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

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

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

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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.

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# President's Foreword



Plate 156. James Main, Waterston House, Aberlady, Lothian, August 2016. © James Main

of May Bird Observatory. As in previous years, six keen youngsters stayed on the island for a week learning ringing, recording and other skills. The course was led by Stuart Rivers and Mark Oksien and assisted by Alison Creamer with support from CEH and SNH.

Once again the Club had a stand at the Big Nature Festival at Levenhall Links in Musselburgh in May. The Fair was well attended and the weather was relatively kind. It is always a good opportunity to meet up with friends and other like-minded organisations. After some years' representation at the British Bird Fair at Rutland it was decided that the Club should not be represented there this year. It is expensive and a big commitment for those attending - we will review this each year.

As I write this, the organisation of our Annual Conference, from 23 to 25 September, is well under way. I am delighted that the venue will once again be the Atholl Palace Hotel in Pitlochry, which provided us with outstanding facilities last autumn. The theme this year is Scotland's Seas and we are fortunate to have a number of excellent speakers on a variety of related topics. Detailed information is available on the Club's website. I should especially like to thank the staff at Waterston House for all their hard work, not only in organising the Conference, but also in running the Club so efficiently.

Over the past couple of months I have had great support from Council and various past Presidents have given me advice and encouragement since I took over as Acting President. I am most grateful to them and to Paul Taylor who agreed to be Acting Vice President until the Annual General Meeting. Dave Heeley and Alan Fox have been exemplary in their respective roles and in providing sage advice.

With the migratory season coming up, I hope you all have a good autumn's birding and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the Annual Conference.

James Main, Acting SOC President

It will probably come as a surprise to many of you that Ian Thomson has resigned as President of the Club. Ian has had several ongoing health problems within his family, which have meant that he felt unable to spend as much time as he would have liked on SOC business. Given all the circumstances, he thought that the best way forward was to tender his resignation at our last meeting of Council. I was not due to become President until October 2017, but I will fill in as Acting President until this year's Annual General Meeting. I should like to thank Ian for all he has done for the Club, both at a local level over many years and during his two years as Vice President and his short time as President. We would all like to give our best wishes to Ian and his family.

June of this year saw the third successful Young Birdwatchers' Training Course on the Isle of May, organised by the Club in conjunction with the Isle



Plate 157. Snowy Owl, Cairngorm plateau, September 2014. © Robert Ince

# Diet of Snowy Owl on the Cairngorm plateau in 2013 and 2014

M. MARQUISS, R. INCE & I. PERKS

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* is a scarce but virtually annual migrant to Scotland, individuals sometimes staying for protracted periods of months to years (Cook 2014). The habitats occupied by long-staying birds resemble the open terrain of their northern provenance and include 'arctic alpine', heather moorland, maritime heath and coastal sand dunes (M. Pennington, in Forrester *et al.* 2007). Snowy Owl has bred in Scotland on maritime heath in Shetland (Tulloch 1968). Watson (1966) pointed out that Snowy Owls occurred in the Cairngorms (Highland/North-east Scotland/Moray & Nairn) in years of Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus* abundance and suggested that breeding might be possible in a year of high Ptarmigan numbers.

Owls consume their food in large pieces with little plucking, so their oral pellets include undigested bones, fur and feather that give a very good index of diet. The diet of Snowy Owl in Scotland is thus well documented with results from seven studies involving six different places: Fetlar, Shetland (Robinson & Becker 1986), Eday, Orkney (Balfour 1964), Lewis, Outer Hebrides (Marquiss & Cunningham 1980), St Kilda, also Outer Hebrides (Miles & Money 2008), Lower Speyside moorland, Highland (Nethersole-Thompson & Watson 1981) and in the high Cairngorm mountains (Tewnion 1954, D.N. Weir cited in Nethersole-Thompson & Watson 1981, Marquiss *et*

al. 1989). As in the breeding range, the documented diets for Scotland comprise few species, but differ markedly in the lack of large rodents because Scotland does not have lemmings. Instead the main species consumed are young lagomorphs or large birds, Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* or Ptarmigan inland and seabirds or waders on the coast. Small mammals are consumed e.g. mice on St Kilda and voles in the Cairngorms, but provide relatively little sustenance compared to other items. The lagomorphs taken are principally juvenile Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* up to half grown and leverets of Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus* up to a third grown.

The differences in diet between studies largely reflects the different habitats occupied but with the exception of the study of five owls on St Kilda (Miles & Money 2008) each study involved the diet of a single owl. The present note documents the diet of the most recent Snowy Owl(s) living on the Cairngorms plateau. In both 2013 and 2014, a male owl occupied the same range as previous individuals, using the same roosts and perches, so there was the opportunity to directly compare the contents of pellets cast by the 2013/14 owl(s) with those of pellets cast by two other individuals, a male in 1980, and a female in 1987. More pellets were collected from the recent owl than previously, and over a longer period, so there was additionally the opportunity to search for variation in diet with season.

The records of Snowy Owl on the Cairngorms plateau suggested that a male bird was present in 2013 from at least 17 February to 4 March and in 2014 from 19 May to 17 October (Cook 2014). It is unknown whether the same bird was involved throughout, but comparison of digital images showed plumage similarities suggesting it could have been the same bird and this was the conclusion of the BBRC (Nigel Hudson *in lit.*). Thirty-five pellets were collected from owl perches from June to October 2014. Nineteen were recently cast, but 16 others were eroded and had lain for some time, some since the previous winter. Four further pellets collected in June 2015 were similarly eroded and had probably been cast in late autumn 2014.



Plate 158. A Snowy Owl pellet with a Ptarmigan tarsus clearly visible (centre), Cairngorm plateau, September 2014.  
© Robert Ince



**Plate 159.** A Snowy Owl pellet below a perching boulder, Cairngorm plateau, September 2014. © Robert Ince

Overall, the 39 pellets contained the undigested remains of at least 50 food items; predominantly 36 Ptarmigan (72% of items), but additionally eight Mountain Hare leverets (16%), five Short-tailed Field Voles *Microtus agrestis* and one Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris*. The main difference from the previous samples was that in 2013/14, the pellets contained predominantly adult Ptarmigan. Unlike the samples from the 1980s, there were relatively fewer Ptarmigan chicks and no waders (Table 1). Of those pellets collected in 2014, the content of 19 fresh pellets differed from that of 16 eroded pellets in that the latter contained only full grown Ptarmigan (Table 2). Mountain Hare leverets, Ptarmigan chicks and voles were only present in pellets cast in summer and autumn.

**Table 1.** The food items recorded in 39 pellets from 2013/14 compared with those from six pellets in 1980 and 24 in 1987.

Food species	Minimum number of items in sample		
	1980	1987	2013/14
Ptarmigan (full grown)	4	3	31
Red Grouse (full grown)	0	1	0
gamebird chicks*	3	9	5
wader chicks**	2	3	0
Mountain Hare leveret	0	10	8
Short-tailed Field Vole	0	8	5
Water Vole	0	0	1
<b>Total items</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>50</b>

\* most (probably all) were Ptarmigan

\*\* at least 3 (probably all) were Dotterel

**Table 2.** The food items in 19 recently cast pellets from summer and autumn 2014, compared with those in 16 eroded pellets that had lain long; some since winter 2013/14.

Food item	Recent pellets	Eroded pellets
Ptarmigan (full grown)	10	16
Ptarmigan (chicks)	5	0
Mountain Hare leveret	7	0
Short-tailed Field Vole	5	0
Water Vole	1	0
<b>Total items</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>16</b>



Plate 160. Snowy Owl, Cairngorm plateau, August 2014. © Robert Ince

The difference in the contents of fresh as opposed to eroded pellets was consistent with the idea that the main food of Cairngorms Snowy Owl was full grown Ptarmigan in winter and spring, shifting to include leverets, voles and young birds as they became available in summer. Such a seasonal shift in diet is sufficient explanation for the difference in the contents of pellet samples from the three years (Table 1). The preponderance of adult Ptarmigan in the 2014 sample might simply reflect the high proportion of pellets from winter and early spring. The results of the present pellet analysis endorse previous studies and enhance the prevailing view that Snowy Owls living in the high Cairngorms are sustained by Ptarmigan, and by analogy with circumstance in Iceland might perhaps breed, but only in a year of high Ptarmigan abundance.

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Plate 161. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Fair Isle, 17 May 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Amendments to the Scottish List: species and subspecies

THE SCOTTISH BIRDS RECORDS COMMITTEE

In 1993, the Council of The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) delegated to the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) responsibility for producing a *Scottish List* and publishing regular amendments. The list was first published in 1994 and SBRC appointed a Subcommittee to maintain it; the current members are Dave Clugston, Ron Forrester, Angus Hogg, Bob McGowan, Chris McInerny and Roger Riddington.

SBRC established several principles for the original version of the *Scottish List*, which are still followed. The British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) has maintained the official *British List* since 1883 and SBRC adopts its taxonomy, sequence, scientific and English names for the *Scottish List*. Similarly, species categorization follows BOU.

The BOU Records Committee (BOURC) normally only adjudicates on the first British record for any taxon. The responsibility then lies with the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) for acceptance of all subsequent records of rare species and subspecies in Britain. Similarly, SBRC is responsible for acceptance of records of species and subspecies which fall outside the remit of BBRC, but which remain rare in a Scottish context. Decisions by BOURC, BBRC and SBRC automatically apply to the *Scottish List*.

The *Scottish List* was most recently published in full in 2011, with updates in 2013, 2014 and 2015 (Forrester 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2015). Since then, there have been several publications that affect the *Scottish List*. BOURC has published its 45th Report (BOU 2016) and the Taxonomic Sub-Committee of BOURC (BOURC-TSC) has published its 11th report (Sangster *et al.* 2016). Also, BBRC and SBRC have produced reports for 2014 (Hudson *et al.* 2015, McGowan & McInerny 2016).

### Taxonomy and the *Scottish List*

The *Scottish List* has followed the taxonomy used for the *British List* for which BOU has responsibility, with SBRC reports including information published in BOURC Taxonomic Subcommittee's reports since 2002.

For many years BOU has been seeking to establish a unified European-wide taxonomic 'model'. However, limited progress has been made, with five separate national taxonomic groups (including the BOU's own) unable to reach a consensus through the Association of European Records and Rarities Committees (AERC) since its establishment in 1991.

With no resolution in sight, and with each country under obligation to retain control of the taxonomy used for their own national lists, BOU Council felt that the continued existence of national groups was not in the best interests of ornithology, and was a barrier preventing the establishment of a unified European taxonomy.

With a view to resolving this issue, BOU has therefore disbanded its own Taxonomic Subcommittee and is now reviewing the available global taxonomies with a view to adopting one system for all BOU activities, including the *British List*. This decision is a reflection of the importance that BOU Council places on establishing a unified European avian taxonomy.

### **BOURC decisions which affect the *Scottish List***

#### *Isabelline Shrike Lanius isabellinus*

There have been many claims of Isabelline Shrike showing characteristics of the nominate subspecies *L. i. isabellinus*. However, because identification criteria for first-year birds and females are not definitive, the adult male recorded on Fetlar, Shetland, 14–17 September 2002 (*British Birds* 96: 600–601) is now accepted as the first British record of *L. i. isabellinus*. All prior records are instead classified as 'subspecies undetermined' (BOU 2016).

#### *Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler Sylvia subalpina*

Although *Sylvia subalpina* was previously given the English name Moltoni's Warbler (BOU 2014), BOURC now use Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler (BOU 2015), which consequently is also used for the *Scottish List*.

### **BOURC Taxonomic Sub-committee decisions which affect the *Scottish List***

Recommendations in the BOURC Taxonomic Sub-committee 11th Report (*Ibis* 158: 206–212) are followed.

#### *Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus*

Based on a recent study which uncovered substantial genetic divergence between *cyaneus* and *hudsonius* Hen Harrier is now treated as two species:

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* (monotypic)

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* (monotypic)

Add Northern Harrier to Category A of the *Scottish List*.

#### *Crakes in the genus Porzana*

Little Crake and Baillon's Crake are transferred from *Porzana* to the genus *Zapornia* and their scientific names become as follows:

Little Crake *Zapornia parva*

Baillon's Crake *Zapornia pusilla*

#### *Charadriidae*

A recent study indicated that some species previously placed in the genus *Charadrius* are best moved to *Anarhynchus*. As a result, scientific names for Kentish, Lesser Sand, Greater Sand and Caspian Plovers become as follows:

Kentish Plover *Anarhynchus alexandrinus*

Lesser Sand Plover *Anarhynchus mongolus*

Greater Sand Plover *Anarhynchus leschenaultii*

Caspian Plover *Anarhynchus asiaticus*

Following another study, the taxonomic sequence of Charadriidae species on the *Scottish List* becomes as follows:

- Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
- Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*
- American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*
- Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
- Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus*
- Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*
- Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*
- Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
- Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*
- Sociable Plover *Vanellus gregarius*
- White-tailed Plover *Vanellus leucurus*
- Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
- Caspian Plover *Anarhynchus asiaticus*
- Greater Sand Plover *Anarhynchus leschenaultii*
- Lesser Sand Plover *Anarhynchus mongolus*
- Kentish Plover *Anarhynchus alexandrinus*

#### **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor***

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is transferred from the genus *Dendrocopos* to *Dryobates* and its name becomes:

- Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*

#### **Taxonomic sequence of *Sylvia* warblers**

Whilst a recent study has suggested that relationships among species within the *Sylvia* genus are best expressed by the use of two subgenera, this approach is not currently being introduced to the *Scottish List*. Following this same study, the sequence of species within the genus *Sylvia* has been altered. The order in which they appear on the *Scottish List* is now:

- Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
- Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*
- Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*
- Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*
- Rüpell's Warbler *Sylvia rueppelli*
- Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*
- Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia subalpina*
- Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*
- Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
- Marmora's Warbler *Sylvia sarda*
- Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

#### **Taxonomic sequence of *Emberiza* buntings**

Whilst recent studies have suggested that relationships among species within the *Emberiza* genus are best expressed by the use of three subgenera, this approach is not currently being introduced to the *Scottish List*. Following the same studies, the sequence of species within the genus *Emberiza* has been altered. The order in which they appear on the *Scottish List* is now:

- Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala*
- Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*
- Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*
- Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*
- Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
- Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*  
Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*  
Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallasi*  
Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*  
Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*  
Yellow-browed Bunting *Emberiza chrysophrys*  
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*  
Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*  
Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

### **Scottish List category totals**

As a result of the above changes the *Scottish List*, category totals are now:

Category A	510
Category B	6
Category C	8
Total	524
Category D	10

### **Records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions**

Comprehensive lists of all records of species and subspecies recorded in Scotland on up to 20 occasions now appear on the SOC's website in tabulated form ([www.the-soc.org.uk/up-to-20-occasions](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/up-to-20-occasions)). The lists are updated annually.

### **Acknowledgements**

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Plate 162. Common Terns nesting on sloping roof, Wick, Caithness, 25 May 2014; nests associated with patches of grass, moss and stonecrop. © R.M. Sellers

## Roof-nesting by terns in Scotland

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*Roof-nesting by terns Sternidae is a comparatively recent phenomenon and in Europe remains one that is very unusual. Some nine sites have been identified in Scotland at which nesting on roofs has taken place and this report summarises what is known about these; all were on the east coast of Scotland between Caithness and the Isle of May, the earliest having taken place in Montrose in 1996. The sites selected were mainly the roofs of factories or commercial premises, but included also a farm building and a newly constructed visitor centre with a green roof. Individual colonies have varied in size from a single breeding pair up to a maximum of 160 breeding pairs. The larger colonies typically held both Common and Arctic Terns, the smaller ones just the former. One instance of a breeding attempt on a roof by a Roseate Tern is also noted. Reasons for the adoption of this new breeding habitat and its consequences in terms of conflict with man are discussed.*

### Introduction

Over the past half century or so, seabirds have taken to nesting on roofs in urban areas in many parts of the world. Such behaviour is most familiar amongst gulls *Laridae* and globally at least 14 species have been recorded nesting on roofs or other man-made structures (Sellers 2016). Terns *Sternidae* have also taken to nesting on roofs, but the practice is by no means as common or widespread in this family as it is in the *Laridae*. In the United States, where it is most firmly established, five species (Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*, Common Tern *S. hirundo*, Roseate Tern *S. dougallii* and Least Tern *Sternula albifrons*) are on record as having nested on roofs, and from South Africa there is a record of Greater Crested Terns (Swift Terns) *Thalasseus bergii* breeding on roofs (further details in Sellers 2016). There have been occasional reports of similar behaviour in Europe, for instance by Common Terns in Finland (Hakala & Jokinen 1971), England (Axell & Hosking 1977, Skinner 1998), the Netherlands (Bouwmeester & van Dijk 1991, Groen *et al.* 1995, Stienen 2002) and Latvia (Strazds 2002, ‘Live Riga’ website 2010) and by Arctic Terns *S. paradisaea* in Finland (‘Nature Vaasa’ website). This remains, nevertheless, a relatively unusual occurrence in Europe and in view of this we summarise here the first records of roof-nesting by terns in Scotland.

## Methods

Details of the sites identified and numbers of birds breeding were provided as follows (listed north to south): Thurso and Wick (RMS), Aberlour (MC), Dyce and Westhill (RD), Montrose (SB) and Isle of May (MO). To ensure that no others had been overlooked we also sought information on roof-nesting terns from the Seabird Colony Register (JNCC 2010), bird reports for all parts of Scotland published between 1995 and 2015, and circulated a request for information to all Bird Recorders in Scotland, but these failed to unearth any further records.

As with gulls, roof-nesting terns can be difficult to census accurately when there are no suitable vantage points from which nests can be viewed. In such cases (and this applies particularly to the colonies in North-east Scotland and at Montrose in what follows) a combination of counts of nests, chicks and the total number of adult birds present have been used to obtain the best estimate possible. Even so, substantial uncertainties remain and in several instances the figures quoted are minimum estimates.

## Results

This survey identified nine locations at which terns have bred on roofs in Scotland at least once in the past 20 years. They are dealt with below in the order in which the principal sites were colonised.

**Montrose, Angus & Dundee.** Terns were first recorded nesting on roofs in the Forties Road Industrial Estate in the north of Montrose in 1996 and in the following year there were 28 breeding pairs (bp) of Arctic Terns together with 4 bp of Common Terns here. In 1998 this original site on a sloping corrugated roof was abandoned in favour of a nearby flat roof covered with stone chippings, and other buildings in the industrial estate. Following complaints about the fouling of cars and the noise made by the birds, late in 1998 some nylon cord was strung across selected roofs in an effort to discourage the birds. The cord on two roofs which had previously held good numbers of birds broke, however, and the site was used again the following year. Some wires were erected during the winter of 2001/02 and resulted in a substantial part of the colony moving in 2002 to new, high and inaccessible roofs, making it impracticable to obtain even rough estimates of the number of birds present. Common and Arctic Terns continued to nest on roofs in the Forties Road Industrial Estate throughout the period 2004–10, but no counts were made; numbers subsequently have been variable with a maximum of 40 bp in 2014 and again in 2016. In 2012, the Arctic Terns moved to a new site at the GSK works, c.3 km to the south, some nesting on a roof, others on the ground nearby, and this new roof was used by both Common and Arctic Terns in 2014. Breeding success at both sites has been very variable, good in some years (e.g. 2011), very poor in others (2012/13/14/16), almost certainly a result of natural processes, rather than human interference. A third site on the roof of a disused building some 750 m from the Forties Road Industrial Estate was used in 2016 and held c.20 bp Common Terns. Table 1 summarises the counts made at the three Montrose colonies.

Table 1. Counts of terns breeding on roofs in Montrose, Angus & Dundee, 1997–2016.

Year	No. breeding pairs			
	Common Tern	Roseate Tern	Arctic Tern	
1997	4	0	28	a No counts made but birds present.
1998	4	0	80–85	b Initially at Forties Road Industrial Estate, but site abandoned and birds moved to new site on roof at the GSK works, where they also failed.
1999	29+	0	69+	c 60 Common Terns and 35 Arctic Terns present, but little serious attempt at breeding and site abandoned early.
2000	75	1	111	d 40 bp on roofs in Forties Industrial Estate and 50 bp on roof at the GSK works.
2001	68	0	48	e All in Forties Road Industrial Estate; mixed flock of 180 Common and Arctic Terns present at GSK works on 25 May; some eggs laid but heavy predation by a single Herring Gull and site abandoned by 9 June.
2002	c.251	0	20+	f c.40 bp of Common Terns at Forties Road Industrial Estate and c.20 pb at a third site c.750 m away.
2003	150+	0	1+	
2004–10	a	a	a	
2011	15	0	113	
2012	160	0	50 b	
2013	c	0	c	
2014	90 d	0	c.8	
2015	35 e	0	0	
2016	60 f	0	4	

In 2000, a pair of Roseate Terns was present at the Forties Road Industrial Estate colony. Three eggs were laid, but the female disappeared a few days later and the breeding attempt was unsuccessful.

**Dyce, North-east Scotland.** Common Terns have nested with Common Gulls *Larus canus* and other larids in the Kirkhill Industrial Estate at Dyce, on the western outskirts of Aberdeen, since 1996. Initially they bred on the ground in a disused pipe yard, but in 2002 the terns moved to a nearby sloping roof made of corrugated asbestos sheets, and bred here annually until 2009. Table 2 summarises the counts made.

