. In February, Stuart Taylor informed me he had seen a Surf Scoter in the bay, presumably the same bird that was present for a while in late November/early December on Loch na Reivil at Hougharry. I had tried for it a couple of times with no success and on 18 February decided to have another look. Although Stuart had seen the scoter from Hougharry I thought my best chance was to view the bay from Aird an Rùnair. Although it was sunny there was quite a strong wind blowing so obviously

not the best of conditions for looking for a duck on the sea. As I arrived at the reserve, I bumped into Paul Boyer, who was just leaving and stopped for a chat. After five minutes or so I noticed what appeared to be an Iceland Gull in flight towards Tràigh Iar, the beach south of Aird an Rùnair. Normally I would scan the beach from there, but there are good feeding areas for gulls out of sight, so I decided on a change of plan and headed that way instead to look for the gull.

As I got to the beach there was no Iceland among the small number of gulls but there was a Glaucous so I got my camera out and took some distant shots. I then became aware of a dark duck close to the shore flying away. It looked like it was going to land close to a Shag but veered away and landed at some distance. It certainly looked interesting but I had no idea what it was even through the 'scope. As I was



**Plate 162.** Harlequin Duck, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, March 2013. © Jonathan Lethbridge/www.justbirdphotos.com

looking towards the sun the bird appeared dark overall and it was more out of sight than in due to the swell. Fleetingly scoter crossed my mind but the bird didn't look bulky enough and the head shape was wrong. A rapid walk down the beach to get closer and on this occasion when I picked it up it was close to a Black Guillemot. Still, I was puzzled with the glare just as bad so I moved even further and to get a bit of height sat on the top of the low dunes bordering the

beach. And when I got onto it again found, much to my astonishment, I was looking at a male Harlequin Duck! The wind and sun glare did not make for the best viewing conditions and it was difficult to make out any coloration other than the generally dark plumage relieved by prominent white marks. I contacted a couple of local birders that I knew were in the area and they soon arrived and others saw it later. Viewing conditions were very much better over



**Plate 164.** Harlequin Duck, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, April 2013. © Brian Rabbitts



**Plate 163.** Harlequin Duck, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, March 2013. © Steve Duffield

the ensuing weeks when more of its plumage could be appreciated. Although having many of the marks of an adult male the bird was clearly in first-winter plumage. Apparently there is a great variation of individual moult patterns to adult plumage. By early April spots of white were beginning to appear across the base of its neck. When not feeding the duck was often out loafing on the small island of Holaisgeir or on the rocks closer to the shore. When feeding it would bill dip a number of times before diving, only occasionally putting its head below the surface, and then only briefly. There was one alarming encounter when the duck was on the rocks and it stretched its neck in alarm and quickly flew off as an Otter came towards it. Other observers also mentioned alarm-posture when a pod of Harbour Porpoises was close by. The North Uist birding scene has been much enlivened by a constant stream of admirers from far and wide to see the first male for a long time. As far as I know this area hadn't been checked recently, so the Harlequin may have been present for some time. It turned out the North Uist bird was a long-stayer, being regularly seen up until 25 April and after a short absence was resighted again on 24–27 May. The chances are it would have been found eventually.

The Outer Hebrides now has the last three records of this duck in British waters. An untwitchable male for less than an hour in June 2007 on St Kilda and a female off Lewis from mid-January to well into May 2004. The circumstances leading to the Lewis bird becoming available to birders are worth recounting here. This came about by a chance encounter between a birder, Dave Pittman, who was staying at a North Uist B & B and a fellow guest and non-birder, Martin Haigh. Dave rang me one evening with the astonishing news that Martin had told him he had been watching a female Harlequin Duck for over a month! Although obviously interested enough to carry out some research into its identification Martin was not connected to any birding circle and the bird had remained unreported. As soon as the news was out many birders visited Lewis and were able to enjoy the duck until it departed in May.

**Brian Rabbitts**

Email: [rabbitts@hebrides.net](mailto:rabbitts@hebrides.net)



**Plate 165.** Harlequin Duck, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, March 2013. © Jonathan Lethbridge/[www.justbirdphotos.com](http://www.justbirdphotos.com)

### **The status of Harlequin Duck in Scotland**

*This species has a fragmented breeding range, from Central Siberia eastwards to the Bering Sea, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, through Alaska and NW USA south to Wyoming, and in NE Canada, southern Greenland and Iceland - disperses in winter along adjacent coasts south to NE China, California and New Jersey. Birds seen in Britain are generally believed to originate from Greenland and east Canada rather than the sedentary Icelandic population.*

*There have been 14 records of 17 birds in Britain up to the end of 2012, with ten (12 birds) of these in Scotland. Interestingly the first three records were all from northern England (1862, 1886, 1915/16), but all subsequent records have been in Scotland.*