**Westhill, North-east Scotland.** In 2005, a second colony was discovered in North-east Scotland on a sloping asbestos roof at Westhill Industrial Estate, some 8 km SSW of the colony at Dyce (Table 2). At least 9 bp of Common Terns bred in 2005, including a pair of adult birds that had been ringed at Dyce. No checks were made in 2006, but by 2007 the original nest site at Westhill had been fitted with deterrent wires in a roughly 25 cm grid and the birds had moved to another roof nearby. About 20 bp of Common Terns nested at this new site, with 2 bp Common Gulls. In 2009, five Common Terns were noted over the former netted-off roof, but no evidence of breeding was obtained.

**Wick, Caithness.** Small numbers of terns have nested in the Wick area for many years, on rocks etc in or near the harbour. In May 2014, a small colony of Common Terns was discovered on the sloping roof of an engineering workshop in the town (Plate 162). Several counts were made over the ensuing weeks with a maximum of 8 bp being found, producing at least eight chicks. The roof, weathered corrugated sheets with some patches of moss, grass and stonecrop *Sedum* sp., measured just 5 m x 25 m and faced north. The terns were confined to the western two-thirds of the roof, whilst in the south-eastern corner was the nest of a Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*. There was a second such nest on a chimney stack immediately to the west and above the terns, and several others on the roof of a building on the opposite side of the road, 15–20 m away. None of the terns here showed any aggression to passers-by in the street below (though this is a quiet street with little activity), but they did chase any Herring Gulls that flew too close to the nest site. The site was occupied again in 2015 when there were 6 bp, which between them fledged eight chicks, and in 2016 when 8 bp produced at least eight chicks. We understand from staff in the workshop below the colony that the terns first bred on this roof in 2013.

A second ‘colony’ comprising a single pair of Arctic Terns was found in 2014 on the north-facing, corrugated roof of another building about 80 m from the Common Tern colony referred to in the previous paragraph (Plate 163). The off-duty bird was extremely aggressive to passers-by in the street below. The outcome of this nest is not known; the site was not used in 2015 and by the 2016 breeding season the building had been demolished.

**Thurso, Caithness.** A small mixed colony of Common Gulls and Common Terns was discovered in May 2014 on a large farm building a short distance from Thurso. The colony consisted of 24 bp Common Gulls and 3 bp Common Terns, the terns nesting on the west side of the valley formed by two pairs of pitched roofs. There were a few pairs of gulls on this same part of the roof, but the majority of them were on the eastern side. This colony appears to have been newly established in 2014, the Common Gulls probably having been displaced from a colony a few kilometres away that had been subject to much disturbance at the beginning of the 2014 breeding season (Sellers 2015). Birds of both species were again present in 2015, with 3 bp Common Terns and 30 bp Common Gulls; there were at least 20 bp Common Gulls here in 2016 together with 1 bp Common Tern.

**Table 2.** Counts of Common Terns breeding on roofs in Dyce and Westhill, North-east Scotland, 2002–2009.

Year	No. Common Terns breeding (bp)	
	Dyce	Westhill
2002	c.7–8	0
2003	7	0
2004	18+	0
2005	c.50–60	9+
2006	50+	?
2007	~100 a	c.20
2008	10+	?
2009	4+	b

a Also three Arctic Terns at bathing area nearby.

b Five Common Terns in flight over colony, but no evidence of breeding.

**Aberlour, Moray & Nairn.** A few Common Terns have been recorded along the River Spey around Aberlour almost annually since at least the early 1990s. Although breeding may have taken place this was not confirmed until 2010 when an adult and a juvenile were seen at the river in early July. In 2014, a pair nested on one of the roofs of the Walkers Shortbread factory in Aberlour, c.300 m from the River Spey, and raised two young. This is believed to have been the first time they bred here as their presence was very obvious. In 2015, 2 bp were present on different roofs at Walkers, with 3 bp in 2016, but limited visibility meant that it was not possible to determine the outcomes.

**Isle of May.** A new information centre was erected at Kirk Haven on the Isle of May in the early months of 2014. The building has a flat roof with a granular covering impregnated with various plant species. Arctic Terns have nested on the ground close by for several years and 6 bp nested on the new roof in 2014, increasing to 28 bp in 2015, but following heavy predation early in the season the site was unoccupied in 2016. .

### Discussion

The past 20–30 years have seen Arctic and Common Terns adopt built-up areas for nesting in a number of places in Scotland. Often these have been on the ground in industrial sites, docks etc. to which ground predators such as Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* do not have ready access. Human activities on such sites may still cause some disturbance, however, and the move to nesting on roofs can be seen as a way of combining the benefits of inaccessibility to ground predators with minimal interference by man, just as it has been in gulls. This, however, almost certainly does not apply in the case of the Isle of May colony, where the use of a roof appears to be simply a case of utilising a new vacant area in a colony in which space is at a premium. Experience in the USA is that terns prefer to nest on flat, gravel-covered roofs (e.g. Fisk 1978), and this has been used to advantage in encouraging birds to use roofs where they can breed successfully but without undue impact on human activities. The experience in Scotland is that birds will use sloping roofs if they have areas of vegetation or accumulations of dead moss where they can lay their eggs.

Urban gulls do not make good neighbours as a result of the noise and mess they make and their aggressiveness towards people (e.g. Goode 2014), and on the basis of the observations described

Plate 163. Arctic Tern on nest on sloping roof, Wick, Caithness, 22 June 2014; the nest site is an accumulation of bits of dead moss. © R.M. Sellers



here the same appears to be true of terns. Certainly, their incessant screeching was cited by people working close to the Wick colony as ‘unbearable’, and the aggressiveness of Arctic Terns is probably even more daunting than that of Herring Gulls or Lesser Black-backed Gulls *L. fuscus*. Terns are much less messy birds than large gulls, even so in large numbers they too can cause fouling of property, especially motor vehicles. This has been a significant issue as regards the Montrose colonies. Some fouling of vehicles was evident in the Wick Common Tern colony, though how much was due to Herring Gulls and how much to terns is difficult to say.

Whether the move into towns will persist in terns as it has in gulls remains to be seen. If it does, then the problems posed by urban gulls are likely to be replicated to a greater or lesser extent by terns. Perhaps the only saving grace is that terns may be more likely than gulls to shift their breeding sites if discouraged, and hence may be more able to find places to nest in urban areas that allow them to coexist peacefully with man.

### Acknowledgements

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Plate 164. The Curlew inspecting one of the larger stones on the beach. © Ron Summers

## A Curlew foraging on a cobble shore

Away from the breeding grounds, Curlews *Numenius arquata* are generally found on estuarine shores where they use their long bills to probe for Ragworms *Hediste diversicolor* and bivalve clams in the mudflats (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Other items of diet include Shore Crabs *Carcinus maenas*, which they search for amongst clumps of seaweed. At high tide, they may move onto grass and stubble fields where earthworms comprise much of the diet (Townshend 1981). Curlews also occur on rocky shores where a long bill may seem to be a disadvantage.

The following observations were made on a cobble shore in the Beauly Firth (Ross-shire) on 19 November 2015. Although the tide was low and soft substrates were available for typical foraging behaviour, an adult Curlew was seen foraging high on the shore amongst cobbles. The bird was particularly attracted to larger stones where, after preliminary inspection, it would slide its bill under the stone and, by turning its head, aligned the bill horizontally (Plates 164

and 165). Every few seconds, it retracted its bill and gulped back a small food item. Later, when I investigated what was under the stones, there was a mass of wriggling *Gammarus* sp. (amphipod crustaceans) (Plate 166). Their size was consistent with the small items being eaten.

The bird had been previously captured, ringed and measured, and classed as a male from its bill length (Summers *et al.* 2013). Males have markedly shorter bills than females so are probably more adept at this type of foraging than long-billed females. The bird was the owner of the territory on which it occurred, so the other more usual foraging habitats (mudflats and clumps of Knotted Wrack *Ascophyllum nodosum* growing on stones and boulders) were available to it. It had been seen at low tide on seven previous occasions; foraging amongst Knotted Wrack five times and twice on mud. This suggests that the bird had chosen the cobble beach to search for food rather than being forced to forage on a less usual habitat through competition with other Curlews.



Plate 165. By twisting its head, the Curlew could slide its bill under large stones. © Ron Summers



Plate 166. A mass of *Gammarus* sp. under one of the stones on the beach. © Ron Summers

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## Kingfisher apparently taking berries

On 6 December 2015, I watched a Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* apparently taking berries from a Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* bush. This occurred at Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve in East Lothian at a pond known as the Marl Loch. This has emergent reeds around its margins, and dense mature Sea Buckthorn thickets bordering the pond on two sides, all situated in a wide open estuary with saltmarsh.

The Kingfisher landed about 3m up in the outer branches of a Sea Buckthorn bush, and after a few moments, started vigorously tugging items off the twigs. It was twisting its head and now and then flicking one or both wings open to above shoulder level to control its balance. At the distance of viewing across the pond, and as the bird was mainly side-on or back-on to me, I could not definitely see berries going into the throat, but as the berries were so contiguous as to be virtually covering each twig, there seems to be no other conclusion but that the Kingfisher was consuming berries. Also there were no movements of the foliage below that might have indicated discarded or falling items from the feeding bird.

I watched this action for about five minutes, and for a further five minutes the bird remained sitting and fidgeting slightly on the branch. It then dropped and splash-dived just through the surface of the water below, emerged, and flew out of sight into the dense lower parts of the bushes. The recent weather had been windy and wet at times, but without freezing or harsh conditions.

There is no mention of Common Kingfishers taking berries in *British Birds* journals, nor in Cramp (1985) or BWP Update (1997–2004). However, the Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon* is stated to take berries in winter (Fry *et al.* 1992).

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Plate 167. Ring-necked Parakeet prospecting for a nest hole, Victoria Park, Glasgow, Clyde, April 2016. © Chris McInerny

## Ring-necked Parakeets potentially nesting in Scotland for the first time

Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* is a beautiful and exotic species, whose natural range includes northern sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian sub-continent (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1997). Four subspecies are recognised, with two in Africa, *P.k. krameri* and *P.k. parvirostris*, and two in India, *P.k. manillensis* and *P.k. borealis*.

Ring-necked Parakeets of various subspecies are popular pets throughout the world, and are bred extensively in captivity (Morgan 1993). In a number of countries, including Europe and North America, captive birds have escaped and established feral breeding populations, sometimes of mixed subspecies (Butler 2005, Strubbe & Matthysen 2007). This occurred in southern England first in the 19th century, but more extensively in the late 20th century, with increasing and large numbers of birds of African and Indian origin present in the early 21st century, mostly in parks and urban areas in the London area; at some sites roosts of 1000s of birds have been counted (Pithon & Dytham 1999, Pithon & Dytham 2002, Brown & Grice 2005). This increase coincided with the species' presence and breeding further north in England. It was first seen in Scotland in Lothian in April 1976, with subsequent records from Caithness to Borders (da Prato 1981). Since then there have been sporadic sightings, mostly in the south of the country, though the species is under-

recorded; this in part due to it being placed in Category E of the *Scottish List*, as birds are thought to be escaped pets (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

In early 2016, up to three birds appeared in Victoria Park, Glasgow (Clyde). These remained and were seen to prospect and inhabit a nest hole in a Beech (*Fagus spp.*) tree in late March and early April (Plates 167–169). At least two birds attended the hole to mid-May, behaving latterly as if they were feeding young on the nest. It appears that this is the first recorded example of attempted breeding by Ring-necked Parakeets in Scotland. It will be interesting to see if breeding is successful. Lower reproduction success of the species has been observed in non-native countries with colder temperate climates because of higher egg infertility (Shwartz *et al.* 2009), so breeding may not be successful in Scotland.

It is possible that the Victoria Park birds derive from the large and expanding English population and, as such, this observation represents the first attempted colonisation of Scotland by the species. It will be interesting to see whether more birds and other breeding attempts have been recorded elsewhere. To build a more complete Scottish picture I would appreciate it if other observations could be sent to me through my email address, listed below.



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Plates 168–169. Ring-necked Parakeets prospecting for a nest hole, Victoria Park, Glasgow, Clyde, April 2016. © Chris McInerny



Plate 170. Rock Pipit showing characteristics of Scandinavian Rock Pipit, Barns Ness, Lothian, May 2016. © I.J. Andrews

## Possible Scandinavian Rock Pipit nesting in Lothian in 2016

On 31 May 2016, I located a pair of Rock Pipits *Anthus petrosus* feeding young in a nest beside Barns Ness lighthouse, East Lothian. The nest was in long tussock grass beside a low wooden fence line and the young were being fed by both parents on a regular basis. From inside a car, the close views obtained of both adults lead me to believe that one bird showed the characteristics of the race *littoralis* (Scandinavian Rock Pipit).

The bird had a greyish wash to the crown, ear-coverts, nape and mantle, a clear white supercilium behind the eye, a pinkish/creamy flush to the lower breast and a pale background colour to the breast and belly. The bird it was paired to was probably within the range of the nominate race *petrosus*, but it also lacked the typical olive tones and dull base colour to the underparts.

It is appreciated that some breeding Rock Pipits in Scotland have a tendency towards a blue-grey head, pale supercilium and paler underparts, especially when the plumage becomes worn or bleached (C.R. McKay pers. comm.), but this is usually later in the season than this individual was observed and this bird's plumage was particularly distinctive.

I had previously identified a Scandinavian Rock Pipit at this exact site on 11 May 2013.

Scandinavian Rock Pipits have occasionally been recorded in the UK in summer, but the only reference I can find to them having been previously involved in a breeding attempt was on Fair Isle in 2015 where a pair was presumed to have bred successfully (*Fair Isle Annual Report for 2015*, in press).

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Plate 171. Rock Pipit paired with the putative Scandinavian Rock Pipit, Barns Ness, Lothian, May 2016. © I.J. Andrews

## The breeding of a mixed pair of Roseate and Common Terns in Lothian in 2016

The Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* colony in Leith Docks, Lothian, holds c.800 breeding pairs and is one of the largest in Scotland (Jennings 2012). It is located on a disused lock wall that now forms an island at the entrance to Imperial Dock within the secure part of the Leith Docks complex. The site was declared a Special Protection Area in 2004, and can be viewed from a vantage point at a range of 225 m.

On 30 May 2016, KG located an adult Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* in the Common Tern colony. It was ringed with both BTO and 'Roseate special' rings. It was incubating and appeared to be paired with a Common Tern. This was confirmed that evening when a change-over at the nest was observed. A visit to the adjacent quayside on 18 June with the Lothian Ringing Group confirmed the presence of the mixed pair and that a chick (Plate 172), thought to be about five days old, was present in the nest (giving a hatch date of c.13 June). At 11 and 20 days-old, the chick was essentially indistinguishable from the nearby Common Tern chicks, but from 25 days-old it could be separated by its darker fore-crown and darker bill (Plate 173). By 15 July, at c.33 days old, the hybrid chick was able to make several short flights.

**Plate 172.** Roseate Tern paired with a Common Tern (the chick is in the nest behind them), Leith Docks, Lothian, 18 June 2016. © Ian Andrews



The nest was within the Common Tern colony on the edge of a concrete area tucked into an area of tall tussocky grass.

While the juvenile hybrid closely resembled a juvenile Common Tern, it was most easily separated by its darker, finely streaked fore-crown and virtually all-dark bill (Plate 174). Although the mantle and scapulars were more heavily marked than nearby Common Terns, it lacked the black-and-white, Sandwich Tern-like patterning characteristic of a juvenile Roseate Tern. Also, the hybrid's legs were pink as in Common Tern, rather than the black of a juvenile Roseate Tern. The Leith hybrid thus was more Common Tern like than a similar individual photographed in Merseyside (Cabot & Nisbet 2013).

Previous sightings of Roseate Terns at this site are as follows:

- 2008: a pair laid a clutch of three eggs; fledging success unknown (per RBBP).
- 2009: a pair laid a clutch of two eggs; fledging success unknown (per RBBP).
- 2013: an adult was seen on 28–29 July.
- 2014: an adult was seen feeding a juvenile in mid-July, but only one adult was ever seen.
- 2015: an unpaired adult was seen on 24, 29 May and 10, 17 July.



**Plate 173.** Juvenile hybrid Roseate x Common Tern (centre) with adult Roseate Tern (right) and adult Common Tern (left), Leith Docks, Lothian, 16 July 2016. © Ian Andrews



**Plate 174.** Juvenile hybrid Roseate x Common Tern (back left) with adult Roseate Tern (with adult and juvenile Common Tern in front), Leith Docks, Lothian, 16 July 2016. © Ian Andrews

Hybrids among terns are rare (Malling Olsen & Larson 1995). However, mixed Roseate - Common Terns pairs and hybrid Roseate x Common Terns have been reported rarely in Europe and more frequently in North America (McCarthy 2006), where they constitute 0.2% of Roseate Tern breeders (Gochfeld *et al.* 1998). Ratcliffe *et al.* (2004) and Cabot & Nisbet (2013) reported that it is most frequently male Common Terns that pair with female Roseate Terns and that this may be the result of a surplus of females in the latter's population; and that such pairs are possibly stable over several seasons. In the UK, hybrid pairings are known from Coquet Island, Northumberland (Robbins 1974), Wales

in 1992, Anglesey in 2009–13 and Lancashire & North Merseyside 2009–11 (RBBP website: [www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-reports.htm](http://www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-reports.htm)).

An apparent mixed Roseate - Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* pairing was noted in Shetland in 1984 (Ewins *et al.* 1987), but this Leith record would appear to be the first instance of a mixed Roseate - Common Tern pairing to be recorded in Scotland.

### Acknowledgements

Two visits to the quayside were made with the Lothian Ringing Group which monitors the colony on behalf of SNH with the kind permission of Forth Ports.

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Revised ms accepted July 2016



Plate 175. Golden Eagle, undisclosed site, Highland, February 2016. © Robert Ince

## Letter to the Editors

### Do adult Golden Eagles teach their offspring to hunt?

Sir, “Do adult Golden Eagles teach their offspring to hunt?” is an interesting question and Peter Cosgrove’s note (*Scottish Birds* 36 (1): 10–11) helps to illustrate the difficulty in finding a reliable answer to such questions: the general lack of detailed comparative information means that correctly interpreting Golden Eagle behaviour is not always straightforward, and this is especially true of the interpretation of isolated observations. In the quoted paper (Walker 1987), but more fully in my book *Call of the Eagle*, I describe adult eagles leading and leaving their juvenile where it would be attacked by Peregrines and an adult ignoring the plight of its juvenile tussling with a Red Fox. Both incidents may be part of the learning process and the second might even be interpreted as supervised hunting. While the interaction with a Kestrel, as described by Peter Cosgrove, may be similar to these it may also have been defensive activity in which the juvenile became embroiled. This also helps to illustrate the problem of correctly interpreting eagle behaviour: a Golden Eagle’s response to almost any situation can be disproportionate to its apparent importance: an eagle intruding close to an active nest might be almost ignored by the resident pair while a Kestrel might be relentlessly pursued even though it poses no

threat. In fact, it is not at all unusual for eagles to aggressively chase, as if hunting, a prey species inside the nesting area but to do so seemingly without an intent to kill, only to drive the animal away. If a juvenile eagle becomes involved it may look more like hunting and teaching than is actually the case. Teaching the young to hunt would require distinctive behaviour but, having made detailed observations throughout sixteen post-fledging periods, I have never witnessed an incident that could be unambiguously interpreted as adults teaching a juvenile to hunt. There may still be an element of learning by example but this is as likely to begin before fledging (the nestling watching the adult) as it is to occur after fledging. In spite of its relevance and importance (and the number of free-flying eagles to be watched), the post-fledging period has always been a much under-studied part of the Golden Eagle’s year.

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# Obituaries

## Joe Potter (1933–2015)



Plate 176. Joe Potter, Loch Hourn, Highland. © Tommy Youd

My first birdwatching outing with Joe was in 1973 when I was 11 years old and he would have been 40. I asked his son Stephen if I could come along with them and after that day we became lifelong friends, despite our age gap, bonded by our common interest in birds.

Joe didn't drive, which was one of the reasons he knew his local patches of Devilla forest in Kincardine and the upper Forth shoreline so well. He was a familiar sight to be seen making his way across the Kincardine Bridge towards Skinflats with binoculars and walking stick to catch the high tide. He was, however, never short of a lift from birding friends who were glad of his experience and good company. We all had many enjoyable days out to various places like Fife Ness, Flanders Moss and Aberlady Bay with an annual weekend away to Grannies Heilan Hame at Embo.

Joe was a miner brought up in a large family from Valleyfield. A hard worker with firm socialist values, he took great pride in his work and the camaraderie of his fellow workers. When not underground at the coalface where he worked, he took immense pleasure from the great outdoors and nature. When he was 21 he and his friend Alex Douglas set off on a two-

week birdwatching holiday from the pit. Despite much friendly ribbing from their peers about what was an unusual hobby back then, there was a whip round for them. So off they went with a pocket full of 10 shilling notes to augment their holiday savings. This was long before the outdoor activity clothing stores of today. They had ex-army rucksacks, work boots and blankets; no down sleeping bags then. They travelled northwards in search of Crested Tit, Capercaillie, Black-throated Diver and many other firsts for them both. Much of their journey was on foot and they stretched their absence from work to a month when the money ran out and they had reached the top of Liathach. A journalist from the *Dundee Courier* came across the two lads and, on hearing about their adventures, wrote a short article on them with a photograph which was duly published. I was lucky enough to hear this story in full and many other anecdotes of Joe's outdoor life, unfortunately too many to incorporate in this obituary.