*The most recent Scottish occurrence was of an adult male at St Kilda (Outer Hebrides) on 18 June 2007, and the majority of Scottish sightings are from the Outer Hebrides and north Scotland (Sound of Harris, OH 1931; a pair at Fair Isle 1965 - also seen Wick, Caithness; Sullom Voe, Shetland 1987; Wick, Caithness 1991; Fair Isle 1999; Coll, Lewis, OH 2004). The exceptions are a male (shot) at Denholm, Borders 1954; a female at Claggain Bay, Islay, Argyll 1987, and two first-summer females at Girvan, Ayrshire 1996.*

*In Scotland birds have been recorded from 11 January to 20 May and 15–31 October, with the 2007 St Kilda individual the only bird found in summer. Most (9/12) have been found in the earlier period. The female on Lewis in 2004 was present for at least 127 days, and several others have remained for protracted stays, though four were only seen on the day of discovery.*



Plate 166. Pine Grosbeak, Collafirth, Shetland, February 2013. © Rebecca Nason

## Pine Grosbeak on Shetland 2012/13

M.S. CHAPMAN & R.J. NASON

In late autumn 2012, an impressive irruption of Pine Grosbeaks began in Fenno-Scandinavia, starting with 1000s on the move in Finland in mid-late October, followed by a clear movement in Norway and Denmark in late October to early November. Of most relevance perhaps to the UK, especially Shetland, Pine Grosbeaks, along with good numbers of Waxwings started to arrive on the Norwegian west coast island of Utsira. The Utsira Bird Observatory's latest sightings webpage ([www.utsirafuglestasjon.no](http://www.utsirafuglestasjon.no)) lists the first two arriving on 27 October, 'slightly earlier' than in previous invasions, rising to five by the 30th and an amazing peak of 50 on 4 November; however none seemed to be reported further south than Denmark, so would one manage to cross the North Sea this time? The previous three British arrivals, in March 1992, November 2000 and November 2004 had been discovered just after a good easterly blast on each occasion. Locally, conditions were not particularly favourable at the time, except for overnight 31 October/1 November, the wind backing through a light south-east up to north-east 4 with rain.

On the morning of 1 November, Alistair and Marcia Williamson looked out of their kitchen window at Almara, Urafirth, north Mainland, to see a group of 18 Waxwings, the biggest group so far of the autumn, and a large, rather wet and bedraggled-looking finch feeding on their solitary Norwegian Spruce. It was hard to make out much detail, and the wing bars were not readily apparent, but the warm olive wash over much of the visible plumage together with the huge bill seemed best to fit a Crossbill when they checked a field guide. They clearly felt it was something interesting, as Alistair took scores of pictures. It stayed all day and most of the 2nd, feeding exclusively on the small tree. They posted a photo on their Facebook page, but this was not noticed by any of the local birders who occasionally view it, and the Williamson's then went on holiday, so it is not known if it remained in the area after the 2nd.

The north Mainland has few, if any, other conifers to the west or north of Urafirth, but the area a few miles to the north-east, around Collafirth, is almost

designer habitat for a lost *Pinacola*, and this is presumably where at some point it headed next. The area has two large conifer plantations and gardens of various sizes, with small relatively new plantings of various pine, spruce and fir species. This area is birded reasonably often by a handful of locals, and a few regular autumn visiting birders, and regular coverage in late October resulted in an Olive-backed Pipit and Arctic Warbler being found there, and a reasonable movement of finches was noted, including small groups of Common Crossbills, and also a big influx of Waxwings. These only started to appear in late October, and clearly peaked around the first few days of November, with nearly 1000 recorded in a co-ordinated Shetland-wide count (by the Nature-in-Shetland website) from the 2nd to the 4th, most of which rapidly moved south. Perhaps the Grosbeak had been caught up in that movement.

At Collafirth, Bert Ratter has a large garden in which he has planted a good number of sapling conifers. The tallest of these, again Norwegian Spruce, are probably no more than 2 m in height. On the morning of 29 January 2013, he just happened to notice a strange bird in one of these trees as he was looking out for the school bus, while his kids were getting ready for school. He knew it was something he hadn't seen before and thought it was some sort of finch. He took a few pictures of the bird, which was very tame, but with only a very basic British birds book, which did not seem to show it, he emailed some pictures to local birder Paul Sclater, a friend he used to work with, who he felt sure would know what it was. It was probably visible in the garden for five to ten minutes before it moved out of sight.

Paul, having been off for a few days, returned to work on 1 February and checked his emails that morning. He opened one of the pictures Bert sent, expecting it to be something common and was stunned when he immediately realised it was a Pine Grosbeak! He contacted a few local birders including George Petrie (GWP) and the news was circulated on the local birders text service. GWP, Jim Nicolson and Roger Tait had a good search in all the likely spots that morning, and Mark Chapman searched for the rest of the day over an even wider area, taking in all the larger plantations, but there was no sign.

Phil Harris and Rebecca Nason (RJN) had been in Shetland for 10 days during the end of January beginning of February 2013. They were unable to go and search for the bird that day due to other commitments, but along with friend Tim Cleeves, who had cancelled his flight south that afternoon after hearing of the sighting they would carry out a thorough search the following day before departing Shetland on the overnight ferry. Later that evening the news came through that the area had been searched by a few birders, but the bird had not been relocated, however they still intended to go the next morning.

The following morning 2 February, they arrived in North Collafirth at around 09:30 a.m. and began making a plan of where to start as there were several gardens with suitable habitat. As they reached the most northerly of these they were distracted by a ringtail Hen Harrier flying along the roadside, and followed this for a short while before heading back to their first search area. The garden of Saltoo had plenty of suitable cover including lots of young pines and along the roadside just north of the garden was a small Spruce plantation only 10 x 5 m in area with 20–25 ft high trees. Tim began searching the plantation along the roadside as several Chaffinch were calling from within, whilst Phil and Rebecca walked around the outskirts of the garden.



Plate 167. Pine Grosbeak, Collafirth, Shetland, February 2013. © Jim Nicolson

They had covered three sides of the garden and had seen a few Chaffinch, Redwing and Goldcrest (more passerines than they had seen in the previous 10 days) and were now on the opposite side of the plantation to Tim. After a short time they both became aware of an unusual flutey song coming from within the plantation in very short bursts, and both agreed that it was unlike any song/call they had heard before and the best they could come up with was a Redwing in sub-song. RJN reached for her iPhone, as she had an App on there with bird songs, and began to play Pine Grosbeak so they could compare it. Within 20 seconds the identical song was coming back at them from within the plantation, They stopped the song and waited and within two minutes RJN spotted movement at the front edge of the pines and there it was - a superb first-winter Pine Grosbeak.



Plate 168. Pine Grosbeak, Collafirth, Shetland, February 2013. © Hugh Harrop



Plate 169. Pine Grosbeak, Collafirth, Shetland, February 2013. © George Petrie

The bird then flew over into the smaller pines of the garden, they frantically waved Tim over and spent the next 10 minutes getting great views before it flew back to the plantation. They quickly got the news out via the Shetland grapevine and Rare Bird Alert and within 15 minutes the first local birders started to arrive. Finally, it was available for all comers to see - the Williamson's sighting seems to have slipped completely under the radar, it had wintered successfully and unseen for three months, and were it not for that brief visit to the Ratter's garden might never have come to light. The Williamsons, becoming aware of the reports at Collafirth, recalled their bird, and checking the photos, realised the true identity of their autumn visitor.

The Grosbeak could be amazingly unobtrusive at times, invisible in the smallest area of spruce, going missing for hours and even the odd day during it's stay, but also pleasingly tame, flying towards birders on occasion to drink just feet away. It seemed to favour rather small gardens with a handful of suitable trees as much as the

larger plantations. For most species, such as Crossbills, there would appear to be little in the way of food in the area, with only a couple of larches having any cones, but the bird fed constantly on the tiny buds on the branches of its favoured trees, seeming to need to consume a huge number of these to sustain itself.

Close comparison between the best photos from Urafirth and then the later sightings shows the bird to be apparently identical, based on head pattern and the extent of orange colouration and various other details. There is a suggestion of perhaps a few missing greater coverts and one or two tertials on some of the pictures from Urafirth, when it was very wet and with its plumage in a state of disarray however. It can be aged (per Svensson 1992) by clearly pointed central tail feathers as a first-winter, and sexed as a male by the fact it has been heard in full song by several observers, by the orange colour extending onto the breast and some pinkish colouration appearing around the rear cheeks.

It was last seen mid-morning on 23 February, a calm bright day, ideal for a departure high to the north-east.

## References

Svensson, L. 1992. *Identification Guide to European Passerines*. BTO, Thetford.

## Acknowledgements

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## The status of Pine Grosbeak in Scotland

*This species inhabits boreal forest zones in the Palearctic and North America. It is largely resident, though most birds in the northern parts of the breeding range move further south in winter. In Europe it is found in Scandinavia and northern Finland eastwards into Siberia. It makes sporadic irruptive movements due to food shortages, with these amplified during bad weather conditions.*

*There have been 11 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2011, with three of these in Scotland. The first Scottish record was of a female trapped and ringed on the Isle of May on 8–9 November 1954; the second was a probable first-year male at Lerwick, Mainland, Shetland from 25 March to at least 25 April 1992, and the third was at Maywick, Mainland, Shetland on 9 November 2000. This species is notably unobtrusive and many individuals that reach our shores undoubtedly go unrecorded.*

*The pattern of British records reflects its winter irruptions with find dates from 30 October (Watnall, Nottinghamshire 1890) to 15 May (Maidstone, Kent 1971) plus four birds found in November; two in "winter", one in March, another in May and one undated. The Urafirth/North Collafirth individual fits exactly into this pattern: it is also the longest staying bird (114 days) - far exceeding the previous total of 31 days of the Lerwick bird in 1992.*



Plate 170. Pine Grosbeak, Collafirth, Shetland, February 2013. © Hugh Harrop

# Scottish Bird Sightings

1 January to 31 March 2013

## S.L. RIVERS

**Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee. Thanks are due to Angus Murray/Birdline Scotland for providing information about arriving dates of summer migrants in spring 2013.**

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayr; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

This period provided a wide range of rare and scarce wildfowl amongst the commoner species; moderate numbers of white-winged gulls, a reasonable showing of Waxwings and several interesting

passerine records. However, it was the presence of a long-staying high-pressure weather system off SW Scandinavia that dominated events from the latter part of February, bringing prolonged cold and wintry weather and notable delays in the arrival of many summer migrants throughout Britain.