If you were enthusiastic about getting out and enjoying nature, Joe would be only too glad to encourage you. He taught me to stop and just listen. 'You'll see a lot more if you listen and can identify the songs and calls' he told me at the very beginning. He saw many rarities, but didn't often lay claim to them; he was satisfied so long as someone put the record in. He and his old friend George Dick identified Scotland's third record of Wilson's Phalarope at Peppermill Dam in Kincardine, an extra special sighting for him as it was on his patch.

Not long after the miners' strike, Joe lost his job as the pits shut down. He and his wife Margaret then became summer caretakers of the farmhouse at Kinloch Hourn for the Gordon family. There Margaret ran a small tearoom and Joe did odd jobs on the estate, helped during the deer stalking and managing the car park, taking note of people going into the rough bounds of Knoydart and ensuring they returned safely to their cars. These were happy years for them both

and for me and many others, strangers and friends alike, who always received a warm welcome when visiting. Joe and I would go out on the hills looking for birds including Red-throated Divers and Golden Eagles up until his late sixties. We would also fish the hill lochs as he was an expert fisherman too.

Joe leaves behind a close loving family, his wife Margaret, his children Stephen, Ruth, Elizabeth and Amanda and eight grandchildren. He also leaves behind many friends, from the birding fraternity and beyond, who will all miss him greatly.

### **Tommy Youd**

## Klaus Dietrich Fiuczynski (1938–2014)

With the death of Dr. Klaus Dietrich Fiuczynski in Berlin on 23 June 2014, raptor enthusiasts lost an inspirational colleague and an outstanding expert on the Hobby. He gave the Derek Ratcliffe Memorial Lecture on his research on the Hobby at the Scottish Raptor Conference in 2005. Through this, I developed a close friendship with him, visiting Berlin to work with him on Hobbies and welcoming him back to Scotland to help with Merlin studies. He also contributed to *Raptors, a field guide to survey and monitoring* as a principal advisor on the Hobby.

Dieter, as he liked to be known, was born in 1938 in Berlin. He studied at the Freie Universität Berlin, where he obtained a PhD and then became a teacher in Berlin. In 1990, Dieter was a headmaster in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, before returning to Berlin in 1996.

Dieter's first ornithological studies were of the Kestrel, but in 1954 he encountered Hobbies in the heavily used forests of Berlin. This population was to become his life-long project, leading to a flow of data on Hobbies in West Berlin and also, later on, for Red and Black Kites. His research and contacts enabled him to work freely in East Berlin, something very rare at the time, and of which he was immensely proud. His fieldwork was carried out very early in the morning before going to work in school. He provided the first artificial nesting sites for Hobbies near Berlin in 1983, which have continued to be used extensively.

He had a long-lasting friendship and intensive correspondence with Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, who had studied Hobbies in England. In 1980, they published a joint, comparative

paper on Hobbies in Germany and England (*British Birds* 73: 275–295). Tree climbing was a passion of his. Soon after retiring he had hip surgery, but within six months he was climbing trees again. For his birthday, he was given a state-of-the-art climbing harness, but he never used it, instead trusting the old one.

Dieter wrote many ornithological papers. The first edition of his monograph *Der Baumfalke* [The Hobby] was published in 1987. In 2011, a comprehensively revised edition was published, and he had begun work, with myself, on an English language edition, shortly before his death. It is understood that VerlagsKG Wolf will publish this English version.

An inspirational teacher, gifted biologist and versatile linguist, it was as the doyen of Hobby studies in Berlin and Brandenburg that raptor enthusiasts remember him.

### **Ron Downing**

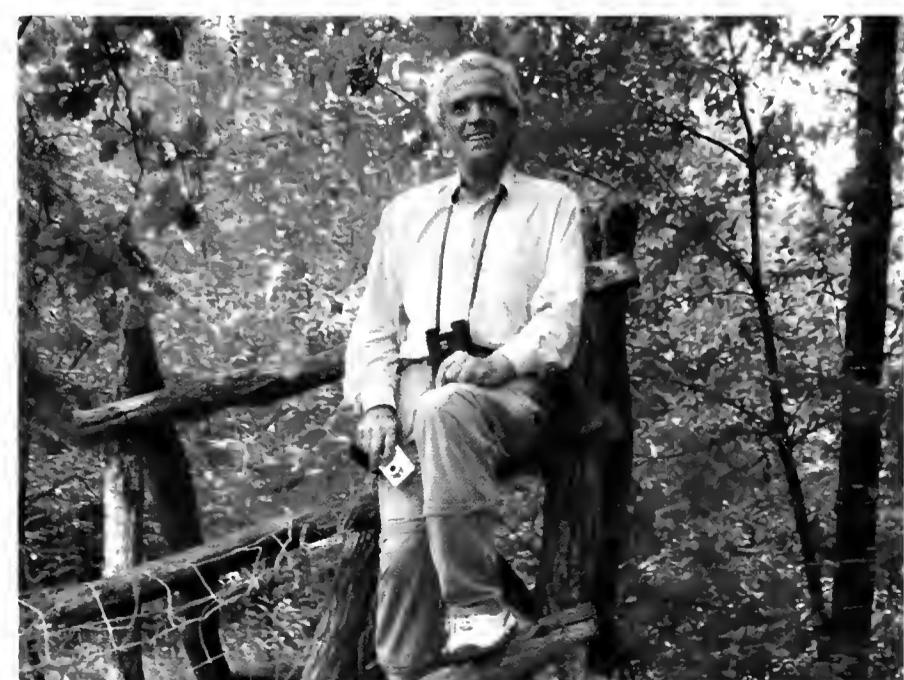


Plate 177. Dietrich Fiuczynski, 2008. © Ron Downing



Plate 178. Participants gather to depart on one of the Club's 'Waders and Seabirds' walks, Musselburgh, May 2016. © Stan da Prato

## Scotland's Big Nature Festival 2016, Levenhall Links, Musselburgh, 21–22 May

J. CLEAVER

With five years of Scotland's Big Nature Festival (previously *The Scottish Birdfair*) under the Club's belt, members are likely to be well versed on SOC's preparation and set-up for this enjoyable annual event. As ever, much consideration went in to planning what the Club's contribution would include this year, and thanks to the fantastic support and generosity of speakers, volunteers, colleagues, walk and workshop leaders, the SOC's contribution, once again, did not disappoint...

■ Attendees visiting the sea wall and/or bird hides this year may have had the pleasure of speaking to a BTO/SOC volunteer birder guide! Individuals were in place throughout the weekend to inform visitors about recent and latest sightings, as well as offering hints and tips to help improve festival-goers' bird identification skills - a real bonus to those birding the site!

- The Club had arranged three broad-ranging, appealing talks over the weekend, delivered by speakers each with an incredible thirty or more years of dedication to their study species/subjects! Peter Mawby talked about the much-loved Dipper and some possible causes for the observed species' decline. Ian Poxton shifted the focus to our uplands, posing the question "Are Merlins and other upland birds under threat on grouse moors?", in which he discussed the results of a 30-year study of breeding Merlins in the Lammermuirs Hills. Gordon Riddle, aka 'Mr Kestrel', shared an insight into his epic, 43 year-long study of a population of Kestrels on the Ayrshire/Dumfries & Galloway border.

We're delighted to have Peter, Gordon and Ian each scheduled in to visit some of the Club's local branches this winter talks' season! Take a look at the programme to find out when and where - we've a fantastic line-up of speakers in store for members again this year!

- By popular demand, Ian Thomson was back to run another raptor identification workshop, as well as leading a wader identification session. Attendees got help in deciphering the identification of some of the more challenging species, thanks to Ian's expert hints and tips.

■ Over the weekend the Club ran four 'Waders and Seabirds' walks led by festival stalwart, Stan da Prato. The Club is very grateful to Stan who is unfailingly available to help out at the event, year upon year, juggling his many horticultural commitments to do so. Extra support this year was provided in the form of his Citroen car, which ferried the bulk of the Club's display materials and resources to and from the showground.

■ The team were delighted to make eight new memberships for the Club over the weekend and several more attendees joined up after the event. Sales on the stand (of second-hand books, bird feeders and pin badges) amounted to just over £500 at close of play on Sunday.

Alongside Stan, many other HQ-based volunteers took care of often time-consuming, nitty-gritty preparation required for such an event, including folding literature, labelling sample issues and making up Club information packs. This was invaluable in freeing up staff time to focus on the key tasks involved in co-ordinating the Club's high-profile involvement in the biggest event of the year for nature lovers in Scotland.

*Jane Cleaver, SOC Development Officer*



Plate 179. Visitors at Scotland's Big Nature Festival, Musselburgh, May 2016. © RSPB Scotland

# NEWS AND NOTICES

## New members

**Borders:** Miss K. Anderson, Miss L. Preston, Mr I.C. Somerville, **Central Scotland:** Ms G. Brown, Mr & Mrs A. McPhee, Mr N. McWilliam, **Clyde:** Mr B. Cox, Miss H. Lemon, Mr D. McLean, Mrs N. Ritchie, Mrs C. Thompson, Mr B. Thurston, Miss D. Weldon & Mr G. Hannah, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr & Mrs N. Arrowsmith, Mr & Mrs N. Dempsey, Mr J. Dobinson, Mr D.H. Howey, Mr S. Rose, Mr P. Slater, Mrs A. Whittaker, **Fife:** Miss C. Chislett-McDonald, Mr R. Redman, Mr B. Temby, **Highland:** Ms C. MacGillivray & Ms R. Wolfe, Ms C. Pearson, Mr J. Poyner, Mr L. Schofield, Mr & Mrs R. Turner, **Lothian:** Mr K. Bealby, Mr & Mrs G. Bone, Ms J. Campbell, Ms G. Cook, Mr G. Cousquer, Mr L. Cuthill & Ms L. Drummond, Ms K. Davidson, Mr R. Dunn, Mr R. Galloway, Ms M. Gilvray, Miss A. Gray, Dr D. Hill, Mr J. Hutchison, Mr T. Janhonen, Mr H. Mathias, Mr S. McBeth, Mrs A. McCulloch, Ms M. McDonagh, Mrs J. McNeil, Mr C. Mirza, Ms C. Page, Mr D. Perpinan & Mrs T. Costa, Ms J. Reynolds, Mr G. Rooney, Ms P. Royle, Ms J. Schonveld, Miss W. Thomson, Mr & Mrs R. Todd, Mr S. Williams, **Moray:** Ms H. Dawson, Mr & Mrs B. Purcell, **North-East Scotland:** Mrs S. Turnbull, **Overseas:** Mr K. Mullarney, **Tayside:** Mrs C. Chapman, Rev & Mrs P. Thomson, **West Galloway:** Mr R. Conn.

## 200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **May:** 1st £50 Miss J. Howie, 2nd £30 S.F. Jackson, 3rd £20 Dr A. Brown, 4th £10 Mrs Betts. **June:** 1st £30 Bruce Lynch, 2nd £20 Stewart Nelson, 3rd £10 Dr Poxton. **July:** 1st £30 R.G. Davenport, 2nd £20 R.S. Craig, 3rd £10 A.K. McDiarmid.

Details on how to join can be obtained by writing to Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose TD6 9NH.

## SOC President

It was with much regret that Ian Thomson had to step down from his role as President in June this year, owing to personal circumstances. Council is grateful to Ian for his drive and leadership over the past year and wishes him well. As a long-standing and avid supporter of the SOC, Ian will of course still be very much

involved with the Club as a member. James Main (Vice President) has agreed to assume the role of President, pending members' approval at the forthcoming AGM.

## Conferences

SOC Annual Conference & AGM, 23–25 September 2016, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. For up-to-date programme details, AGM agenda and to book, visit the SOC website.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, Saturday 18 March 2017, Carnegie Conference Centre, Dunfermline

## Waterston House

### Art exhibitions

Jo Ruth: Saturday 23 July to Wednesday 14 September

Lisa Hooper: Saturday 17 September to Wednesday 16 November

Chris Rose: Saturday 19 November to Wednesday 17 January

## Optics Demo Day

Sunday 16 October, 10 am–4 pm, free event  
A wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free, friendly expert advice. If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know and we will do our best to have these available for you to try at the event.

## Aberlady evening goose talk & watch

Thursday 29 September & Tuesday 4 October, 5.30 pm, £4.00 SOC members/child (£6.00 non-members). An entertaining illustrated talk by John Harrison, East Lothian Council countryside ranger, on the migrating geese that descend on the county in their thousands each autumn. The talk is followed by the opportunity to watch the Pink-footed Geese fly in to roost on nearby Aberlady Bay. Places are limited so advance booking is essential. Refreshments served.

## Aberlady morning goose walk

Saturday 8 October, 7.00 am, £4.00 SOC members/children (£6.00 non-members). A guided walk led by countryside ranger John

Harrison. A gentle stroll from Waterston House to Aberlady Bay and back is a great opportunity to learn all about the geese as you go to catch the spectacle of the birds taking off for the day to feed in the surrounding countryside. Price includes tea/coffee and a breakfast roll back at Waterston House. Advance booking essential.

### Branch updates

**Perth & Kinross:** Scott Paterson (Recorder), change of email: pkrecorder@the-soc.org.uk

**Central Scotland:** Niel Bielby (as Secretary), change of email: central.secretary@the-soc.org.uk

**Upper Forth:** Assistant Recorder, new email address upperforthrecorder@the-soc.org.uk

### Unwanted back issues of *Scottish Birds*?

HQ can use them! The journal is a key promotional tool for attracting new members, so we always welcome any donations of spare back issues (from volume 30 onwards), which we can give out to visiting birdwatchers at Waterston House or at events. If you are in a position where you no longer wish to store your old SBs, but don't live near Waterston House, you could take them along to a local branch meeting (for them to pass on to HQ via a Council meeting, for example) or staff could take delivery at an SOC conference. To

discuss how we can help you to recycle your unwanted journals in this way, please call Wendy on 01875 871330.

### Scottish Bird News

The archive of *Scottish Bird News* (SBN), the SOC's quarterly magazine that ran from 1986 to 2009, has now been digitised and is available online at the Biodiversity Heritage library <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/creator/87457#/titles>

### Colour-ringed Lesser Black-backed Gulls

One hundred Lesser Black-backed Gull chicks were colour-ringed on Inchcolm, an island in the Firth of Forth, on 5 July 2016. Each Lesser Black-backed Gull chick was ringed with a metal BTO ring on the right leg and an orange alphanumeric colour-ring on the left leg. This is initially a three-year project, funded by an SOC research grant, to find out whether Lesser Black-backed Gulls breeding on the Forth islands are still migrating and wintering in south-west Iberia and Morocco or are now wintering in Britain. I would be very grateful for details of any sightings of these birds, whether in Scotland or abroad!

*John C. Davies  
Email: johncdavies@blueyonder.co.uk*



Plate 180. Lesser Black-backed Gull, the first re-sighting, Baron's Haugh, Clyde, 6 August 2016. © Davie Abraham

# Inspiring the next generation of young naturalists – ‘A Focus on Nature’ mentoring scheme

J. CLEAVER



SOC is in the privileged position of having a membership composed of skilled ornithologists, scientists, educators and creatives, working within a wide range of industries and fields. In recent years particularly, the Club has sought to explore ways in which this wealth of knowledge and expertise can be passed on to ensure that there will be a future generation of naturalists recording, conserving and speaking up for our country's birds.



Plate 181. Encouraging a future generation of bird and nature-lovers, Isle of May. © Lang Stewart

Encouraged by the success of the *Young Birders' Training Course*, a joint initiative with Isle of May Bird Observatory, the SOC is looking to build on the training and support the Club offers young naturalists.

A Focus On Nature (AFON, [www.afocuson-nature.org](http://www.afocuson-nature.org)) is a voluntary organisation run by a voluntary committee of nature conservationists and enthusiasts. The organisation's aims complement the educational remit of the SOC and include: ensuring a transfer of skills and knowledge between generations, working with other youth networks and environmental organisations to create a youth conservation movement in the UK and promoting nature conservation and natural history to young people.

AFON runs and manage a successful mentoring scheme which matches volunteer mentors operating within a broad range of disciplines (including Practical Conservation, Nature Writing & Journalism, Art & Design, Policy & Campaigns, Filmmaking & Television, Science, Ecology & Surveying, and Academia & Research) with mentees: budding conservationists/writers/scientists and similar, eager to network with, and learn from, experienced professionals.

AFON is looking to grow their mentoring programme in order to build on the support and expertise on offer to young conservationists.

## How can you help?

In order to expand the SOC's reach and offer help and support to naturalists at the beginning of their career, the Club is hoping to sign a number of 'SOC Mentors' up to the scheme.



**Plate 182.** Participants on the 2016 Young Birders' Training Course learning to ring gulls under supervision of Bex Outram (SNH), Isle of May. © *Stuart Rivers*

Prospective mentors complete a two-page form providing more information about themselves and their specific expertise, alongside a head shot, which is added to AFON's Mentors directory, as hosted on the organisation's website.

Mentees complete an application form and shortlist three potential mentors they feel are the best suited to their individual career needs. AFON distributes its application to each prospective mentor, who will then have the opportunity to comment and either approve or reject applications at its discretion and for whatever reason - no explanation is required.

Mentoring can take many different formats: from a distance, e.g. via the internet, over the telephone, via social media, or on a much more personal basis, offering work experience, meetings, talks or lectures. Mentors are encouraged to give advice tailored to the individual mentee, appropriate to their circumstances (the scheme is open to mentees aged 18 and above).

As a minimum, AFON expects mentors to:

1. Send an introductory email explaining background and current career, thus entering into correspondence with the mentee
2. Answer all emails fully

3. Give advice on careers
4. Assist in the construction of CVs
5. Where appropriate provide references and recommend jobs and prospects, etc.
6. Highlight any upcoming opportunities to mentees

Any additional support (including any financial costs incurred) is given at the discretion of the mentor.

Mentoring is expected to continue for a minimum of **six months**, providing the recipient keeps up the correspondence, however, AFON would like mentors to support talented individuals for as long as possible, following and influencing the careers of promising individuals.

If you would like to find out more about possibly becoming a mentor, please drop Jane a line: [jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk](mailto:jane.cleaver@the-soc.org.uk) or contact 01875 871 330 for more information. To view a list of current mentors signed up to the scheme, visit [www.afocusonnature.org/mentors](http://www.afocusonnature.org/mentors). Think you could benefit from working with a mentor? Visit [www.afocusonnature.org/entrants/mentoring](http://www.afocusonnature.org/entrants/mentoring) for more information.

*Jane Cleaver, SOC Development Officer*

# Artist Profile: Chris Rose



Plate 183. Detail from Short-eared Owl, Musselburgh, Lothian. © Chris Rose

In recent years I've been drawn to the coast for inspiration so to be invited to exhibit at Aberlady gave me the perfect excuse to spend more time at the seaside!

Much of the work in this show will feature paintings around Aberlady Bay itself, although I couldn't resist hopping up the coast to Musselburgh to paint the Short-eared Owls that invaded the lagoons last winter in great numbers. Seemingly unphased by the continual stream of passing human traffic, the owls were a daily delight to very many people; both birders and 'normal' people. One morning I watched an owl repeatedly quartering the narrow strip of rough grassland between the lagoons and the sea wall. The sun shining through its wings gave it an almost angelic quality.

And on the subject of owls; one could hardly ignore the Long-eared Owl roost at Aberlady. One particular owl could be seen regularly on the same branch, part-hidden behind branches and twigs. I liked the way your eye was distracted by the orange berries of Sea Buckthorn, sprinkled like so many Christmas tree lights over the latticework of branches. The dead reeds that fringe the loch provided a bold counterpoint to the dark secrecy of the buckthorn thicket.

The mud flats and salt-marsh pools of Aberlady Bay provide a wealth of material and I've completed a couple of paintings just from the car park. The light over the bay is ever-changing and in 'Aberlady Bay' the sun briefly interrupts heavy showers passing through on a stiff north-westerly, ruffling the water on the brackish

pools. The usual collection of gulls, waders and wildfowl dot the landscape - barely recognisable from this distance although a group of Wigeon can be detected grazing on the marsh.

Wigeon are always present at Aberlady during the winter months. Returning to the car park, after a day sketching Long-eared Owls, I discovered a small flock of Wigeon feeding close by, lit by the afterglow of the setting sun. The winter sky reflected brightly in yellows, oranges and purples in the brackish pools, contrasting in the fading light with the increasingly darkening marsh. Details become lost in the gathering gloom and the abstract shapes of the pools come to dominate the scene.

In addition to sketches and paintings, the exhibition will include many of the original illustration plates for the newly published book *Robins & Chats* (published by Bloomsbury in 2015). The book features 62 full-colour plates illustrating the 175 species that make up this diverse and attractive family. From the bluebirds of North America to the cliff-chats of East Africa the family includes many familiar groups, such as wheatears, stonechats and redstarts, together with less well-known species such as the secretive shortwings of Asia and the rare and localised akalats of central Africa.

The exhibition at Waterston House starts on 19 November 2016 and will run to January 2017.