**Snow Goose:** two white-morph birds remained in the Loch Paible/Balarald area, North Uist (OH) from December to 12 March, with one still present to end March; a blue-morph Lesser was at Nether Ardrosdale, Isle of Bute (Arg) still from 7 January to at least 15 February; one at Mull of Galloway (D&G) on 4–14 March, and one at Westport, Mull of Kintyre (Arg) on 12 March. **Vagrant Canada Geese:** Richardson's [*race hutchinsii*] - one was at Neriby, Islay on 11–12 January; with individuals in the Loch Gruinart area and at Loch Indaal, Islay (Arg) from 12 January to 13 March at least; one at

Preston Merse near Loaningfoot/Southernness Point (D&G) from 1 January into February, and presumed same at Mersehead RSPB reserve from 24 February to 3 March; one in the Balranald area, North Uist (OH) from 31 January to 29 March; one near Fionnphort, Mull (Arg) on 26 March. Todd's [*race interior*] one remained at Preston Merse near Loaningfoot/Southernness Point (D&G) from 2012 to 2 February, with presumably the same bird nearby at Mersehead on 29 March; one was at Caerlaverock WWT reserve (D&G) on 15–24 January; one was at Rhunahaorine Point, Kintyre (Arg) on 9–20 March, with it or another at Port Charlotte, Islay (Arg) on 27 March. **Red-breasted Goose:** an adult remained on Islay from 2012 to mid-March; the adult remained at Preston Merse near Loaningfoot/Southernness Point (D&G) from 2012 to 12 January, and 30th. **Egyptian Goose:** one was near Haddington (Loth) on 24–27 February.



Plate 171. Interior/Todd's Canada Goose, Rhunahaorine Point, Argyll, March 2013. © John Nadin

**American Wigeon:** a sometimes elusive drake remained at Udale Bay, near Cromarty (High) from December to end March; a drake was at Doocot, near Rosehearty (NES) on 4 January; a drake on Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) from 6 February to 18 March; a drake was at Liddel Loch, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 8 February; a drake was at Finstown (Ork) from 3–25 March.

**Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were noted as follows: on Loch Mor then Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from December 2012 to 24 January, and on 15 February; on Loch of Ayre, St. Mary's, Mainland (Ork) on 12–15 January; a drake at Caerlaverock WWT (D&G) remained from 2012 to 22 February and 14 March; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 21 January. Single drakes were at Souleseat Loch (D&G) on 1–5 February; at Loch of Tankerness (Ork) on 11 February; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 11–15 March; at Riverside Park LNR, Dundee (A&D) on 18–23 March. **Black Duck:** the returning adult drake was at Strontian Bay (High) from December 2012 to 17 February. **Blue-winged Teal:** the elusive drake was seen intermittently on the River Dee, at Threave (D&G) from 2012 to end March. **Ring-necked Duck:** a female/imm on Loch Hosta, North Uist on 1 January moved to Loch Scaraidh, North Uist (OH) from 20 January to 13 March; a drake was on Loch Skerrols, Islay (Arg) on 23 January. **Lesser Scaup:** a probable 1st-winter female was at Loch of Ayre, St. Mary's, Mainland (Ork) on 7–15 January, a probable female at Loch of Bosquoy, Harray on 15 January; a drake was at Auchendores/Leperstone Reservoirs, near Port Glasgow (Clyde) on 12–31 March.

**Harlequin Duck:** a 1st-winter male was present off Traigh Iar, Balranald, North Uist (OH) from 18 February into April. **Surf Scoter:** an adult drake remained in Largo Bay (Fife) from 2012 to at least 24 March; a drake was at The Wig/Soleburn,

Loch Ryan (D&G) from 26 January to end March, with two present on 6 February; a drake at Rerwick Head, Mainland (Ork) on 9–10 February; a 1st-winter male was off Hougharry, North Uist, (OH) on 1–11 February; two drakes were off Rerwick Head, Mainland (Ork) on 11–12 March; single drakes were in the Sound of Taransay, viewed from Luskentyre, Isle of Harris (OH) on 30 March and off Port Seton (Loth) on 31st.