Plate 184. Detail from Long-eared Owl, Aberlady Bay, Lothian. © Chris Rose

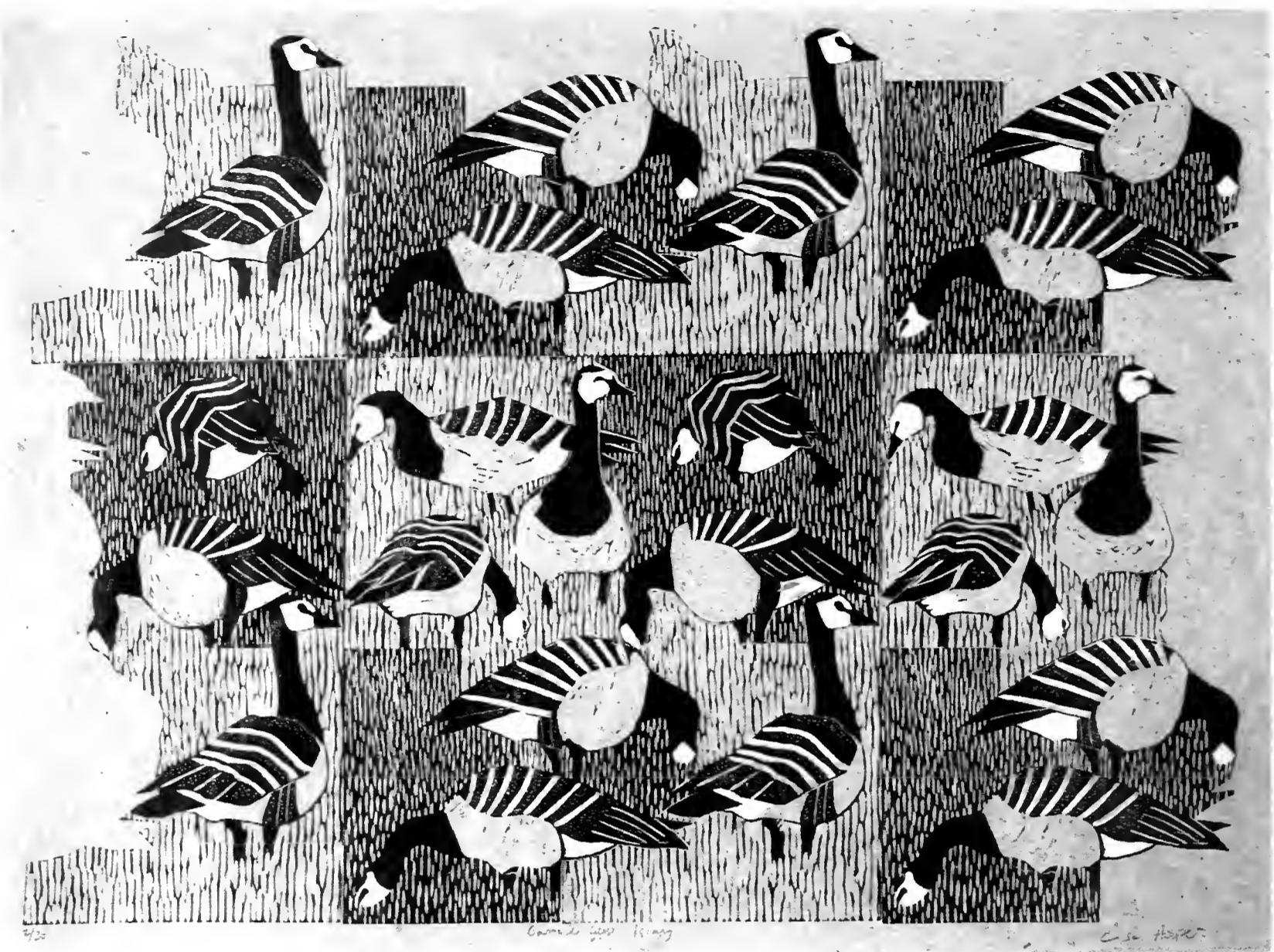


Plate 185. Barnacle Geese, Islay. © Lisa Hooper

## Artist Profile: Lisa Hooper

This September sees printmaker Lisa Hooper returning to the Donald Watson Gallery for her third solo exhibition. Lisa, whose bold and colourful prints are inspired by birdlife from her home in Galloway to the Orkneys and the Inner Hebrides will be showing approximately 50 new pieces of work and launching her latest book, *Printing Wildlife*. Lisa exhibits throughout the UK and has won a number of national prizes for her work.

Lisa has been a printmaker since the early 1990s and during this time she has developed a range of techniques with which to capture her bird and wildlife subjects. Although she was initially attracted to printing when she learnt to etch, she now uses woodcut and linocut as well as a number of more unusual types of printing such as monotype, collagraph and Japanese woodblock. It is the variety of techniques that Lisa uses that typifies her work. "To me, it's really important to have a varied

toolbox of approaches to a subject," says Lisa, "then I can choose the right look and feel for the image I have in mind."

Because of her restless interest in new ways of working, Lisa's work is always moving on. In this exhibition, for instance, you will see examples of tessellated linocuts which Lisa first started to make in response to seeing Barnacle Geese in their tens of thousands on Islay two years ago. "As I printmaker I was thinking that I ought to be able to find a way of capturing the seemingly infinite number of geese on Gruinart Flats without drawing every bird. So I developed the idea of a tiled segment of several geese, which I could print as a repeat across the page. This method is quite a logical way of capturing pattern in bird multitudes of several kinds from seabird colonies to murmurations."

A second development has been led by the purchase of a new press which now shares



Lisa's studio in Port William with the etching press she has owned since 1998. The new acquisition is actually an old relief printing press made in approximately 1850. Whereas the etching press is good for printing in a single pass, the relief printing press is really designed for printing multiple passes. So it's perfect for printing multicoloured linocuts. Lisa is enjoying the freedom and versatility this gives to her work. You'll be able to see several examples of these in the exhibition.

Because of Lisa's unusually comprehensive understanding of printmaking and her experience as a full-time wildlife artist, she was approached earlier this year by the Langford Press (who published her book *First Impressions* in 2014), to write the second in a separate series of books on Wildlife Art Techniques. It is that book, *Printing Wildlife*, which will be launched at the Private View on 16 September where Lisa will be available to sign copies and discuss her work.

PRINTING WILDLIFE  
approaches to wildlife printmaking

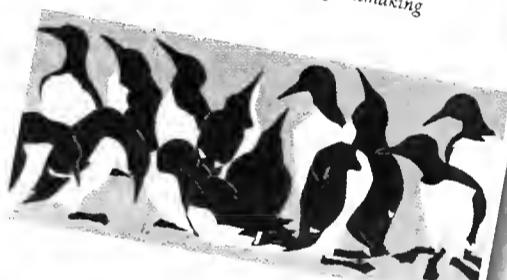


Plate 186.  
Razorbill, Isle  
of May. ©  
Lisa Hooper



Plate 187. Grey Seal. © Lisa Hooper

# A magical day with Ray

I. YOUNG



Plate 188. Snipe, Dewar, Borders, May 2016. © Ray Murray

Attendees at the Peebles BTO/SOC bird conference in March 2016 were faced with a rare opportunity - the possibility of 'buying' Ray Murray, one of the prime birders in the Lothian and Borders region, for a day. The two highest bidders in the silent auction would win him.

I was one of the lucky two and on 22 May myself and Heather Beaton, both ecologists from HED Ltd in the Highlands, travelled down to meet Ray at Dalkeith Tesco's car park at 05.30 hrs.

We weren't quite sure what to expect never having bought a man before, but we weren't disappointed. Ray acted as tour guide and drove us to all the hot spots. Knowing the area intimately, he targeted the places to locate Ring Ouzels, Peregrine, Velvet and Common Scoters,

terns and many more; he even had a Grey Wagtail precisely on cue.

We visited a range of habitats including coast - impressive cliffs stacked with sea birds, moorland, a stunning bluebell woodland and even visited England-shire where we managed to look back across the borders to see a heron in Scotland (tickable!).

Ray's knowledge of birds and birdsong in his local area, his endless enthusiasm for his subject and his easy-going nature made for a magical day out. We spotted 99 species in 14 hours and increased our knowledge of bird song and bird habits and identification. Highlights included a wonderful sighting of a Snipe calling on a fence post just 5 metres from us, a pair of Gadwall at Musselburgh Lagoons, a Wood Sandpiper at Foulden, a Little Tern on the beach at West Barns and a Peregrine in the middle of Galashiels.

I would highly recommend buying Ray for the day; he's great value in so many ways.

*Imogen Young, Black Isle, Highland.*



Plate 189. Ray Murray offers his birding services for a day in aid of South-east Scotland Atlas funds, Peebles, March 2016. © SOC

Ray has added: *I had two great days out with both Imogen Young and Pauline Crerar (the other winner). We managed 103 on Pauline's outing in early May - so it was a little disappointing to only get 99 on the second trip in mid-May (both c.13 hours in field). Everyone finished up happy, the ladies for the trip and the bank account for the South-east Scotland Atlas, which will help with publication cost. For branches looking for a good way of raising funds - this is a winner!*

# BOOK REVIEWS

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

**The Birds of Ullapool and Lochbroom Parish, an annotated checklist.** Richard Rafe, 2015. Published on behalf of the Lochbroom Field Club by Avon Court Press, ISBN 978-0-9553810-1-0. Available from Brenda Rafe, Lochbroom Field Club Treasurer, Ardcraig Braes, Ullapool, IV26 2SZ. Paperback, 30 pages, £4.00 plus 80p p&p.



The author readily admits in the book that he is a recent incomer to this area and is looking for feedback to make the checklist more accurate. Having said this, it is great to have a list for such a large and remote area as this, possibly the largest (in terms of land area) parish in the UK. It is encouraging to find someone prepared to put in the time and effort to compile the collective knowledge of the local field club. Hopefully he will be around long enough to prepare an enlarged second edition.

The list follows the standard format, beginning with 'swan' and ending with 'Reed Bunting'. Each entry gives a brief summary of the bird's nesting, migration and residency details as well as a measure of its rarity in the parish. A simple sketch map of the parish giving general viewpoints would enhance the usefulness of the booklet for first time visitors. Also, as the booklet is basically a list, can the author find a local artist or, failing that, obtain small sketches for margins or page top illustrations? A little computer juggling with bird outlines or recognizable local scene sketches would break up the list. Presentation on a shop shelf is everything these days.

A useful field check list of the right size. I look forward to the next edition.

Roger Gooch

### Bird Families of the World.

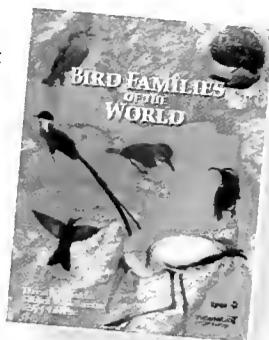
David W. Winkler, Shawn M. Billerman & Irby J. Lovette, 2015. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, ISBN: 9788494189203, hardback, 599 pages, £69.99.

The study of bird diversity is a life-enriching experience and this book allows the reader to marvel at avian diversity throughout its wonderfully illustrated pages. The book has been designed to serve both as a text for ornithology courses and as a resource for serious bird enthusiasts of all levels. Technical terminology is much reduced, and all scientific terms used are defined in a glossary. Introductory material describes the scope and concepts behind the classification used.

The bulk of the book is a family-by-family account of the birds of the world. Each family is represented by at least a two-page spread, including a distributional map with the breeding, non-breeding and year-round ranges of each family, a short text inviting the reader to learn more, standardized descriptions of the appearance, relationships and similar species to each member in the family, their life history and conservation status. Each account includes a review of recent ideas about the relationships of the family to other families and relationships within it. The work is liberally illustrated by photographs from bird enthusiasts around the globe as well as paintings of one species from each of the genera.

The classification of birds is in a state of flux and new molecular research has changed our

understanding of evolutionary relationships. For example, falcons were traditionally grouped with other diurnal birds of prey, however, I was surprised to learn that the latest classification splits falcons from other birds of prey and places them closer to parrots, owls and cuckoos.



This book provides a good overview of the world's bird families; however, some readers may be frustrated by the lack of detail on species. The authors stress that families provide us with a more manageable framework for understanding bird diversity and evolutionary relationships. If you are looking for a book which celebrates bird diversity and do not wish to fork out on all 16 volumes of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* this book certainly provides a worthy alternative.

Mike Thornton

**Field Guide to the Birds of Britain & Ireland.** Mark Golley, 2016. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN: 978-1-4729-1746-1, softback, 208 pages, £14.99.



This is an updated version of the Wildlife Trusts' *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Ireland by Habitat* published in 2004. The book includes an introduction, description of different habitats, then 182 pages devoted to the 285 species covered, followed by 13 comprising a tick list, glossary, further reading, useful websites and the index. Aimed at the novice and improving beginner, this book has a good succinct text covering the

main identification points, vocalisations, habitat and when and where to see each species. Page layout is well designed.

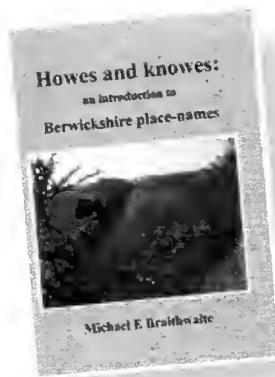
The strength of a field guide usually lies with the quality of the illustrations (over 1,000). These are generally very good and in lifelike poses rather than all side-on standardized paintings. A number suffer from overly dark or rich colour reproduction and a few are rather pale, but the great majority are excellent and convey the jizz of the species well. Strange then that the only mention of the artist (Dave Daly) is second place in the acknowledgements. Overall a decent addition to the marketplace.

*Stuart L. Rivers*

**Howes and Knowes: an introduction to Berwickshire place-names.** Michael E. Braithwaite, 2016. The Berwickshire Naturalists' Club, Hawick, ISBN 978-0-9516434-2-6, paperback, 40 pages, free to BNC members with suggestion of £4 donation to M.E. Braithwaite, Clarilaw Farmhouse, Hawick, TD9 8PT, tel: 01450 372129, otherwise no price given.

When you play with maps you may discover wildlife extinct or extant - think of all those Highland Creagan na h-lolaire. Scotland has indeed a great many noble wild prospects, as Dr Johnson memorably agreed, but much is "improved" or degraded, and persecution of predators persists.

Using chiefly 1:25,000 and some six-inch to one mile OS maps and the online *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, our author, a published botanist, discusses with nice illustrations names of nearly 300 sites - landforms, habitats, species; some obvious, others obscure. *Bogs, mires or mosses* may recall wetlands now drained; *Cat Cleugh*



and *Wolfen Burn* reveal missing mammals (the Scottish Gamekeepers Association supplies the Wild Cat photo

here, but would those gentry admit the beast itself to its old haunts?). Berwickshire still boasts seabird cities - *Foul Carr* is a mingin high-rise block at St Abb's Head. Ravens now return to *Ravensheugh*; enigmatically eponymous *gleds* attempt to enjoy their own again; *Earns Cleugh* awaits the return of the king of birds; but is *Gowkscroft* doomed to silent springs?

*Deans, heughs, cleughs, hopes and rigs* are mapped, but not species. Admitting to just scratching the surface, the author credits *The Birds of Berwickshire* (1889), but omits many gems from Muirhead's treasure-trove. Some species are overlooked. Nevertheless, naturalists with hinterland will value this inspirational offering on a neglected topic. We hope Mr Braithwaite will hawk deeper for an expanded edition - *Earn's Heugh to Wolf Cleugh: a natural history...* might make a more enticing title.

*D.J. Bates*

**Lines from Nature.** John Busby, 2016. Langford Press, London, ISBN: 9781904078616, hardback, 191 pages, £37.99.

John Busby was widely recognised as a master of art, within professional art circles and among birdwatchers and naturalists. Among the birding world, he was probably most famous for his beautifully evocative line drawings and watercolours that spoke of intense field observation, but John himself used to say he was most comfortable with his oil paintings. This magnificent book, the content

of which John delivered to the publisher only weeks before he died, shows his accomplishments in both arenas. To think of Busby as a bird artist alone would belittle him and his art, but not to acknowledge the way his wildlife drawings spoke to naturalists would also be a mistake.

Busby's curiosity about and delight in the natural world jump from every page of this book. Each picture captures an energy so much more vivid than many photographs. His pictures are realistic in that they distil the essence of the creature or scene, emphasising energetic tensions, colour relations and compositions in ways that not only tell of his rigorous academic training, but of his love for the subject. Busby was less concerned about depicting the intricate details of the birds he drew than of how the inclusion or exclusion of those details affected the picture and the viewer's enjoyment. In other words, his art was a response to the environment - and therefore each drawing included something of John Busby himself - rather than a slavish record. All that shines through in this great book, and I think goes a long way towards explaining his popularity among ornithologists as well as art lovers.

*Lines from Nature* is John Busby's final book. It contains many previously unpublished wonderful drawings and paintings. The text may be secondary to the pictures, but it reflects the gentility of the man himself. It speaks directly from him. He was generous, polite, subtle and infectiously enthusiastic about art in general and drawing and painting wildlife in particular. In this book, you can see how his personality infused his art throughout his long life, whether that was in his distillation of a

John Busby Lines from Nature



living, breathing bird into a few perfect charcoal lines, or his bold rock pool paintings and energetic oils of dancing cranes. There is a vitality and a vibrancy to his work that this book captures perfectly. In the introduction, John Busby writes: "A drawing that gets to the heart of things should, perhaps by its economy of means, or sometimes by its complexity, but mostly by how it is composed, communicate the artist's sense of the occasion, and hopefully bring the moment alive." That sums up the book. It is all about capturing those special moments that all naturalists love. It is more than a worthy legacy. It's a total delight.

*Mark Boyd*

**Wild Island: A Year in the Hebrides.** Jane Smith, 2016. Birlinn, Edinburgh, ISBN 978-1-78027-269-6, hardback, 160 pages, £20.



I first saw Jane Smith's wildlife artwork in a gallery on Colonsay two years ago and was immediately struck by its vibrancy and her ability to capture her subjects' jizz convincingly with economic use of line and colour. I admired it again in her exhibition at Waterston House earlier this year, which coincided with the launch of this lovely book and where many of its illustrations were for sale. It portrays very skilfully, in paintings, sketches, prints and words, a year in the life of the small island of Oronsay, accessible at low tide from Colonsay, and which is farmed by the RSPB for the benefit of wildlife.

Jane lives not far away in Argyll and her book is the result of sporadic visits to Oronsay over a number of years, when she was hosted by RSPB reserve managers Mike and Val Peacock. Written as a series of

monthly diary-style entries, it describes the island, its history, the people who live and work there, the livestock and the rich variety of flora and fauna that are found there. Machair, Choughs and Corncrakes are among its star attractions and the Paps of Jura provide a rugged backdrop. The text is both lyrical and informative and, together with delightful illustrations on just about every page, it certainly makes me want to go back to Oronsay for a closer look.

*John Savory*

**RSPB Handbook of Scottish Birds** (second edition). Peter Holden & Stuart Housden, 2016. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-2728-6, softback, 256 pages, £12.99.

This is the second edition of the book with the same name which was first published in 2009. It follows the same format and covers 252 species of regular occurrence. Now fully updated, it is richer and more comprehensive with newly added Gaelic names, updated distribution maps, conservation status and over 1,000 colour illustrations.

Acknowledgment has been made to our own *Birds of Scotland* (2007) and it is aimed at the birdwatcher in Scotland, although it is not intended to be a field guide as such, but more of a key to discovering more about each species. A few additional rarities have been added, such as Pectoral Sandpiper, Mandarin and Glossy Ibis, but Crane and Little Egret are now acknowledged as being regular visitors and have been moved to the main text.

The illustrations are good and are aimed particularly for those who are not as confident of their identifi-

cation skills as some. It is not an advanced bird guide, but aims to help as many people as possible develop a greater understanding of birds and their habitats that make up the rich mosaic of Scotland.

*Karen Bidgood*

**Nightingales in November: a year in the lives of twelve British birds.** Mike Dilger, 2016. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-1535-1, hardback, 368 pages, £16.99.

As birders, we go by the seasons, ticking off when birds arrive and leave, when territories are disputed and breeding starts. However, when the birds aren't visible do we give any thought to what they are up to? Mike Dilger has picked 12 British species, some resident some migrant, and highlights a year in their lives. What really stands out for me in this book is how recent scientific research, primarily by the British Trust for Ornithology, is showcased. Satellite tagging has allowed us to get a clearer understanding of what certain species are up to when not on our shores and this information is shared along with the information gleaned by the devoted studies of many individuals over the years. Our knowledge of different species' life histories has dramatically increased and Mike's informal style of narrative puts this across in an easily understandable format. Each month of the year is split into three sections and the lives of the 12 birds are discussed in each.

*Nightingales in November: a year in the lives of twelve British birds* by Mike Dilger

*Hayley Anne Douglas*

## RINGERS' ROUNDUP

If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles, project updates or requests for information which you would like to be included in the next issue, please email to Raymond Duncan at [Raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:Raymond@waxwing.fsnet.co.uk). Thank you very much to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the many ringers, ringing groups and birders who provided the information for this latest round up. Thanks also to the many bird watchers who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them. For lots more exciting facts, figures, numbers and movements log on to <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports>



Plate 190. 'Super Ouzel', Glen Clunie, North-east Scotland, May 2015. © Innes Sim

### Super Ouzel

A Ring Ouzel colour-ringed as a chick in Glen Clunie, near Braemar in 2008 which has returned to breed in the glen this summer for his eighth season is now, at eight years and one month, the oldest Ring Ouzel on BTO records. Not only that, but thanks to Innes Sim and Graham Rebecca's long-term study in the glen, we also know that this 'Super Ouzel' is on his fifth wife, has successfully raised 50 chicks in 14 breeding attempts without any failures and in 2016 was presiding over a clan of five sons/daughters, three grandsons/daughters, one great-granddaughter and one great-great-great granddaughter all nesting around him in the glen! He has also managed to avoid being shot

on 16 migrations through France and Spain, and has probably travelled at least 35,000 miles during his lifetime (so far) - amazing!

### Juvenile Swallows in May

The September 2015 Roundup included a bit about Swallows possibly migrating together in clans after Carmen Azahara caught two Scottish-ringed birds together on spring passage in northern Spain. Carmen and boyfriend Euan Ferguson had another interesting Swallow catch this spring on North Ronaldsay. Euan mentioned Bluethroat and Nightingale were a few of the highlights in early May, but that, "the most interesting bird so far has been a juvenile Swallow!"

Swallow chicks aren't usually on the wing in Scotland until well into June. Carmen mentioned that Swallows can breed in the south of Spain and northern Africa from February, and when she was working in northern Spain she would occasionally catch freshly fledged juveniles at this time of year that have followed the adults migrating north.

By coincidence, we had also come across juvenile Swallows a few years earlier on 29 April 2007 at Meikle Loch, near Aberdeen. Two were observed and photographed sitting on a fence. Later that year in an autumn roost two juveniles caught for ringing were recorded in active wing moult. Swallows normally moult in their wintering quarters in Africa. See Grampian Ringing Group Report No. 11, 2002–2006 for further reading.

### Changing Chiffchaffs

In describing the autumn migration of the Chiffchaff in the UK, The BTO Migration Atlas (2002) states "seemingly random short distance dispersive movements commence in July and continue into September. These merge into a more definite migratory movement that commences in late August and peaks in the second half of September. Having reached northern France and the Low Countries birds head southwestward to reach southwest France by late September and the Atlantic coast of Spain, Portugal and Morocco from early October onwards. Many birds cross the Canara in October and early November to occupy wintering grounds that extend from Mauritania south to Guinea-Bissau".



Plate 191. Juvenile Swallow (left) with second-year bird. North Ronaldsay, Orkney, May 2013. © Euan Ferguson

Similarly, in *The Birds of Scotland* (2007) "Autumn passage starts with the departure of local birds from late July and early August... They change to a south-west heading to reach western Iberia and Morocco by October".

Below is a list of ringing movements of Chiffchaffs on autumn passage where birds have been confirmed (or highly likely to be) born or breeding in Scotland by date of ringing or recapture.

BKY015	Juvenile	01/10/05
	Walton in Gordano, Avon	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Ad male	23/04/07
	Bridge of Don, Aberdeen	639kmNE
CKE239	Juvenile	01/10/09
	Leighton Moss, Lancashire	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Adult	16/05/10
	River Almond, Edinburgh Airport	200kmN
CBB049	Juvenile	05/10/07
	Pett Level, East Sussex	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Adult	11/07/08
	Near Mill Farm, Aberdour, Fife	630kmNNW
HAE277	Unknown	09/10/15
	Icklesham, East Sussex	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Ad male	17/04/16
	Bridge of Don, Aberdeen	722kmNNW
DYN263	Juvenile	05/08/14
	Connon Island, Maryburgh, Highland	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Juvenile	11/10/14
	New Laithe Farm, Newton, Lancashire	422kmSSE
RH7298	Adult	14/10/12
	Wimereux, Pas-de-Calais, France	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Adult	04/05/14
	Lionthorn Community Woods, Falkirk	680kmNNW
AJ0676	Juvenile	15/10/07
	Ingooigem, West-Vlaanderen, Belgium	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Adult	27/06/08
	Yellow Craig Wood, Stirling	766kmNW
JHT715	Juvenile	20/10/15
	Greenstraight, Hallsands, Devon	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Ad male	01/07/16
	Bridge of Don, Aberdeen	779kmN
HNA763	Unknown	22/10/15
	Aldridge Lodge Farm, West Midlands	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Ad male	24/04/16
	Torrieston, Moray, Highland	566kmN
EBL800	Ad male	28/10/11
	Beachy Head, East Sussex	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Ad male	08/07/12
	Strathclyde Country Park, Motherwell	629kmNNW

AEH611	Juvenile	15/07/15
	Near Kildray, Highland	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Juvenile	.01/11/15
	Nanijzal, Lands End, Cornwall	836kmS
EXY220	Adult	01/11/14
	Skokholm Island, Pembrokeshire	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Adult	18/06/15
	Connon Island, Maryburgh, Highland	655kmN
AER528	Adult	12/07/14
	Cathcart, Glasgow, Strathclyde	
	<i>Retrapped</i> Adult	07/11/14
	Paul Do Taipal, Coimbra, Portugal	1760kmSSW

The dates when the birds have been caught on passage have been highlighted in red. Bearing in mind the literature describes main passage through the UK during August and September and into southern Europe and even Africa during October, it is most surprising to find there are no pre-October records of Scottish birds in England.

*The BTO Migration Atlas* is based on more English-ringed birds where Chiffchaffs have historically been more common and hence more ringed, but as they continue to expand and increase northwards it would appear their departure timings are becoming considerably later than those further south.

Is there a sliding scale of passage timings through the country with the 'ToffChaffs' heading off first and the 'MacChaffs' following on later? How might this affect their wintering strategy/range? What about the UK wintering population? Will it increase as increasing 'MacChaffs' loiter longer in the milder winters and more join up with lingering 'ToffChaffs' and the incoming 'ThorChaffs' (Scandinavian and Siberian)?

So, keep the CES ringing going and why not target a few breeding Chiffchaffs in your local patches too so more birds of known origin are ringed. The males react well to tape lure and where females are vocal nests are easy to find.



Plate 192. 'Mac' the Mandarin, Walker Dam, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 28 February 2016. © Harry Scott

## The mind-boggling movements of 'Mac' the Mandarin

H.I. SCOTT

On 8 February 2016 the following message from Brian Battensby appeared on our local 'NE Scotland Wildlife' Facebook page "I've seen a photo of the Mandarin drake in Johnston Gardens and it has a ring on its left leg. I can't remember it being ringed and certainly not on its left leg".

To put this observation into context, an often obliging drake Mandarin has been seen and photographed during the winter months since about 2010 (he's even appeared on TV!) in Johnston Gardens, a small ornamental garden just west of Aberdeen City Centre. Until Brian's post there had never been any mention of him being ringed.

So, I thought I'd head into Aberdeen to take a look and investigate the Mandarin's origins. I was curious to find out whether our returning wintering bird had recently been caught and ringed, or was it a different bird altogether? Surely it would be very odd to have different drake birds frequenting the same inner city pond?

Mandarin are present in North-east Scotland in very small numbers and have been recorded breeding here in mid-Deeside. I've ringed six breeding females on nests between 2005–07 (It's very difficult to catch the drakes, and young ducklings cannot be ringed since it takes several weeks for their feet to fully develop) so I was very curious to know more about this ringed bird.

When visiting Johnston Gardens on 28 February, I chatted with several folk, including the park keeper, who suggested 'Mac' was originally from the nearby Hazelhead Park bird collection and that's where he was ringed etc. That appeared to make sense; he summers in Hazelhead Park then spends his winters nearby in Johnston Gardens. Anyway, I finally located 'Mac' at nearby Walker Dam and managed to get some snaps of his ring - Now this is where the story of 'Mac' takes a dramatic twist!

The ring on his left leg implies he'd been ringed overseas. Generally UK ringers are encouraged to ring birds on their right legs. The left leg ring intrigued me, but then lots of exotic wildfowl originating from captive collections can have rings on either leg, so my initial thoughts were that he was most likely from the Hazelhead Park collection or similar.

Well... when I checked the ring in my photos, and read what was inscribed on it, I was utterly gob-smacked! The minute I read the digits I knew he was definitely not one of my Deeside birds and more importantly... he was NOT an escapee from Hazelhead Park!

His ring was inscribed with the words "Stavanger Museum" and as he moved about, I was also able to get pretty much all the inscribed digits on his ring... "427439..." (Plate 193). As soon as I got home I entered the details on the Stavanger Museum web site and within 24hrs received a detailed report of his history. His full ring number is 4274391 and he was ringed as an adult male on the 9 April 2015 at Bestumkilen near Akershus, Oslo in Norway! Then just four days later, on the 13 April 2015,

he was re-sighted at Minneparken, Porsgrunn selva, which is about 150km SW of Oslo. He wasn't sighted again till he turned up in Johnston Gardens and was first re-sighted here on 6 September 2015 by Les Andrew.

Håvard Husebø from the Norwegian Ringing Scheme at Stavanger Museum very kindly emailed me the following information about the status of Mandarin in Norway; "The Mandarin Duck is a relatively scarce bird in Norway. It is of course being kept as a domestic park bird, but there are also annually about 20–30 records of free living individuals. With a peak of records in April and early May, which indicates that these do in fact migrate, possibly following other ducks on their route."

I'm not aware of any breeding of the species in Norway at the moment, although there were a few records back in the early 90s.

There are in total 21 ringed Mandarins in Norway. Your finding is actually our second recovery in UK. The first one was also ringed near Oslo and shot just north of Newcastle on 9 November 1962. We also have one which was recovered way down in eastern Germany."

In response to Håvard's email, I checked the British Trust of Ornithology's (BTO) national ringing data to gauge this movement from a UK perspective. From what I've managed to find out, only seven Mandarins have previously been recorded travelling between the UK and other countries or vice-versa; one ringed in France turned up in the UK and another ringed here went to France; same story with the Netherlands, as we recovered one of theirs and



Plate 193. Ring detail, Walker Dam, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 28 February 2016. © Harry Scott



they recovered one of ours; and lastly the above Norwegian ringed bird shot in NE England and two UK ringed Mandarins recovered in the Russian Federation. So 'Mac' is just the fourth UK recovery of a foreign-ringed Mandarin.

How amazing is that?

However, a few questions still needed answering, was he new to Johnston Gardens last winter or, is he the same bird wintering here over the last four to five years? If the latter, has he been travelling backwards and forwards between Aberdeen and Oslo all those years? Or, have we been seeing more than one individual at Johnston Gardens? If that was the case, surely someone would have spotted two together on at least one occasion?

To get a clearer picture, I put some requests on local FaceBook groups for sightings past and present of 'Mac'. Firstly to establish just how many years a Mandarin has frequented the gardens and secondly, whether there was any possibility that two birds have ever visited the area.

Plate 194. 'Mac' the Mandarin, Walker Dam, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 14 April 2016. © Vicky Hall

It was at this point, on 20 April 2016, the story of 'Mac' ventured into mind-boggling new territory; I received an email which potentially confirmed something quite extraordinary! I promptly put out yet another local FaceBook request for very recent sightings of 'Mac' in the Johnston Gardens area and amazingly, within 24 hrs, Vicky Hall got in touch and was able to confirm with the aid of her photo (Plate 194) that 'Mac' was present at Walker Dam, Aberdeen till at least 18.30 hrs on Thursday 14 April.

Well that really made my day as the email I received the day before was now even more astounding as a result of Vicky's sighting. It had alerted me that our very own 'Mac' had again been photographed only 110 hrs (4.5 days) after Vicky's photo was taken, but this time it was at 09.00 hrs on the morning of 19 April by Morten Lie (Plate 195). Have you guessed what's coming next?



Plate 195 a–b. 'Mac' the Mandarin, Krokstadelva near Drammen, Norway, 19 April 2016. © Morten Lie

Yep, 'Mac' had indeed flown back over the North Sea and was snapped by Morten at Krokstadelva near Drammen, just south-west of Oslo!!! What are the chances of that? A potentially 'plastic' park duck being photographed well enough to read its ring within hours of it leaving/arriving at two locations on opposite sides of the North Sea. Remember it had taken six months for hundreds of local followers in Aberdeen to actually photograph/read his ring after he was first sighted wearing it.

These new sightings were truly amazing. It had already been major news in the bird ringing world to learn of his initial journey over here last September after being ringed near Oslo last Spring, but for him to return there this spring, makes this record truly unprecedented!

It now appears that 'Mac' has been traversing the North Sea annually, spending his winters here in Aberdeen and summering over near Oslo since approximately 2011. We'd have known nothing of his amazing adventures and assumed he just moved away from Aberdeen each summer to find a mate locally, had he not been ringed last spring near Oslo.



"So, I wonder what will happen next?" was my last post to our local FaceBook groups back in April 2016... then BOOM!!! Never a dull moment when our wee 'Mac' is concerned. Yep, it all kicked off yet again!

On 26 June 2016, Tessa Holland reported "Mandarin is back in Aberdeen. Just saw him land at Walker Dam... did not have camera on me..."

Could this be 'Mac' back in Aberdeen so soon? He usually doesn't reappear till August/September. I promptly broadcast a request for anyone passing that way to drop by and confirm, with a photo hopefully, that 'Mac' was in fact back in Johnston Gardens for his winter holidays.

Well, with such a large and enthusiastic group of followers in Aberdeen it didn't take long at all. On 28 June 2016, Ian Talboys posted the following "Mac the Mandarin duck is back at Walker Dam this morning. I was passing and saw a scruffy looking Mandarin duck on the edge of Walker Dam. On close inspection of the photos, he has a ring from Stavanger Museum number 27439..." (Plate 196).

So that's the story so far at the time of writing. 'Mac' is most definitely back in residence in Aberdeen a lot earlier than usual, and he's made it back in one piece at least.

To be continued?

**Plate 196 a–b.** 'Mac' the Mandarin, Walker Dam, Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 28 June 2016.  
© Ian Talboys

## Acknowledgements

A great many people, from both sides of the North Sea, have been involved in this story to date, so many thanks to everyone involved. Every little bit of information has been a huge help in keeping an accurate record of this hyper-mobile wee dazzler.

*Harry Scott, Aboyne, Aberdeenshire.*

*Email: picades@ifb.co.uk*





Plate 197. Black-tailed Godwits, Tiree, Argyll, April 2015. © John Bowler

## Spring records of Black-tailed Godwits in Scotland

G.F. APPLETON

On 24 February this year, on the Samouco saltponds on the Tagus estuary in Portugal, we saw an Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit wearing four colour-rings: red & lime on the left, green & green flag (RL-GGf) on the right. It had been ringed there on 10 August 2010 by Dr José Alves so it's not a surprise that it was in the same spot five and a half years later. In between times, on 29 April 2013, RL-GGf was one of 1,520 Icelandic godwits counted on Tiree by John Bowler and Graham Todd (Bowler 2014), having encountered strong northerlies that forced it to delay the Atlantic crossing. If you think back to the cold spring of 2013, it is not surprising that strange things happened that year. Northerlies delayed spring arrivals of African migrants but they also blocked the departure of wintering birds that were trying to fly to Iceland, Greenland and northern Canada.

RL-GGf is one of our favourite Black-tailed Godwits. It happens to like a small estuary called Grafarvogur in Reykjavik, which Professor Jenny Gill (University of East Anglia) and I monitor daily in the second half of April each year. We've seen this bird here in the springs of 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2016, on a total of 13 occasions. We

have an arrival date for 2011 too, when he was spotted in Southern Iceland by Professor Tómas Gunnarsson, our Icelandic collaborator, but there's a gap in 2013, when we left Iceland while he was still on Tiree. There are a couple of early spring records of this bird in the Netherlands, so this is where he probably spends March and early April every year, having left Portugal in February. In the last six years he has set off for Iceland in spring and only in 2013 was he seen in Scotland. He and other godwits that are forced to suspend migration are starting to give us insights into the hurdles that weather patterns can put in the way when birds are trying to travel north (Gill 2015).



Plate 198. Black-tailed Godwits, Tiree, Argyll, May 2016. © John Bowler

**Table 1.** The dates of first spring sightings of RL-GGf (Red over Lime on left tibia, Green over Green flag on right tibia) in Iceland between 2011 and 2016. The only spring sighting in 2013 was in Tiree.

	Arrival point	Arrival date
2011	Southern Lowlands	20 April
2012	Reykjavik	25 April
2013	(Tiree)	(29 April)
2014	Reykjavik	24 April
2015	Reykjavik	18 April
2016	Reykjavik	22 April

### Migration in a changing climate

We've been monitoring the spring arrival of Black-tailed Godwits in Iceland since 2000, and we've shown that colour-ringed birds have their own individual schedules: early birds always arrive early and late birds always arrive late. Differences in the exact date on which each individual arrives may be associated with the weather patterns each year, but individuals are remarkably consistent despite annually variable weather conditions. It therefore appears that individual godwits, like RL-GGf, have a preferred window in which to undertake the Atlantic crossing.

Interestingly, although there is no evidence that individual birds have changed their arrival times in Iceland over the last 15 years, the arrival dates of the population are getting earlier (Gunnarsson *et al.* 2006). We've shown that this advance in migration is being driven by young birds recruiting into the breeding

population on schedules which are earlier than those of previous generations (Gill *et al.* 2015). Ultimately, this is likely to be being driven by warmer springs and earlier nesting seasons. There's a blog about this paper at [wadertales.wordpress.com/2015/11/16/why-is-spring-migration-getting-earlier](http://wadertales.wordpress.com/2015/11/16/why-is-spring-migration-getting-earlier).

### Black-tailed Godwits on Tiree

Over the years, the Isle of Tiree in the Inner Hebrides has proved to be a great place to pick up colour-ring sightings of Black-tailed Godwits. John Bowler, the local RSPB Officer, really enjoys watching out for their spring return when, as he comments, "hundreds can drop in on the loch-sides in full breeding dress". The very first birds appear at the end of March and numbers increase into April, with very large flocks often occurring at the peak of passage in the last week of April and the first week of May. Birds are usually found on the grazed edges of machair lochs, with numbers declining through May and odd birds lingering to the middle of June. Given that between 1% and 2% of the Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit population wear colour-rings there is a good chance of finding a marked bird. With migration getting earlier, John's godwit-watching season will probably get longer.

Godwits also appear on Tiree in the autumn but in smaller numbers. The first failed breeders appear in late June, followed by more adults in July and



Plate 199. Black-tailed Godwits, Tiree, Argyll, May 2016. © John Bowler



Plate 200. Black-tailed Godwit, Tiree, Argyll, April 2015. © David Mason. This French-ringed bird (OFL-LB) was present on Tiree on 29 April 2013

early August and then juveniles in late August through to October, with occasional stragglers in November and December. Young birds often use freshly-cut silage/hay fields on Tiree for foraging, in the same way that many will have done in Iceland as they prepared for the journey south.

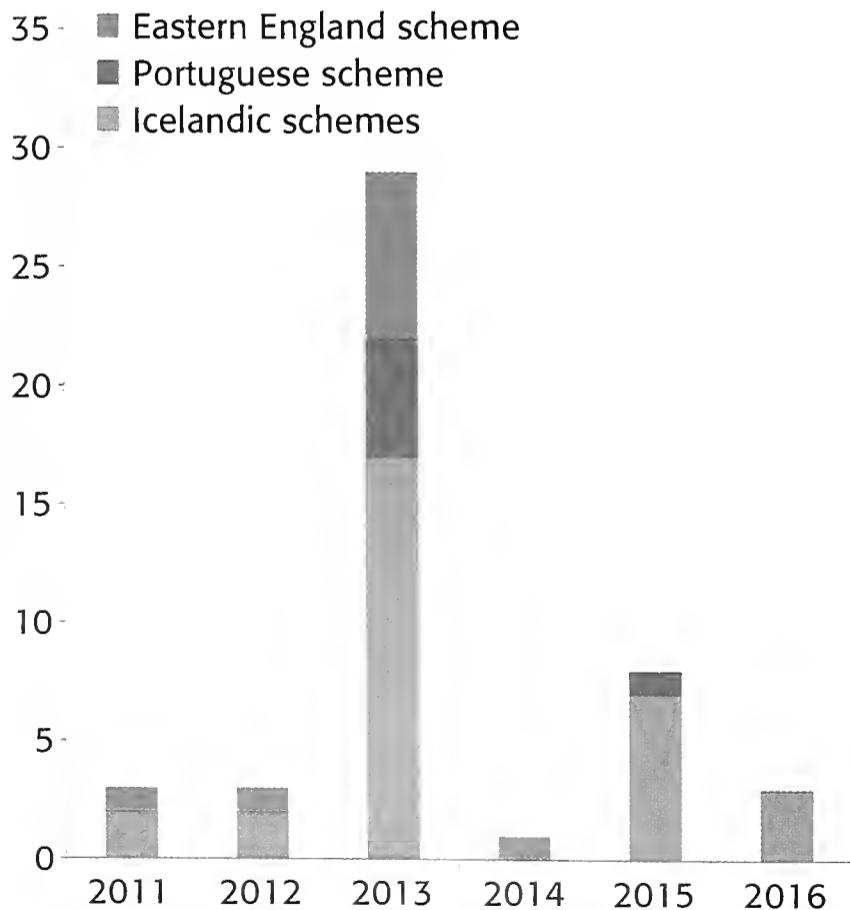


Figure 1. Annual variation in the number of colour-ringed birds from three of the main schemes reported in Scotland in mid-March to mid-June (excluding birds that spend the whole or part of the winter period in Scotland).

### Disrupted migration

Black-tailed Godwits are very site-faithful in every season of the year. However, although 63 different colour-ringed birds have been seen in spring by John Bowler and his colleagues, only one bird has been seen in more than one spring. This low number of repeat between-year sightings on Tiree, where looking for colour-ringed birds is part of the daily routine, very much suggests that birds seen here are dropping in out of necessity, rather than using the site as an annual staging post. The journey from south England or The Netherlands to Iceland is only just over 1,000 miles, which is well within the capabilities for migrating waders in non-stop flight - as long as they do not encounter adverse weather conditions (Alves *et al.* 2012, Alves *et al.* 2013).

Scottish flocks of migrating Black-tailed Godwits do not only occur on Tiree, of course. On the peak day of 29 April 2013, when 1,520 birds were counted on Tiree, 891 birds were also reported at Loch Gruinart on Islay. The 2,411 birds in these two flocks constituted about 5% of the Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit population (Gunnarsson *et al.* 2005). Given that there were other colour-ringed godwits reported in Motherwell and on Benbecula, just how many Icelandic godwits were in Scotland on that day?