**King Eider:** single drakes lingered from December at several sites: a near-adult at Symbister, Whalsay (Shet) to 26 January; at Rosehearty (NES) to 5 January, then at St. Combs (NES) to 11 January to 25 February, with presumed same at Rattray Head (NES) on 16 January; a first-winter male was seen in Bluemull Sound between Yell/Unst (Shet) on 1–29 March. **Smew:** on Shetland two remained at Clickimin Loch, Lerwick to 6 January; a redhead was at Baltasound, Unst on 20–29 January; one at Loch of Snarravoe, Unst from 10 February to 24 March. A drake was at Loch of Burness, Westray (Ork) from 1–25 January; a redhead was at Loch of Tankerness (Ork) on 16 January. A redhead was on Loch Spynie, near Elgin (M&N) from 26 January to 21 February and 7 March; two redheads were on Sand Loch/Cotehill Loch, Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 24 January to 15 February; a drake was at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from December 2012 to 14 March, and a drake at Piperdam Loch, near Dundee (A&D) from 14 February to 4 March. At least one drake was at Loch Leven (P&K) on 18–19 February, and again on 1 March, and a redhead on Butterstone Loch (P&K) from 12 January to 9 March, with three birds there on 25 March. One was at Morton Lochs, Fife on 4 January; a drake at Loch Gelly (Fife) on 11–15 January and 7–12 February, with a redhead also present 7 February to 5 March; a redhead at Mountcastle Quarry, near Ladybank (Fife) on 11–24

January; a redhead on the Eden Estuary at Guardbridge, Fife on 17 January, and a redhead was at Portmore Loch, near Eddlestone (Bord) on 18 January. A drake was at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve, Clyde on 21 February to 14 March, with a redhead there on 3–7 March. A redhead was at Martnaham Loch (Ayr) from 4 January to 12 February, a female at Maidens Harbour (Ayr) on 19 January; a redhead at Belston Loch, Drongan (Ayr) from 2 February to 11 March. A redhead was on the River Dee at Threave (D&G) on 17 & 27 January, a redhead still at Souleseat Loch (D&G) on 1–6 February; and two redheads were at Carlingwark Loch (D&G) on 7–14 March.

**White-billed Diver:** one was in South Nesting Bay, Central Mainland (Shet) on 20 January; one was seen from the Isle of May on 23 January; an adult was in the St Margaret's Hope area/Widewall Bay area, South Ronaldsay (Ork) from 29 January to end March, with another off the No. 1 Churchill Barrier, Holm (Ork) on 9 February; one was off Munnis, Unst (Shet) on 1 February; one off Sound Gurney, Fetlar (Shet) on 8 February; one was off Cellar Head, Isle of Lewis (OH) on 18 February; singles off John O'Groats (Caith) on 4 March and at Machrihanish Bay (Arg) on 5 March; three were off Portsoy (NES) on 17 March with one still there on 31 March; one was noted off Ness, Isle of Lewis (OH) on 27 March, with two there on 30–31 March. **Manx Shearwater:** one was in Gunna Sound, off Tiree (Arg) on 26 March, with two then past Maidens (Ayr) on 29 March. **Eurasian Bittern:** one was still at Castle Loch LNR, near Lochmaben (D&G) from December to 14 February, with two seen there on 24 January and 19 February; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve from 20 January to 22 February at least; one at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 2012 to 17 February; one was

in a garden at Kilbarchan, Clyde on 11–13 February; one was at Loch Spynie (M&N) on 4 March. **Little Egret:** up to six were at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve in January and February, and at least one in March; up to three were in the Stranraer area and singles at Creetown and Kircudbright Bay (all D&G) during January, and singles at Loch Ryan, Luce Bay, Urr Water, Creetown and Kircudbright Bay (all D&G) in February, and singles at Creetown and Wigtown Bay in March; one was at Skinflats (UF) on 2 January; two at Tynninghame (Loth) for most of January; one near Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 12 January; two at Tynninghame Bay (Loth) on 2 February, with one still present there in March; one at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 17 February and 3–7 March. **Red-necked Grebe:** one was at Burleigh Sands, Loch Leven (P&K) on 14 January; one off Portobello, Edinburgh (Loth) on 30 January; one at Gosford Bay (Loth) on 7 February. **Black-necked Grebe:** one was in Montrose Basin (A&D) on 13 January, with two there on 24 February; singles were present off Ruddons Point and at Tayport Bay (both Fife) on 24 March.

**Marsh Harrier:** a female was at Montrose basin (A&D) on 21 March, and one was at Dale of Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 22 March - the earliest ever Shetland record. **Northern Harrier:** one was seen at Deerness/Tankerness (Ork) on 8 February. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was on Eday (Ork) on 13–14 February; one was noted over Fetlar (Shet) on 26 March. **Osprey:** one flew NW over Caddonfoot, nr Galashiels (Bord) on 7 March; one flew NW over Snaigow towards Dunkeld (P&K) on 12 March. **Gyrfalcon:** a juvenile white-phase bird, presumably the bird present in December 2012, was seen on South Uist (OH) between 3–12 January, one was at Balranald on 10 January and it or another flew over Gualann, South

Uist and then along the west coast of Benbecula (OH) on 11 January; an immature was between Toab and Rocket House, Mainland (Ork) on 15 January, and in the Stromness/Loch of Stenness area (Ork) on 31 January to 2 February, and again at Yesnaby on 8th, with a probable second bird then at Hoxa on 26th and Deerness on 27 February (all Ork); a white-morph bird was seen at Tresta, Fetlar (Shet) on 26 March.