The lack of predictability, when it comes to the potential locations of these spring flocks, makes it difficult to monitor patterns across different years. There are simply not enough places at which there are regular counts of birds each spring and too many places where flocks could choose to stop. Fortunately, reports of colour-ringed birds provide a surrogate for flock counts. A quick analysis of the number of colour-ringed Godwits from Icelandic, Portuguese and Eastern England schemes, seen in Scotland between the springs of 2011 and 2016 shows that there were records in every year but with a larger number in 2015, and by far the most records in 2013. None of the birds was seen in more than one spring, emphasising the random nature of these arrivals.

The colour-ring information provided by birdwatchers is making a huge contribution to the migration studies of Black-tailed Godwits.

There are now Black-tailed Godwits in Scotland in every month of the year but sightings of colour-marked individuals in April and May are particularly helpful in helping us to identify the influence of weather conditions on spring migration and the migratory routes used by birds from across the winter range. Please report any of these observations to [j.gill@uea.ac.uk](mailto:j.gill@uea.ac.uk) who will pass on records to other colour-ring administrators. Details of the godwit work and the publications to which colour-ring observations have contributed can be found here: [wadertales.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/godwits-and-godwiteers](http://wadertales.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/godwits-and-godwiteers).

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Plate 201. Black-tailed Godwits with Whooper Swan, Tiree, Argyll, May 2016. © John Bowler



Plate 202. Starnafin Pools, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, July 2016. © RSPB

# Breeding Little Gulls at RSPB Scotland Loch of Strathbeg nature reserve, North-east Scotland in 2016

R. HUMPIDGE

The Loch of Strathbeg covers over 900 ha of land in the north-east of Scotland, right on the coast half way between Peterhead and Fraserburgh. The reserve consists of the loch itself (the largest freshwater dune loch in the UK), the surrounding wetlands and some drier grass fields. The reserve is designated SSSI, SPA and Ramsar. Primarily known as a winter wildfowl site, with over 50,000 Pink-footed Geese here during the winter as well as thousands of ducks and swans, it is of international importance. The reserve is also very well known as one of the best birdwatching sites on mainland Scotland, with over 270 species of bird recorded here and 78 species breeding in the last decade.

The Little Gull is usually a passage migrant to the coasts around the UK, with most birds being recorded between September and March. The closest breeding grounds are the best part of a thousand miles away in Finland.

This is not the case at the RSPB Scotland nature reserve, the Loch of Strathbeg. Little Gulls have been seen here every year going back at least as far as 1974, when the RSPB first started managing the reserve. But unlike the national picture most of our records are in the summer months. In fact, over the last 20 years only 6% of all records have been during the more 'normal' recording window of September to March.

Until now there have been only five confirmed breeding attempts in the UK, all of them in eastern England. There have been two probable breeding records in eastern Scotland, but these were based on the sightings of young fledged birds and no nest was found. The last attempt was in 2007 in Norfolk, also on an RSPB nature reserve (Titchwell Marsh) where eggs were laid, but predated before hatching.

In 2014, at least six individual Little Gulls were seen at the Loch of Strathbeg, with three adult birds seen in mid-May. Two of these were seen displaying and loafing on the Starnafin Pools in front of the visitor centre. We got really excited when they were also seen copulating, but this came to nothing with no nest building or further signs of breeding. The birds were recorded almost daily until early July, and only occasional records into August and September.

2015 saw one bird coming back even earlier on 4 April, this was joined by a few immature birds and then another adult arrived on 1 May. Two adults were seen almost daily until early July, when records became more sporadic and then stopped at the end of the month. Again, two adult birds were seen displaying and copulating, but more than the previous year. They also started landing and loafing on the tern nesting island right in front of the visitor centre. They were seen carrying nesting material on several occasions, but couldn't settle. They ended up building three different nests in different places around the perimeter of the island, but did not lay any eggs.

In 2016 things progressed even further. Two adults birds were seen from mid-April, joined shortly after by a third bird. This bird was not quite as dark underwing and no rosy tint on the breast (and may have been a younger bird).



Plate 203. Little Gull, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, June 2016. © RSPB



Plate 204. Visitor centre and Tern Island, Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, February 2016 © RSPB

Unlike previous years the birds moved very quickly to occupy space on the tern island, they changed location several times before settling on a spot on the north east corner. On 8 June their behaviour changed, being much more attentive to the site and very keen to get back when disturbed by the nearby terns. We suspected that they had laid and this was confirmed by overflying the nest site with a small drone. We could not actually see into the nest from anywhere at ground level. This was the first time that Little Gulls had ever been confirmed laying in Scotland, and only the sixth definite time for the UK.

Little Gulls are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and so anyone going anywhere near them (either in person or with a drone) needs a special licence to do so. The Loch of Strathbeg nature reserve is, largely, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and anyone wishing to fly a drone over here needs another licence from Scottish Natural Heritage to do so. The RSPB staff at the reserve have all the necessary licences, so please don't bring your own drone - you will be breaking the law.



Plate 206. Little Gull nest with chicks, RSPB Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, July 2016. © RSPB. This photograph was taken under licence.

Given an incubation period of 23–25 days the first egg was due to hatch on 1 July, but it wasn't until 4 July that we could actually fly overhead and see what was happening. Not just one, but two chicks were seen.

This is the first time that Little Gull eggs were confirmed to hatch in the UK - ever!

Little Gulls feed mainly on insects, many collected from the surface of the water, but also vegetation. We have seen the adults all over the reserve, feeding in front of our hides overlooking the main loch, as well as in the Savoch reedbed area in front of Tower Pool Hide.

The nest was monitored over the next three weeks as the chicks grew, with the young birds spending much of their time around the nest in deep vegetation. Then on 25 July, the wait was over and a chick was seen as it took its first flight. The second juvenile was seen to fledge on 27 July. This made the parent birds Britain's first-ever successfully breeding Little Gulls.

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Plate 205. Little Gull nest with one egg, RSPB Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, North-east Scotland, June 2016. © RSPB. This photograph was taken under licence.

Whilst the island was within a pool surrounded by a predator-proof fence, we also wanted to make sure there was no human disturbance, so we mounted a 24-hour guard with staff and volunteers. And for the next three weeks we sat and waited... and waited.

# Scottish *flava* fest

I.J. ANDREWS & S. GILLIES



Plate 207. Male Blue-headed Wagtail, East Lothian, 30 May 2016. © Stuart Gillies

There has been a small breeding population of Yellow Wagtails in fields along the North Sea coast of East Lothian since the 1980s. Numbers have always been small, and a population of 10–15 pairs has been estimated during the past five years (Marc Eden pers. comm.). The wagtails favour the winter wheat and potato crops in the coastal strip from Dunbar south to Torness. Migrants are also seen at sites like Seafield Pond at West Barns and on the beach at Barns Ness.

In the last few years (since 2013), birds of the typical, British race of Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flavissima* have been accompanied by a somewhat bewildering array of males with pale, greyish and bluish heads. Very few appear to get close to looking like classic ashy-grey headed Blue-headed Wagtails (nominate *flava*). All of these types have been seen on territory and would appear to be paired and to be breeding.

Close-up photographs of these birds allow details to be assessed like never before, and it is now clear that a number of different individuals are involved. The key features of these birds are their

pale grey, not really bluish at all, heads and broad white supercilia which have a distinct 'posterior flare' (if that's a valid term!). At close range, they often show pale centres to the ear coverts ('hollow' ear coverts) and some have isolated greenish feathers on the crown. The throat can be white or yellow. On the other hand, Blue-headed Wagtails, which have also been photographed, have darker, bluish-grey crowns with a finer white supercilium without that flair.

One plausible theory for the presence of these birds, is that one or more Blue-headed birds has hybridised with British Yellow Wagtails to produce a variety of hybrid forms that fall into the general category of 'Channel Wagtail'. Such Blue-headed x Yellow Wagtail intergrades have been known for some time, notably on the coast of the English Channel in northern France and it is from this population that the term 'Channel Wagtail' derives (Dubois 2001, 2007).

These 'Channel Wagtails' are broadly similar in appearance to true nominate-race birds and their apparent increase in Lothian (indeed the

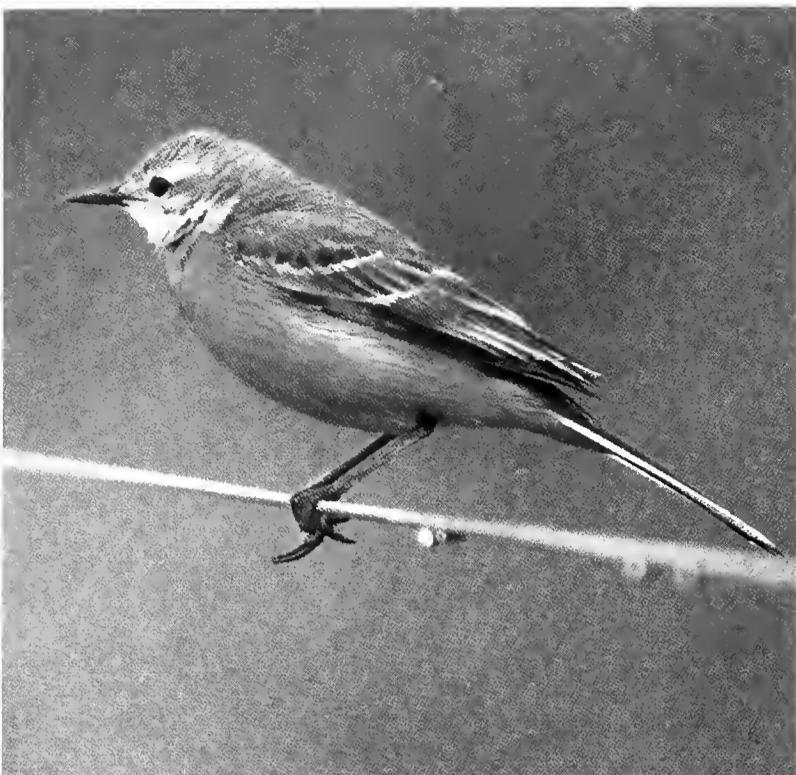


Plate 208 a–b. Male 'Channel Wagtail', East Lothian, 30 May 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 209 a–b. Male 'Channel Wagtail', East Lothian, 16 May 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 210 a–b. Male 'Channel Wagtail', probably the same bird as 209 a–b, East Lothian, 6 June 2016. © Stuart Gillies

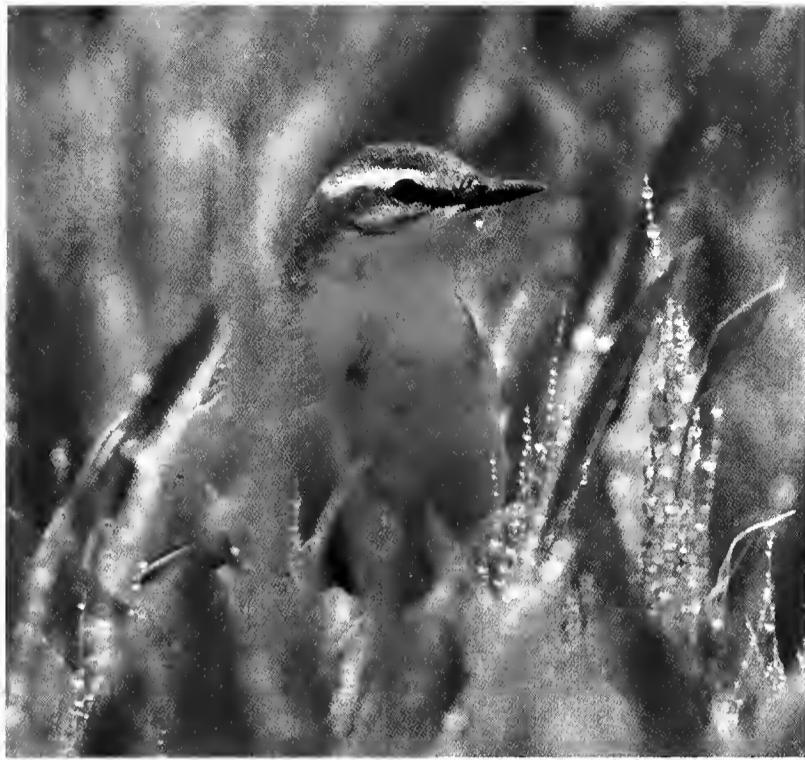


Plate 211. Male 'Channel Wagtail', East Lothian, 13 June 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 212. Male 'Channel Wagtail' or possibly a first-summer Blue-headed Wagtail, East Lothian, 20 June 2016. © Stuart Gillies

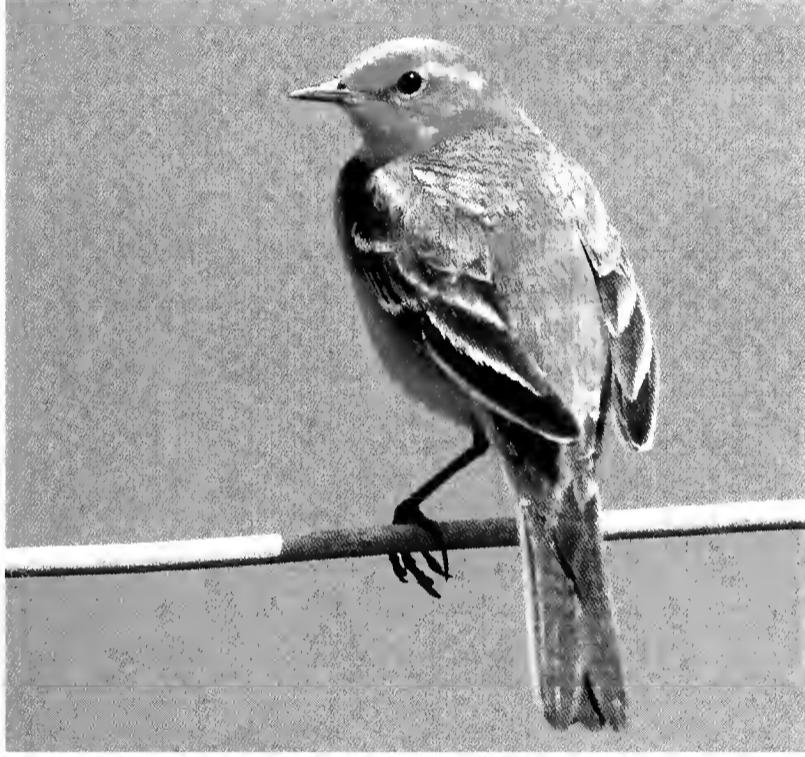


Plate 213. British Yellow Wagtail, East Lothian, 9 May 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 214. British Yellow Wagtail, East Lothian, 13 June 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 215. British Yellow Wagtail, East Lothian, 30 May 2016. © Stuart Gillies



Plate 216 a–b. Male intergrade Yellow Wagtail, Musselburgh, Lothian, 9 May 2016. This bird was variously accredited to *supercilialis*, *dombrowskii* or a *feldegg* x *flava* hybrid. © Stuart Gillies

UK) is no doubt partly due to our increased awareness to their existence. One wonders how many have been passed off as Blue-headed Wagtails in the past. Also, there may have previously been an assumption that these birds were migrants from their restricted zone along the English Channel. I think our knowledge now shows that such birds can appear locally, well within the range of *flavissima*, and even in Lothian! And there is also one further question as to what happens as these hybrids interbreed further with other forms?

In a Scottish context, there has only been one previous record of 'Channel Wagtail', on Fair Isle in May 2006 (Baxter 2010). [Unfortunately, a photograph of the same individual was incorrectly labelled as a Blue-headed Wagtail in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007).]

Photographs are two other intergrades (Plates 216 & 217) illustrate some of the other non-standard birds that have turned up in Lothian. Neither is easy to put a definitive name to!

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Plate 217. Male intergrade Yellow Wagtail, Musselburgh, Lothian, 10 May 2013. Probably a *thunbergi* x *flava* hybrid. © Ian Andrews

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Plate 218. Black-headed Bunting, Isle of Skye, Highland, June 2016. © Martin Benson

## Black-headed Bunting, Isle of Skye, Highland, June 2016

S. ROBSON

Early summer 2016 - after at least 18 months of continual, torrential rain, cold weather and strong winds, the Isle of Skye was enjoying a period of dry and gloriously hot weather with a gentle and welcome breeze predominantly from the north-east. From the end of May we began to experience soaring temperatures with wall-to-wall sunshine. Maybe our resident birds would have a successful breeding season after the washout they endured in 2015. We were still waiting for the Swallows to arrive but all of the birds seemed to be busy nest building and the Dunnocks in particular, were putting on an enchanting mating display.

Friday 10 June was a midgy, overcast day. It was calm, and after a week of 25°C temperatures and higher, we had some very welcome rain following a fairly long dry spell which had dried up our pond, and turned the burn, which runs by the house and down through the croft, into a mere trickle. Our croft, which is situated in the shadow

of the highest cliff in Skye, and below Dunvegan Head at the mouth of Loch Dunvegan, slopes down to the cliff edge, looking out across the loch to the island of Isay and the Waternish peninsula beyond. We have a small flock of Hebridean sheep and we grow vegetables and soft fruit both in polytunnels and in outside beds. The house is at the top of the croft near the road, and it is very well sheltered by mature trees and shrubs. We have planted bird-friendly, edible hedges about the croft and are nurturing a small woodland of about half an acre. I think it is fair to say that we have a good habitat for birds here, with a variety of garden birds in the vicinity of the house, and on and around the croft-land in the summer months we have Wheatears, Meadow Pipits and Skylarks. We also enjoy occasional sightings of both Golden and White-tailed Eagles, and several years ago were witness to a wonderful clash of the titans as five of these birds had a stushie in the skies above us which lasted at least half a day.



Plate 219. Black-headed Bunting (with House Sparrow above), Isle of Skye, Highland, June 2016. © Susanna Robson

We have two sets of bird feeders, one at the back of the house and one at the front. Each has a seed feeder, a fat ball and half a coconut, most of which had been eaten. I came into the kitchen on this particular day and out of the corner of my eye registered a black head at the fat ball feeder. My first thought was Bullfinch, but it seemed odd. We get one pair of Bullfinches through each year, but they have never visited the feeders, preferring the flowers of the Rowan. I also registered an intense golden-yellow - Bullfinches are not yellow. Although the feeders are no more than about three metres from the house, I ran to get the

binoculars. A yellow bird which was not a Siskin, or a Yellowhammer - here was something that could possibly be a little unusual. He had a black head, a golden-yellow collar, the most deeply golden breast and the colouring of his feathers was opulent and gorgeous - deep rose-coloured shoulders which gradually gradated down in colour to brown as my eye reached his tail. I could not find him in my books of British birds, but I did find him in the *Collins Bird Guide* - he was a Black-headed Bunting!

I entered him into my records for Birdtrack, utterly delighted that at last I had something unusual to put there, and a message came back that it was a National Rarity. Wow! He was a hungry bird and he stayed attached to the fat-ball feeders, both at the front and at the back of the house. At first our resident House Sparrows were a little aggressive towards him, but he was so hungry he was not to be put off. It was noticeable that he was not fazed by our Border Collie and he was obviously used to gardens and feeders. Nights at this time of year, particularly when the weather is fine, do not really get dark and he was still feeding when we went to bed and he was back feeding by 05:00 hrs the next morning. Because of the drought conditions, I had been crumbling some little bird fat-pellets onto the doorstep in the early mornings for the Blackbirds, who were unable to get worms from the hardened ground, and the bunting had no hesitation in joining all the other birds on the doorstep for the extra snack.

He stayed with us over the weekend for three days, and was very visible to the visiting ornithologists of Skye; it was the first time the Black-headed Bunting had been recorded on the island. We also had birders from elsewhere in the Highlands, from the Scottish Borders and as far afield as the English Midlands. Everyone who came was very appreciative and very polite and respectful of us. I also got great support from Bob McMillan, the former area representative of the BTO and host of the excellent website [www.skye-birds.com](http://www.skye-birds.com).

We think probably, that this wee bird had probably followed the good weather and had just kept on coming, finally ending up on Skye. At one point during his stay with us, he sat on some recently

cut grass and collected in his bill, a bunch of long dried grass stalks, as if to say, "if only". He was last seen late on the Sunday night, and by Monday 13 June he was gone. It is really something to know that such a wee creature can provide a huge amount of pleasure for a great many people.

Since then, all our regular birds (Blackbirds, Chaffinches, House Sparrows, Dunnocks (despite the visiting Cuckoos), Great, Blue and Coal Tits, Song Thrush, Robins, Hoodie Crows, Rock Doves, Willow Warbler, Wheatear and Stonechat) have had a fantastic breeding season. We have young and still-fledging birds everywhere we look. A Greenfinch family has bred here for the first time in at least five years and the Starlings, who breed in the old stone walls of the ruined blackhouses, have now fledged their young and these youngsters are currently being taught to fly together.

**Susanna Robson, Dunvegan, Isle of Skye.**  
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#### Status of Black-headed Bunting in Scotland

This species breeds from central Italy, and SE Europe, south to Israel and eastwards through Turkey, SW Russia, and the Caucasus to Iran and Turkmenistan. The population is entirely migratory and winters in eastern Pakistan and NW India.

There were 78 accepted records of Black-headed Buntings in Scotland out of a total of 178 in Britain to the end of 2004. There have now been 214 accepted records (individuals) in Britain to the end of 2014, with 98 of those in Scotland. The ratio of new Scottish to new British records remains virtually identical in the last decade compared to the period up to the end of 2004.

Previously (to end 2004) there was a main peak of find dates from the end of May to early July (42 birds), a smaller peak in August (15 birds) and a similar peak from mid-September to early October (14 birds). The 2016 Skye bird fits into the highest part of the spring peak of records, which probably comprises a mix of hormone-fuelled overshoots of the breeding areas and wandering failed breeders caught up in weather systems heading north from the eastern Mediterranean.

The 20 Scottish records since 2004 include the first records for North-east Scotland - a male at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve on 13–18 October 2005, and for Dumfries & Galloway - a male at Mainsriddle on 22 June 2013. There were also two more in Argyll (now nine), three more in Highland (now 13), two more in the Outer Hebrides (now six), one more in Orkney (now 12), two more on Fair Isle (now 25) and eight more in Shetland (now 26).

The relative proportion of records from Shetland has increased notably compared to the period up to the end of 2004, and with six of the eight finds in autumn this is probably due, in part at least, to the greater number of observers now heading there in September/October. This proportional increase in autumn finds is seen in the spread of find dates in the 20 records since 2004, with two in May, six in June, three in July, one in August, seven in September and two in October. Away from Shetland the find dates of the birds are virtually all within the main spring peak and the August peak observed previously, suggesting little or no change to the vagrancy patterns (and/or observer coverage?) to these parts of Scotland, at least.



Plate 220. Black-headed Bunting, Isle of Skye, Highland, June 2016. © Andy Stables



Plate 221. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, West Burra, Shetland, May 2016. © Roger Riddington

## Rose-breasted Grosbeak, West Burra, 3–4 May 2016 – the first Shetland (fifth Scottish) record

L. GOODLAD

I often glance out of our kitchen window to see what birds are in the garden; usually it's Blackbirds, Starlings and sparrows. However, on the morning of Tuesday 3 May I got such a shock when I looked out and saw a brightly coloured bird-like 'thing' in the trees near the empty coconut feeder. I thought it was a stuffed cuddly toy put there by my husband, or one of my friends as a practical joke. Then it moved! It was real. It was real and I didn't recognise it. I'm not all that good at recognising some birds like little warblers and little greenish-brown birds, but this was so different from anything I'd ever seen and it really stood out. It was black and brown on its back and white below with a lovely red heart-shaped mark on its breast. I knew it

wasn't a woodpecker or Bullfinch but when I saw its strong beak I did wonder if it was a 'finchy-thing'. (Here's how amateur I am at birdwatching: a big bird of prey soaring overhead is an 'eagley-thing').

Anyway, I grabbed my camera and quickly put Peppa Pig on the TV. Putting cartoons on the TV might seem an odd thing to do at this point, but it was essential. Earlier in the year our toddler had screamed to be picked up when I tried to take photos of a female Sparrowhawk which regularly visited our garden; and of course she scared it away before I got a good photo. I knew that to get a chance of getting a clear photo, or two, I had to distract our toddler - and I managed it!

I then raced through the house to find the bird in my *Collins Bird Guide*. I really started shaking when it wasn't there. It wasn't on the RSPB 'bird identifier' either. Next stop was Facebook and I put this message out there: "Never thought that birds would have this effect on me, but I'm quivering with excitement! I don't even know what it is, yet. Saw it out the kitchen window just a few moments ago". Moments later Alan Adamson suggested a grosbeak, so I did a quick google image search which brought up photos that matched what I was seeing outside our house. It was a Rose-breasted Grosbeak!

I have to say, I am absolutely amazed at the connectivity of the birding world. Not long after putting my post on Facebook the phone was ringing and Hugh Harrop was asking for directions to our house, visitors and keen birders were arriving to view the grosbeak and by lunch time the local online newspaper was phoning to cover the story. I got to watch as the interest and the numbers of people arriving grew. It was a goose-bump moment when I realised the magnitude of what I had reported and that it

was a first for Shetland and that it had only been seen a handful of times in Scotland. Jim Nicholson was asked by the *Shetland Times* newspaper to get a photo of me standing by the bird feeder, when it wasn't in use, and I eventually agreed (although I think the bird would have looked less cheesy).

On the first day local birders got great views as we invited everyone who came to see it into our garden. There were beautiful moments when the grosbeak fluttered and flapped around the feeder and we saw gorgeous red flashes from under its wings. Sometimes it landed on the ground below the feeder to eat what had fallen down. I remember thinking that we were all so close to the bird and yet everyone had all these huge cameras and tripods positioned all around the garden. It interested me that one of the birders, whom I didn't know, said that he'd found our house by simply asking my brother-in-law to drop a Google pin on a map to show where we lived - what did all you birders do before mobiles, Google, Facebook and Rare Bird Alerts?

Plate 222. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, West Burra, Shetland, May 2016. © Rebecca Nason



Nearer lunchtime the number of people arriving grew, as did the requests for info on my Facebook page: "Is it still in your garden?" "Is it ok if I come along in my lunch hour?" My friend Jon Dunn was one of those able to do so and it was great to share his excitement and chat over a cuppa about the morning's events. Bear in mind, I had been inside all morning with our toddler and it was all happening so fast around me so it was great to see a friendly face who could stop the blur for a few moments.

I began to panic a little when I remembered that soon my son and his playmate would be returning from Playgroup. How was it going to work having three under-5s and a mega rarity in the garden? What if they didn't keep quiet enough and scared the bird away? What if they ran about and knocked over a tripod? So we had to leave the paparazzi and we headed to a nearby playpark. A little later, as we returned to our house, I had to explain to a passing neighbour that no, there wasn't a funeral on in the chapel up the road and that all the many, many cars parked

here and there along the road sides was because of what was currently in our garden. So, happily she came to view and share in the excitement. On the second day (Wednesday 4 May) the grosbeak sang and I managed to capture it on video! Some birders from the first day returned and there were some new faces. Hugh informed me that two friends would be arriving off the Northlink boat that morning so we were now receiving visitors from the Scottish Mainland.

Apart from venturing occasionally into next-door's garden the grosbeak stayed close to the bird feeder, resting occasionally in the corner of our garden among small trees and honeysuckle. It visited our garden for two days and was present until 20:00 hrs both nights. I am glad that folk young and old, able-bodied and disabled managed to see the Rose-breasted Grosbeak when it was here. Of course, there are those who arrived from England on the Thursday and just missed it - and I felt gutted for them, so gutted. This is the first time we've had such a close encounter with a rarity and the birding community. Everyone was so appreciative and polite and it was a super experience. I was humbled by an elderly gent who, upon leaving, thanked me and asked if I had a charity box which he could give money to? I was astonished and unprepared for this and in the end we agreed that either RSPB or Médecins Sans Frontières would be good choices. I felt that such a lovely, lovely gesture should be highlighted as, unfortunately for some, the image of the twitcher can be one of not respecting property or privacy, but our experience was the complete opposite.

Our son and daughter loved seeing such a rare bird and thankfully they both had toy binoculars so they could join in. Our little boy even snapped several pics on his own little camera which he took to Playgroup the next day to show everyone. Before leaving one evening, Hugh told me that he had indeed received invaluable advice from our four-year-old son which he promised to bear in mind: "just point the camera at the bird"- cute!

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Plate 223. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, West Burra, Shetland, May 2016. © Lynn Goodlad





Plate 224. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, West Burra, Shetland, May 2016. © Kris Gibb

#### Status of Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Scotland

This Nearctic species breeds in Canada east of the Rocky Mountains from southern Northwest Territories and British Columbia south-eastwards to the Great Lakes and Kansas and across to the Atlantic Coast from southern Newfoundland south to north Virginia and the Appalachian Mountains. The entire population is migratory and it winters from central Mexico to NW South America.

There have been four previous accepted records of this species in Scotland out of a total of 26 in Britain to the end of 2015 - all four were first-winter males:

1985: 7–8 October, Newton Plantation, North Uist, Outer Hebrides

2005: 8 October, Aird Mhor Plantation, Barra, Outer Hebrides

2011: 10 October, Stenaquoy, Eday, Orkney

2012: 31 October, 'At Sea', Oil Platform East Brae, sea area Fair Isle (found dead)

There are also two records from the Channel Isles (Sark 1975; Guernsey 1987) and eight from Ireland (Co. Cork in 1962, 1979, three in 1983, 1987; Co. Wexford 1985 and Co. Kerry in 2000).

Except for a first-summer male at Holme, Norfolk on 4–5 May 2006, all of these records have been in autumn or early winter, with find dates between 26 September and 20 December. There are two British records in September, 20 in October, one in early November and two in mid to late December. Of those that were aged 17 were first-winter males, four first-year females and four were females. The Shetland 2016 bird is the first adult male to be found and only the second in spring.

As with most Nearctic passerine vagrants the majority of British records are from SW England and Wales, with half (13) from the Isles of Scilly alone, two from Devon, one Hampshire, one Gwynedd and two Pembrokeshire, plus singles from Essex, Norfolk and Yorkshire. The Scottish records are from the Western and Northern Isles, which is again the usual pattern for Nearctic vagrants north of the border. The "At Sea" record in 2012 is one of several instances where North American vagrants have been discovered on North Sea oil installations.



Plate 225. White-crowned Sparrow, South Dell, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 31 May 2016. © Colin Bushell

## White-crowned Sparrow, Isle of Lewis, 3–31 May 2016 – the first Outer Hebrides (third Scottish) record

J. MACFARLANE & B.A.E. MARR

At 16:00 hrs on 31 May 2016, having just returned from Stornoway, my wife Mary was at the kitchen window where she could look out at our bird table and two bird feeders: my wife has a good eye for different kinds of birds.

On this occasion she informed me about a strange bird she was watching, it was a sparrow-like bird which had a striped head. We noticed that unlike the House Sparrows, who fed on the feeders, this bird ate on the ground.

I took a photo of the bird and sent it via Facebook to Martin Scott, who informed me that it was a White-crowned Sparrow! He asked me if he could inform people about it, which we said would be fine. Soon afterwards a man came to the door and we invited him in, he told us his name was Colin Bushell, and from the open dining room window he along with our friend David Green were able to take photos of the sparrow. It then flew to the overhead lines and started singing where Colin managed to get a good recording.

Plate 226. White-crowned Sparrow, South Dell, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 31 May 2016. © John Macfarlane



At about 19:30 hrs the bird took off and wasn't seen again, so unfortunately people who turned up soon after, and the following day, failed to see it.

After the article appeared in the local paper Agnes Campbell from Eoropie, about two miles from our house in South Dell, told me she along with her sister Mary Thomson had seen the bird just before we saw it.

**John Macfarlane**

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#### Background account by B.A.E. Marr

I was leading a tour on an expedition ship in the Arctic, about 600 miles from the North Pole, when (at 18:35 hrs) on 31 May, Martin Scott emailed me: "Sorry Tony, but this is in Dods' garden at 28 South Dell", with an attached photograph of a White-crowned Sparrow. There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth when I received the e-mail, and I began to try to equate the worth of such a mega rarity with the number of Polar Bears we had seen; a completely futile and very upsetting exercise.

Martin and Dods were aware of my absence, as before I left on 20 May I had informed my regular circle of birders who I email with any birding news from Ness that I would be away until 9 June. My e-mail included the ominous words that "It's a dangerous time for a birder to leave Britain, but less dangerous than in the Arctic, where our main mission is to find Polar Bears. I'll be in touch from the ship to find out what I'm missing!" Unfortunately, I couldn't have been much further away from the Isle of Lewis. I even began to suspect a conspiracy; to smell a rat; to believe that this was a stitch up. How could I have been so suspicious of my friends?

The answer to that question goes back to 15 May. That afternoon a near-neighbour of mine in Port of Ness, Molly Melia, told me that she had seen 'a funny sparrow' on her lawn with House Sparrows around ten days before. She described perfectly a White-crowned Sparrow, but couldn't find it in her bird book (*the AA/Reader's Digest Guide to the Birds of Britain*). She has no camera. She is not a bird watcher, and describes herself as a bird lover, but has previously found

and identified a Waxwing, and seen a juvenile Rose-coloured Starling, in her garden.

She said it attracted her attention with its black-and-white striped head. It had a broad white stripe down the centre of the crown, with a black stripe on each side and a white one below that. She likened it to a Badger's head pattern. I asked her if it had a white throat: no, just pale, but not white. Rest of underparts were 'buffish' and upperparts 'brown'. She did not note the bill colour. I later showed her all the plates from the *Collins Bird Guide* which include sparrows and buntings with stripey heads, European and American. She pointed immediately to the White-crowned Sparrow picture and said "that's it". The dates were 3–4 May, during a SW-S gale. It was seen once in late morning on 3rd, and once similarly on 4th. There had also been a Rose-breasted Grosbeak on a bird table in Shetland on those two days!



Plate 227. White-crowned Sparrow, South Dell, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 31 May 2016. © Colin Bushell

A few days earlier, on 30 April, a White-crowned Sparrow had been trapped at Woolston Eyes, Cheshire, and on release it soon vanished. Out of interest, Port of Ness is c.360 miles northwest of Woolston. However, Molly did not notice any ring on her bird, so it would have to be a different bird.

I weighed up all the evidence and initially considered that without a photograph, the record could only be regarded as a 'probable'. When I returned to Lewis however, I discussed with Molly her bird in the new light of Dod's sighting, and we agreed that this made her one much more likely to be accepted as a definite record. In a discussion I then had with Dods, he mentioned that he had heard that there had been a further sighting of a stripey-headed sparrow feeding on the ground with House Sparrows in a garden in Eropie a few days before he and Mary saw their bird.

I visited the owner of the property, Agnes Campbell, and discussed the sparrow with her and her sister, Mary Thomson, who saw it together from the kitchen window. They remarked on how striking the head pattern was. I have no doubt that it was a White-crowned Sparrow. They could not remember the precise date, but agreed that it was on or around 27 May - four days before the South Dell sighting.

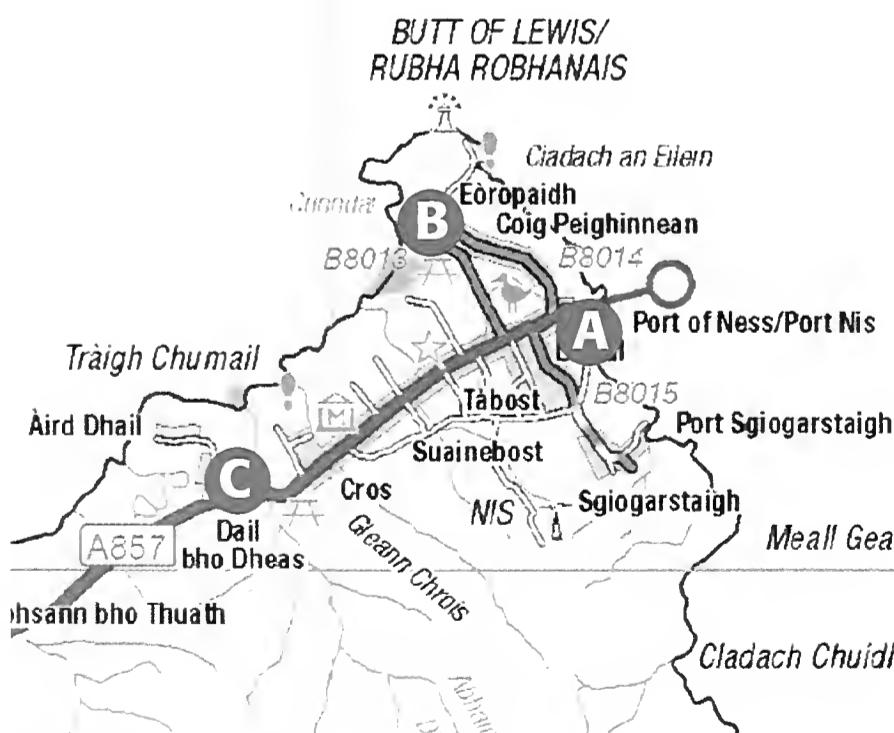


Figure 1. Map showing the northern tip of Lewis with locations and dates of White-crowned Sparrow sightings as follows; A. Port of Ness/Port Nis (3-4 May), B. Eoropaidh (27 May), C. South Dell/Dail bho Dheas (31 May). Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2016



Plate 228. White-crowned Sparrow, South Dell, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 31 May 2016. © Colin Bushell

Thanks to the alertness of Ness residents, and their concern for the welfare of the local birdlife by feeding them in their gardens, we have three sightings of a White-crowned Sparrow in Ness, the northern tip of the Isle of Lewis, within a radius of 3.5 miles and a period of 27 days, which all presumably relate to the same bird.

There is a final irony in my misfortune in not seeing this bird. My main home is in Cley, Norfolk, where a long-staying White-crowned Sparrow was present from 3 January to 11 March 2008 and became quite famous, attracting a lot of birders and media attention. A friend wrote to console me by saying that at least I had the Cley bird on my list. No chance. I was on an expedition cruise ship at the other end of the world, in Antarctica, throughout that period. Will I accept any more offers to come out of retirement and lead another tour? Let's wait and see! In the meantime, I'm going to join the Ness residents and put up a bird table and feeders in my own garden in Port of Ness. If you can't beat them...

*Tony Marr, Port Nis, Isle of Lewis.  
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## Status of White-crowned Sparrow in Scotland

This Nearctic species breeds from Alaska eastwards across northern Canada to Northern Quebec and Labrador, and southwards down the Rocky Mountains to NE Nevada, Utah and northernmost New Mexico, and from the Sierra Nevada to the Pacific Coast from Washington State to California. The vast majority of the population is migratory, wintering along the Pacific Coast from southernmost Alaska and across the whole southern half of the USA, south of Chicago, to north and west Mexico.

There have been two accepted records of White-crowned Sparrow in Scotland out of a total of five in Britain to the end of 2015:

**1977:** 15–16 May, one on Fair Isle (trapped 15th)

**2008:** 17–18 May, one at St. Michael's, near Leuchars, Fife

The other British records are one at Hornsea Mere, Yorkshire on 22 May 1977; a first-winter at Seaforth, Lancashire on 2 October 1995, and one at Cley-next-the-Sea, Norfolk on 3 January to 11 March 2008. There are also two records from Ireland: one on board SS Nova Scotia within sight of land in sea area Shannon in early June 1948, and one at Dursey Sound, Co. Cork on 20–27 May 2003.

The geographical spread of the British records is notably wide, which sometimes raises issues as to whether the birds have arrived here under their own steam, or that of some transatlantic cargo ship or passenger vessel. The find date for the 1995 Seaforth bird is consistent with displacement during autumn migration (though close to a container port), while the 2008 Cley individual may have arrived the previous autumn but just not been found until it moved into gardens in mid-winter.

It is tempting to speculate that the 2008 St. Michael's bird was the Cley individual heading back north but it also fits in the narrow window of May finds seen with the 1977 birds. The closely related White-throated Sparrow of North America also occurs in Britain as a vagrant (48 records to end 2014) and shows a similarly widespread pattern of occurrence (not favouring SW England), with a notable peak of find dates in May (22) and June (12) and another smaller, broad peak of 10 find dates from October to January. The White-crowned Sparrow records mirror this well, lending support to the idea that this is a natural pattern, where spring birds are displaced overshoots of the easternmost breeding areas in Canada/USA.



Plate 229. White-crowned Sparrow, South Dell, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 31 May 2016. © Colin Bushell



Plate 230. Green Warbler, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, May 2016. © Brydon Thomason

## Green Warbler at Baltasound, Shetland, 12–15 May 2016 – first record for Scotland

M. PENNINGTON

I couldn't get out until the evening on 12 May, a day which had seen a few scarce migrants including Wryneck, Bluethroat and Red-backed Shrike arriving on Unst, Shetland. I decided to go and look for the male Bluethroat at Haroldswick and there I met Unst's newest resident birder, Dave Cooper (DC). He told me he had just seen a Red-backed Shrike at Setters Hill Estate (SHE) in Baltasound, so I decided to go and have a look for it before it got too late.

Arriving at SHE I found a *Phylloscopus* warbler that flew ahead of me and then landed. My first impression was that it was bright enough to be a Wood Warbler, but it clearly wasn't although it was certainly a bright bird. Then I noticed the prominent wing-bar! Obviously, Arctic and Greenish Warblers were the first candidates for consideration, but neither of these seemed likely; the structure was wrong for Arctic and the

bird looked nothing like the Greenish I had seen on Unst the previous spring. Yellow-browed was clearly excluded as the tertials were plain, but was that just the hint of a second wing-bar? Two quick, perched views were all I got. Although I saw it again, I only had flight views as it flitted between bushes and it seemed to be intent on going to roost.

I immediately went round to see Brydon Thomason (BHT) to discuss what I had seen: a bright *Phyllosc* with a yellow face and a wing-bar. It had to be a Willow Warbler with a bold wing-bar (unlikely, surely?) or a Green Warbler (even more unlikely?). Greenish Warbler was only in the back of mind, because it looked so different to the only spring bird I'd seen, but something in the back of mind was telling me that you could get really bright spring Greenish Warblers; but that is the postscript to the story.

Four of us met up at SHE at 07:00 hrs the next morning, 13 May - myself, BHT, DC and Rob Brookes (RJB). It took a while to relocate the bird, as it had moved from the main pine plantation to a small patch of low bushes. It was quite hard to observe in the dense cover, but BHT obtained a few photos. At least one of these showed a pale line above the bill, suggesting that the supercilia met above the bill. As this was said to be a character of Greenish Warbler, but not Green, we decided that the bird must be a very bright Greenish. Before heading to work, I put the news out on the local bird information service, then looked for a few photographs on the internet. I found photos of the Finnish Green Warbler from 2012, initially thought to be a very bright Greenish, and stopped in my tracks. The resemblance to our bird was striking - and several photos showed an obvious pale line above the bill. It would appear that we had jumped to conclusions too soon. I phoned BHT, who was going through the same thought process, had been looking at the very same photos and was having the same doubts.