**Common Crane:** a 1st-winter frequented fields between East Linton and Tynninghame (Loth) from 9 February to 28 March; one was seen near Campbelltown (Arg) on 25 March; one flew over just South of Fraserburgh (NES) on 30 March. **Avocet:** one was at Skinflats (UF) on 30–31 March. **Spotted Redshank:** over-wintering birds were reported from Erskine, Clyde and at Cramond, Edinburgh (Loth) to 9 March - the latter also seen nearby inland at Cammo Pools. **Grey Phalarope:** one was at Garths Ness (Shet) on 5 January; one was present off South Queensferry (Loth) on 23 March, with it or another seen nearby off Dalgety Bay, Fife on 25 March.

**Little Gull:** a 1st-winter was off Maidens Harbour (Ayr) on 2 February. **Bonaparte's Gull:** a 1st-winter was at Stoneybridge, South Uist (OH) on 2 February; a probable returning adult was at Thurso (Caith) on 30–31 March. **Mediterranean Gull:** away from the Firth of Forth hotspots sightings included: an adult was at Troon/Barassie (Ayr) from December 2012 to 16 January, with two there on 3 January; an adult was at Lunderston Bay, Clyde on 16 January, two adults there on 11 February; one at Largs (Ayr) on 20 January; an adult at roost on Castle Loch LNR, near Lochmaben (D&G) from 24 January to 7 February, with two in the area on 3–4 February and one again on 12 March; one at Bishopburn (D&G) from 1–26 February; a 2nd-winter at

Hogganfield Loch, Clyde on 2 February; a 2nd-winter at Doonfoot (Ayr) on 14 February; three adults at Noddsdale (Ayr) on 20 February; an adult was at Lochore Meadows CP, Fife on 23 February; one was at Wigtown (D&G) on 25 February; an adult was at Doonfoot (Ayr) on 14 March, and three at Largs on 20 March. **Ring-billed Gull:** a first-winter was at East Voe of Scalloway, Central Mainland (Shet) from 16 January until 12 March, and again nearby at Loch of Asta on 28 March; a first-winter was on Fair Isle from 9–21 January; an adult at Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 22 January; an adult was at Dingwall (High) on 25 January to 7 March; the presumed returning adult was seen again at Oban (Arg) on 14 February; one was near Fairlie (Ayr) on 16 March. **Yellow-legged Gull:** two adults were at Shewalton (Ayr) on 24–26 January, and a single at Noddsdale (Ayr) on 28 March.

**Iceland Gull:** at least three were on Shetland in January, with up to 10 in February and March. Singles were on Fair Isle on 9 February, and 18th and 28 March. On Orkney an adult was at Stromness on 23 January and 6 February; a juvenile on North Ronaldsay on 5 February; a juvenile at Burwick, South Ronaldsay on 6 February; singles at Stromness on 5th and Stronsay on 18 March. On the Outer Hebrides there were six Iceland Gulls in January, 15 in February and nine in March, with a peak of three at Balranald RSPB reserve, North Uist on 18 February. A juvenile was at Thurso (Caith) on 21 January; a second-winter at Longman Point, Inverness (High) on 9 January, a juvenile there on 16 January; one at Alturlie Point, near Inverness (High) on 9 January; a juvenile at Portree, Isle of Skye (High) on 25 January; a juvenile was at Golspie (High) on 6 March. A juvenile was near Lossiemouth (M&N) on 12 January, an adult there on 20 January; one at Loch Oire, near Elgin (M&N) on 1–10 February, with two adults



Plate 172. Ring-billed Gull, Dingwall, Highland, March 2013. © Harry Scott

there on 13 March, and one still on 14th. A juvenile was at Collieston (NES) from 11–27 January, with a 2nd-winter there on 2–3 February; a juvenile near Meikle Loch, Aberdeen (NES) on 27 January. One was at Loch of Kinnordy (A&D) on 24 February; a first-winter at Loch Gelly, Fife on 14–18 February, and a juvenile at Skateraw (Loth) on 5 March. In Argyll, one was off Traigh Bhi, Tiree on 6 January; an adult at Bunnahabhain, Islay on 13–22 January, 16–17 February and 2 March; an adult at Kilninian, Mull on 10–11 February; one at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay in second week February; and one was on Loch a Phuill, Tiree on 31 March. In Clyde, a second-winter was at Hogganfield Loch on 14 January; a juvenile at Strathclyde Loch on 26 January, with a juvenile and 2nd-winter there on 10 February; a juvenile was at Endrick Mouth, Loch Lomond on 11 March. An adult was at Fail Loch landfill site (Ayr) on 12 January; and an adult in Ayr (Ayr) on 23 January to 3 March; a juvenile was at Shewalton (Ayr) on 20 February. An adult

was at Soleburn, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 10 February, and a juvenile was at Soulseat Loch, near Castle Douglas (D&G) on 11 February. **Kumlien's Gull:** one was reported at Scalloway (Shet) on 5 February, an adult at Symbister (Shet) on 14 February; a 2nd-winter at Loch of Harray, Mainland (Ork) on 22 February; a juvenile at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 22 February; with four sightings on the Outer Hebrides in March.

**Glaucous Gull:** up to 10 were reported on Shetland in January, 15 in February and 10 in March; two juveniles were on Fair Isle on 14 January, four there on 11 February, and singles on 2–3 and 18 March; an adult and a juvenile were in Birsay Bay, Mainland (Ork) on 3 February; a 2nd-winter on the Peedie Sea, Kirkwall (Ork) on 4 February, an immature there on 10 February, one there 22 February and on 10 March; a juvenile on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 5–6 February and 12th and 18 March; an adult at Birsay, Mainland (Ork) on 10 February; a 2nd-winter was at Marwick, Mainland (Ork) to

13–19 March. On the Outer Hebrides there were 12 Glaucous Gulls in January, 10 in February and six in March. A juvenile was at Ullapool Harbour, (High) on 5 February; a juvenile still at Spey Bay (M&N) on 9 January; two juveniles at Peterhead Harbour (NES) on 20 January, one still 27 January; one at Loch Leven (P&K) on 20–21 March; a juvenile at Skateraw (Loth) on 6–8 March. One was at Loch na Keal, Mull (Arg) on 5 February; a 2nd-winter at Ormsary (Arg) on 5 February, with a juvenile there on 6 February; one at Bowmore, Islay (Arg) on 18 February and Gartbrech, Islay on 21 February; a juvenile on Loch Fyne, near Inverary (Arg) on 3–4 March; one was on Loch a Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 16 March. An adult on River Clyde at Erskine, Clyde on 19 January; a juvenile between Barrhead and Newton Mearns, Clyde on 20 January; an adult at mouth of River Leven, Dumbarton, Clyde on 6–7 February and 14 March. **Sandwich Tern:** two were at Girvan (Ayr) on 18 March, with one at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) the same day.

**Little Auk:** relatively few seen - records included: seven past Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 30 January; one flew west past Anstruther, Fife on 1 February, with three in Loch Fyne (Arg) the same day, and one off Kerrara (Arg) on 2nd; one was at Saltcoats Harbour (Ayr) on 3 February; one found dead at Killinallan, Islay (Arg) on 3 February; singles at Achnacloch, Isle of Skye (High) and at Loch Scridain, Mull (Arg) on 5 February; singles off North Berwick (Loth) on 8 February, and North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 15 February, with one at The Green, Tiree (Arg) also on 15th; three flew north past Fife Ness, Fife in an hour on 9 March; one was off Skinflats (UF) on 10 March; three were noted off Musselburgh (Loth) on 23 March, with singles at Barns Ness and South Queensferry and two past Dunbar (all Loth) on 24th, and one was at Dalgety Bay, Fife on 24–25 March. **Snowy Owl:** one was found near Ben Macdui, Cairngorm (M&N) on 18 February, and remained in appropriately wintry conditions to at least 4 March; one was on Glas Bheinn, Isle of Jura on 28 March.

**Great Grey Shrike:** one was near Forse, SW of Wick (Caith) from 19–21 January; one was in Galloway Forest Park, north of Newton Stewart (D&G) on 24 January; one was seen near Fordell, Fife on 29 January; one at Old Kinord, near Dinnet (NES) from 4 February to the start of March; one was noted again in the Fordell/Crossgates area, Fife on 6 March. **Woodlark:** one was present on the Isle of May on 26–27 March. **Common Chiffchaff:** early reports were of one at Castle Loch, Lochmaben (D&G) on 20 March, and one at Hunterston (Ayr) on 23 March. **Waxwing:** up to 500 were noted in Aberdeen in January; large counts elsewhere included over 120 at Buckhaven (Fife) from 10 January, with a peak of 180 there on 20 January; 70+ in Edinburgh (Loth) on 9 January; 52

at Gladsmuir (Loth) on 13–14 January, 60+ near East Linton (Loth) and c60 near West Barns (Loth) on 19 January, 97 by Hedderwick Farm, near Dunbar (Loth) on 22–24 January; 60 at Craigshill, Livingston (Loth) on 23 January; c70 at Stenhouse, Edinburgh (Loth) on 25 January; 70+ in Kirkcaldy, Fife on 3 February; 60 in Wishaw, Clyde on 6 February, and 83 there on 9 February; c70 in Aberdeen on 6 February; 80 in Cranhill, Glasgow, Clyde on 9–14 February; c50 at Longniddry and Barnton, and 80 at Cammo, Edinburgh (all Loth) in mid-February; 50 in Forres (M&N) on 22–24 February; c50 at Hill of Beath, Fife on 23 February; 53 at Cowdenbeath, Fife on 24 February; 173+ at Cranhill, Glasgow, Clyde on 7 March, with 160 there still on 13 March; 60+ in Deanswood Park, Livingston (Loth) on 8 March. **Nuthatch:** records north of the core range included: one at Camperdown Park (A&D) from 12 January to 11 March; two at Kippenross (UF) on 18 January, another at Doune (UF) on 20 January; one in Callendar Park woods, Falkirk (UF) on 17 February; one at Blair Drummond (UF) on 3 March; one at Auchincruive (Ayr) on 6 March, one at Lake of Menteith (UF) on 16 March, and one on the Lanrick Estate, near Doune (UF) on 17 March. **Ring Ouzel:** a male was north of Lockerbie (D&G) on 10 March, and one near Stirling (UF) on 17 March. **Black-throated Thrush:** a male was present in a garden in Banchory (NES) on 24–27 March.

**Black Redstart:** singles were at Cairnbulg Harbour (NES) on 26 February, and at Brodick, Isle of Arran (Arg) from 12–14 March.

**Northern Wheatear:** a male was reported at Glen Gorm, Mull (Arg) on 23 January; earliest migrants reported were one at Ardnave, Islay (Arg) on 12 March, and two at Seamill (Ayr) on 23 March. **Desert Wheatear:** the 1st-winter female remained at Rattray Head (NES)

from December to 26 March. **Richard's Pipit:** one was at Dornoch Beach (High) on 5 February. **Water Pipit:** one was still at Barns Ness (Loth) from December 2012 to end March, with two there on 31 March; one was at Seamill (Ayr) on 2 March, and one at Crosshill (Ayr) on 26 March. **Brambling:** the highest counts were 800+ at Newmains Farm, Reston (Bord) on 19 January, with 1,000+ there on 23 January. **Hornemanni Arctic Redpoll:** one was at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 15 January. **Hawfinch:** 17 were at Scone Palace (P&K) on 13 January, c20 on 18 January, and 20+ on 3 February; one was in a garden in Stirling (UF) on 2 February, and one in a garden at Moffat (D&G) on 4 February. **Pine Grosbeak:** a 1st-winter male was at North Collafirth, Northmavine, (Shet) on 29 January and 2–10 & 12–23 (not 14) February. **Lapland Bunting:** reports included one at Skateraw (Loth) on 16 January; nine on the Eochar machair, South Uist (OH) on 3 February; three at Hough Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 3rd; one was at Collafirth (Shet) on 7 February; one north of Sauchope Caravan Park, Fife Ness (Fife) also on 7 February; was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 13 March; one one was at Balranald, North Uist on 16 March, three at Ardvachar, South Uist on 17th, and two by Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis on 26 March (all OH); singles flew over North Cambee reservoir, Anstruther and Spinkie Den wood, St Andrews (both Fife) on 28 March. **Snow Bunting:** reports included 20 at Strath Fillan (UF) on 19 January; c45 at Kinshaldy Beach/Tentsmuir, Fife on 4–15 February, with 14 still nearby at the Goosepools, with 1 March: 30 in Glen Shee (A&D) on 8 February; c140 at Caol Ghleann, near Tyndrum (UF) on 11 February; 20 on Barry Buddon (A&D) on 19 February; seven at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 4–6 March, with two still on 20 March.

## Advice to contributors

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Text, image and graphics formats

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

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

Maps and other graphics should preferably be provided in eps (Encapsulated PostScript) format, or as a high resolution jpg/tiff file, good quality computer print-out or drawn in black ink. Other formats can be accepted; please liaise with the Office Manager. Photographs should be supplied as high resolution jpg/tiff files with minimal or no cropping or enhancement.

Reference should be made to *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) for guidance on style of presentation, use of capitals, form of references, etc. Detailed instructions for contributors with respect to house style conventions can be found on the SOC website's publication page.

Please send all correspondence to the SOC Office Manager at Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY or e-mail [mail@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:mail@the-soc.org.uk). Telephone 01875 871330 or e-mail for further advice and assistance.



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## PhotoSP©T

**Plate 173.** Like many photographers, most of my favourite images have been taken with planning and effort, and are often rewards for weeks of work. In contrast to this, however, the sequence I shot of these fabulous Arctic Terns (or Tirriks as we know them here in Shetland) was taken (in June 2011) when working on a different species all together. I was photographing a pair of Ringed Plovers amongst a beautiful carpet of Sea Pinks and had been stalking them for quite some time, shuffling forward on elbows and belly, to get down to a nice level, when my attention was quickly drawn to the terns overhead.

I have photographed them interacting like this on many occasions, but it was the lovely clean backdrop of grey-white cloud that made the terns really stand out. Although I was pleased to have captured their aerial interaction, I was gutted when I realised I had only been at 280 mm on my 200 to 400, hence the hefty crop!

**Equipment used:** Nikon D7000 with 200-400mm f4 lens, ISO 400, shutter speed 1/2500th, aperture f5.

**Brydon Thomason**

*Featuring the best images posted on the SOC website each quarter, PhotoSpot will present stunning portraits as well as record shots of something unique, accompanied by the story behind the photograph and the equipment used. Send in your photos now - it's open to all.*