The bird then proved elusive and it was after three in the afternoon before BHT and DC relocated it, in the sycamore plantation at Halligarth, a few hundred metres away from where it had been found. At least one of the four of us stayed with it until it went dark. As it was dull and overcast, and the bird was feeding above our heads most of the time, it was difficult to assess just how bright it was. In these conditions, it often looked quite dull, and doubts

set in again. But, every now and again, we would see it lower down, against a dark background, and it would suddenly look very different. The combination of features looked very good for Green, but we had heard no calls and had no DNA; and we still had that niggling doubt about bright Greenish Warbler. We phoned a few people that evening and circulated a few photos. Responses were understandably cautious, but also encouraging. We obviously needed fresh eyes on the bird.

The next morning the bird was still at Halligarth at 07:00 hrs, but then it disappeared again. We widened the search once Roger Riddington (RR) had arrived from Shetland Mainland, and relocated the bird back at SHE. With the bird low down against a dark background, it looked very bright, and RR's reaction was "Wow, that's amazing! If I was you, I'd put news out!" This was all the encouragement we needed.

Soon afterwards, the bird was trapped in a mistnet erected in one of the existing net rides at the site. As soon as we saw it in the hand, any lingering doubts disappeared. The bird was ringed and processed by myself, RR and Will Miles, and a DNA sample was obtained in the form of a faecal sample. After photographs were taken, microphones were readied in case it called upon release. It didn't; it remained stubbornly silent throughout its stay.

**Plate 231.** Green Warbler, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, May 2016. © Brydon Thomason





Plate 232. Green Warbler, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, May 2016. © Mike Pennington

About 20 Shetland birders arrived on the Saturday afternoon and, on the Sunday (15 May), more birders arrived, although only two charter planes made it in (it was, apparently, a busy horse-racing weekend with planes booked to transport jockeys between race courses). On 16 May there was one report of a brief sighting in the afternoon, but there were others searching all day without success.

The initial identification of the bird was based on the brightness of the plumage, with the resemblance to the colours of Wood Warbler. The plumage tone varied considerably according to the light, and sometimes the bird looked quite dull, but the upperparts and wing-fringes were brighter green than even the brightest Willow Warbler. The underparts were all yellow, especially so in the hand, although in the field it sometimes only looked as though the face and throat were yellow. In the hand, it could be seen that the whitest part was the flanks. This may have contributed to the impression in the field that only the face was yellow.

The supercilia obviously caused us some problems because of the comments in some field guides, but they were distinctly yellow, brightest in front of the eyes. In many photos the supercilia quite clearly stop short of the bill, but there were pale bristly feathers above the

bill which, at some angles, made it look as though the supercilia met above the bill. The problem of defining the exact position of the supercilia is a pitfall that has been discussed before in the context of some controversial records of Greenish and Arctic Warblers and it is worth noting the Finnish Green Warbler from 2012 seems to have the supercilia meeting above the bill in some photos. Obviously, the value of this character is limited.

The wing-bar was very distinct: broad, chunky, square-ended and more or less white, without the obvious yellow of the underparts. A very indistinct second wing-bar was visible at times, in the field as well as in photos, but it was often obscured by other feathers.

Biometrics taken in the hand proved nothing as none are diagnostic, but several measurements appear to be better for Green, and the bird had a long wing-length (67 mm) towards the upper limit for both species. In the field, it looked quite long-winged and large-billed, but whether or not these were significant differences is debatable.

Our DNA sample was sent away by Special Delivery on Monday and Martin Collinson pulled out all the stops to get the analysis done. It was maybe no great surprise, but it was certainly a relief, when the results came through, less than

a week after the bird was trapped. The sequence for the Baltasound bird was virtually identical to two other previously sequenced Green Warblers, and was 3–5% different from other taxa in the Greenish Warbler group.

There appear to be eight previous accepted records in Europe, as well as another three widely published records that have not been accepted by the relevant committees. The only accepted record for Britain was on Scilly in 1983 and, together with the first European record on Heligoland in 1867, it was in autumn. The subsequent records in NW Europe have largely been in spring, with the Baltasound bird the earliest so far, although only one has been as late as June.

While this would appear to be the first record for Scotland, it may not be. That niggle in the back of my mind about Greenish Warblers looking extremely bright in spring was there for a reason. On 31 May 2014, Geoff and Donna Atherton had found a bright 'Greenish' Warbler on Foula, which

remained until 4 June. They obtained a few photos and were intrigued enough to send them to some other Shetland birders for comment. Green Warbler was seriously considered, but it was excluded, for the very same reason that the Baltasound bird was initially put out as Greenish: the supercilium appeared to meet above the bill and this was thought to be sufficient to rule out Green Warbler. The bird was circulated around the local committee and had been accepted as a Greenish, based on this feature and despite the brightness of the plumage; this was where that niggle in the back of mind had come from! With the identification of the Baltasound bird, Geoff and Donna had quite reasonably requested that the photographs be looked at again, and they do appear to show a very bright Green Warbler. Although there is no description, the photos have been sent to BBRC for consideration. If it were accepted it would mean that there have been Green Warblers in NW Europe in four of the last five springs, so we should be examining every spring Greenish Warbler closely from now on!

Plate 233. Green Warbler, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, May 2016. © Roger Riddington



Published European records of Green Warbler are as follows (records awaiting assessment are marked †, published records that may not be accepted by the national committee are marked \*):

- 1867: Germany, Heligoland, shot, 11 October (Gätke 1895)
- 1983: Britain, Bryher, Scilly, 1st-winter, photo'd, 26 September to 4 October (Hudson 2010)
- 1997: Faroe, Nólsoy, trapped and DNA sample taken, 8 June (Sørensen & Jensen 2001)
- 1997: Germany, Heligoland, 8 June (Dierschke *et al.* 2011)\*
- 1998: Germany, Heligoland, photographed, 1 June (Dierschke *et al.* 2011)\*
- 1998: Greece, Antikythira, Batoudiana, 1st-year, trapped, 18 September (Hellenic Rarities Committee 2006)
- 2000: Greece, Hania, Neo Horio Kydonias, 1st-year, 27 September (Hellenic Rarities Committee 2006)
- 2003: Sweden, Ottenby, Öland, trapped and DNA sample taken, 29 May (Irwin & Hellström 2007)
- 2003: France, Audinghen, Pas-de-Calais, 1st-winter, 20–21 September (Jiguet *et al.* 2004)
- 2012: Finland, Lågskär, Åland Islands, photographed, 20 May (Väisänen *et al.* 2015)
- 2014: Britain, Foula, Shetland, photographed, 31 May to 4 June (recently submitted to BBRC) †
- 2015: Denmark, Blåvand, trapped and DNA sample taken, 27 May †
- 2016: Britain, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, trapped and DNA sample taken, 12–15 May †
- 2016: Germany, Mellum island, 17 June (J. Dierschke pers. comm.) †

Finally, we can't help but think of Martin Garner when a bird like this turns up. He would have loved it and would have been one of the first we would have turned to for advice. His "anything can happen, never let it go" attitude made many birders try just a little bit harder, ourselves included.

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Plate 234. Black-billed Cuckoo, Bayhead, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2016. © Richard Levett

## Black-billed Cuckoo, Bayhead, North Uist, 22–31 May 2016 – first Outer Hebrides (fifth Scottish) record

R. LEVETT

Tracey Viney and I were making our third visit to the Outer Hebrides from our home in Hampshire, but this was our first in May, the previous two birding holidays having been in June. We hoped the earlier timing might improve our chances of encountering more spring migrants.

On Sunday 22 May, a couple of days in to our nine day trip, we were on our way to Benbecula airport to pick up two friends, Richard Carpenter and Heather Chivers, who were arriving on the afternoon flight from Southampton via Glasgow. We left our accommodation in Hougharry on North Uist early so that we had plenty of time to stop if we saw anything interesting. A few minutes into the journey at 14.25 hrs, as we were passing a garden opposite the north junction of the Paible circular road, I caught a glimpse of a bird's head peeping out from the shrubbery. The bird was sat close to the ground on a wire fence. I turned to Tracey, who was driving and said "I've just seen an American cuckoo! We need to turn around". The immediate instinct was of course to stop, but the single track road approaching the brow of a hill

was not a good place to be and we didn't want to scare the bird off so we carried on and turned in the first convenient spot. It was only then that the questions and doubts crept in. These cuckoos don't turn up very often and certainly not in the spring. Surely it was the wrong time of year? What else could it be? So, as we came back over the brow, we were hugely relieved to see that the bird was still there. Not only that, it had moved and was now sitting up on the fence in full view. It was immediately obvious that my initial reaction was correct and that this was indeed a New World cuckoo of a genus that neither of us had ever seen before.

The excitement grew as we pulled up on the Paible road and parked. On leaving the car we could see the bird was on the fence some 30 metres away. Tracey asked what the identifying features were and I said "To be honest, other than the fact that one has a predominantly black bill and the others a predominately yellow bill, I'm not sure". So we set about noting as many features as possible through the scope.

It was obviously a cuckoo, slim and long-tailed. Most importantly the slender, slightly-decurved bill was all dark, steel-grey in colour. More striking was the orbital ring which was bright, crimson-red and stood out very clearly, especially when the head was turned in to the light. The underparts were generally white with some buff tints under the throat and undertail coverts. The upperparts were olive-brown with a hint of bronze but lacking any distinct rufous tones in the wings. Periodically, as the bird alighted on the fence, it would cock its tail revealing the grey underside with narrow pale fringes to the feathers. Repeatedly, the bird disappeared back to the garden making short flights between the fence and the shrubs during which times the graduated tail with small white tips and the buff underwings could be clearly seen. Once we had noted all the plumage details, I tried to move closer to get a photograph, but the bird was wary, nervous of any approach and simply responded by burying itself in a bush.

Happy that we had all the features we checked through the field guide (which only showed juvenile plumage), but this was sufficient to confirm that this must be an adult Black-billed Cuckoo. We then phoned a friend from Hampshire, John Faithfull, who was on Skye having left North Uist the day before after a week birding on the island. I knew he had a local contact and could hopefully put the word out. When I spoke to John there seemed to be a long period of silence before he responded, I can't think why!

**Plate 235.** Black-billed Cuckoo twitch, Bayhead, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2016. © Richard Levett



**Plate 236.** Black-billed Cuckoo, Bayhead, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2016. © Stephanie Leese

By this time we needed to leave to pick up our friends from the airport. It was agreed that I would stay to try and get a photo and wait for other birders to turn up while Tracey undertook the taxi duties. By the time I finally managed a photo it was about 15.30 hrs. In the end, I had to resort to laying in the ditch on the opposite side of the road, which must have seemed a little odd to the passing traffic but at least I had a record shot in the event that no-one else saw the bird. After an hour Tracey arrived back with Richard and Heather. No other birders had appeared in that time. The cuckoo duly emerged from the shrubs to resume feeding and they were able to get good views of it as it continued to work its way along the fence dropping to the ground to feed voraciously on Six-spot Burnet moth caterpillars.

This was their first visit to the Uists and one that will surely be hard to beat. How often do you start a birding holiday with a Black-billed Cuckoo? At 17.00 hrs we left the site and drove to the Balranald seawatch point to see if we could find any birders, but there was no-one there so we returned to our accommodation nearby for a cuppa. We know how to celebrate! At the cottage I located the contact details for Steve Duffield (Western Isles Wildlife) and phoned him as I knew he lived on the island. It turned out he was in Estonia! Fortunately, he was still able to spread the news of this most unexpected avian arrival.

When we stopped at the cuckoo site later that evening there was already a small gathering of happy birders present, so the information had clearly filtered through. Numbers grew steadily over the next few days once it became clear that the bird was still alive and kicking.

There were apparently only 15 previously accepted British and Irish records of Black-billed Cuckoo and this, the fifth Scottish bird, was the first ever spring occurrence in Europe. Interestingly, one local resident even reported that she had heard it calling in her garden. Above all, it appeared uncharacteristically healthy and because of its record-breaking 10-day stay, it provided a long-awaited opportunity for birders from all over the UK to finally catch up with a notoriously difficult bird which many thought they were destined never to see. One determined individual even chartered his own plane whilst the scheduled flights and car ferries were pretty much booked up such was the demand.

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**Plate 237.** Black-billed Cuckoo, Bayhead, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2016. © Steven Lane



### Status of Black-billed Cuckoo in Scotland

This Nearctic species breeds east of the Rocky Mountains from easternmost British Columbia south to northern Oklahoma and eastwards to the Atlantic Coast from New Brunswick south to North Carolina and the Appalachian Mountains. The population is entirely migratory and winters in NW South America.

There have been four previous accepted records of Black-billed Cuckoo in Scotland out of a total of 14 birds in Britain to the end of 2015:

- 1950: 8 November, first-winter, near Southend, Kintyre, Argyll found dead
- 1953: 11 October, Foula, Shetland found exhausted, died next day
- 1953: 30 September, "At Sea", found exhausted on Oil Platform Maureen, taken in overnight and released on 1 October
- 2014: 23 October, first-winter, North Ronaldsay, Orkney

The 10 other British records are predominantly from SW England, with five on the Isles of Scilly (1932; two in 1982; 1985 and 1990), one in Cornwall (1965) and two in Devon (1967; 1982) plus one at Redcar, Cleveland on 23–24 September 1975 and a first-winter at Red

Rocks, Hoylake, Cheshire on 30 October 1982. There is a single Irish record - one killed at Killead, Co. Antrim on 25 September 1871.

The geographical location of records is similar to that of other Nearctic near-passerine (and passerine) records in Scotland/Britain. The 2016 North Uist bird is consistent with that pattern but is the first ever Nearctic cuckoo found in spring in Europe. The previous Black-billed Cuckoo records are mostly from late autumn with one on 29 August (Scilly 1982 - found dead 30th) and the rest between 23 September and 6 November, with two in September and 10 from 11–30 October.

The longest stay of any of these autumn records is three days (Scilly 1982). The 2016 North Uist bird was present for (at least) 10 days making it easily the longest staying Black-billed record, doubtless owing much to the local caterpillar populations. This species and its close relative Yellow-billed Cuckoo (64 in Britain to end 2015, 13 in Scotland) are notorious for being found dead, or dying soon after discovery, due to the extreme stress of the trans-Atlantic displacement itself and a lack of suitable insect food in autumn, especially caterpillars for Black-billed, which normally form the bulk of their diet.

Plate 238. Black-billed Cuckoo, Bayhead, North Uist, Outer Hebrides, May 2016. © Roger Ridley





Plate 239. Gull-billed Tern, Belhaven, Lothian, May 2016. © Ian Andrews

## Gull-billed Tern, Belhaven, 28 May 2016 - the first Lothian record

M. HANNAM

Having recently inherited a friend's battered 1996 Ford Fiesta, I spent a fair proportion of May undertaking spontaneous birding trips made possible by my 'new' set of wheels. On 28 May, one such outing saw me arriving at the John Muir Country Park at around 06:30 hrs.

I'd enjoyed a productive couple of hours exploring the mosaic of saltmarsh, tidal mudflats and pinewoods. Common, Sandwich and Little Terns swooped over the bay and flocks of Ringed Plovers and Dunlins, supplemented by the odd Little Stint, scampered along the shoreline. Returning to the car, I'd mulled over where to go next; it was still early and I didn't need to return home until lunchtime. The tide was high, so I decided to make the short drive round to Belhaven and check out the bay area.

On arrival at the car park at about 09:40 hrs, a brief scan revealed a mixed flock of gulls loafing by the channel, a handful of Redshanks and a solitary tern on the sandy flats of the inner bay. I'd initially trained the scope on the gull flock, but something about the tern drew my attention. After another look through the bins, and with adrenalin already rising, I fixed it in the scope - a neat black cap without any hint of a crest, black bill and black legs. My first thought was, I suppose unusually, of the eastern *longipennis* race of Common Tern, having recently seen one at Blakeney Point in Norfolk. However, the black legs discounted that possibility and besides it didn't look much like a 'common'. On the subject of those legs, I noted they were exceptionally long, 'high-kneed', giving the bird a gull-like stance (gull-legged tern anyone?). This impression was reinforced by the

bird's subsequent feeding behaviour as it proceeded to stalk across the mud occasionally probing at the surface much like a feeding gull or even a wader. By now I was pretty sure I was looking at a Gull-billed Tern. I have lived in Lothian for 14 years now and couldn't recall one putting in an appearance, so I was aware this represented a significant find. My certainty was diluted by a couple of details. The bill was definitely on the thick side, but the Lars Jonsson illustration suggested a pronounced gonydeal angle which I couldn't for the life of me make out. Additionally, when the bird took flight I was able to appreciate the relatively wide wings and short tail, but couldn't in truth make out the grey rump. The bird's flight pattern proved intriguing as it quartered the bay, much like a harrier in its slow methodical progression.

By happy coincidence I had finally succumbed to the lure of Twitter and had created an account the previous day. I took out my iPhone to see I had only 8% battery remaining! I then glanced up to see the tern flying strongly towards Dunbar Golf Course and the coast beyond. Immediately, I hurried down the lane and onto the narrow path along the edge of the fairways. Scanning the rocky shoreline, I picked out a

couple of Common Terns amongst the Kittiwakes, but no sign of my putative GBT.

I'm sure all birders will be familiar with that strange mix of elation and despair which accompanies the one that got away (I must add at this point that amongst all the subsequent wonderful photos of the bird, not one belongs to me. I find bird photography a frustrating business and haven't as yet invested in the specialised kit to make it less so. As a result, I had no pictorial evidence to back up my sighting). Based on what were, it has to be said, eye-wateringly good views of the bird I decided to put it out there as the real deal rather than a possible. Perhaps someone would pick it up further along the coast to confirm the sighting.

Consequently, my first ever tweet was a slightly forlorn: "Gull-billed tern at Belhaven Bay, flew south towards Dunbar harbour 9.40am." The message was clear, 'this bird has flown'. I trudged back to the bay more in hope than expectation, so imagine my relief when I returned to see the tern standing in exactly the same position as I'd first located it. I attempted to send another tweet, but the iPhone gave up the ghost before I could spread the word.

Plate 240. Gull-billed Tern, Belhaven, Lothian, May 2016. © Ian Andrews





Plate 241. Gull-billed Tern, Belhaven, Lothian, May 2016. © Kris Gibb

It's strange how when confronted with a rarity our identification skills can be overly inundated with caution; we don't want to risk a mistake, look foolish or feel that we are wasting people's time. Over the next half-hour or so, I watched the tern perform its hawking rituals over the bay confirming my identification beyond any doubt; every feature visible with absolute clarity.

Several hours after the event (note to self, always charge iPhone battery before setting out), I was able to send my second ever tweet: "Terrific views of gull-billed tern on inner bay Belhaven 10.50–11.25 am."

*Mike Hannam, Edinburgh*

Email: [mike.hannam@rediffmail.com](mailto:mike.hannam@rediffmail.com)

Luckily for local birders, the bird was present in Belhaven Bay until 18:20 on 28 May. On 29 May, it was present from at least 15:10 to 17:35, but was not seen on the 30th. It was seen close by in the inner bay at Tynningham between 06:45 and 07:10 and at 16:10–16:30 on 3 June. Intriguingly, news broke of a Gull-billed Tern at Kinneil Lagoon, near Grangemouth (Upper Forth) in the morning on 3 June, and one (it) was at Tynningham at 05:05, but not thereafter, on the 4th, before being seen at Kinneil again intermittently from 08:20 to 21:00 on 4th, and

on 5th and 6 June. It was also seen at Skinflats (Upper Forth) on 8th, at Seton Sands (Lothian) on 12th and at Musselburgh and off Cockenzie (both Lothian) on 13 June before re-appearing at Kinneil again from 14–25 June. Assuming all sightings are valid and refer to the same bird, then it could certainly shift! *Eds.*

#### **Status of Gull-billed Tern in Scotland**

*This species has a global distribution with fragmented breeding areas in North, Central and South America, the Palearctic, SE Asia and Australia. The Western Palearctic breeding population is spread across numerous colonies from southern Spain eastwards through Mediterranean and Black Sea coastal sites, and inland sites in central and eastern Turkey, E Kazakhstan and isolated colonies in SW Russia, plus several sites along the W/NW coast of Denmark. These populations are migratory, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa.*

*There were nine birds out of 301 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2004: a male, found moribund, on Pentland Skerries (Orkney) on 7 May 1913; one on Fair Isle on 24–29 May 1971; one at Bo'ness (Upper Forth) on 21 May 1977; one at Drimsdale, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 3–6 May 1987; a first-winter at*



Plate 242. Gull-billed Tern, Belhaven, Lothian, May 2016. © Kris Gibb

Loch Ryan (Dumfries & Galloway) on 12 October 1990; one at North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 27 May 1992; one at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shetland) on 25 June 1995; one at Loch Bee, South Uist on 14–16 July 2000, and one at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist on 13–31 July 2003. Previously accepted Lothian records in 1960, 1966 and 1968 were reviewed and are no longer considered acceptable.

Since 2004 there have been five further accepted records in Scotland:

- 2008: 29 September to 3 October, adult at Crossapol, Tiree (Argyll)  
2010: 25 April, adult at Near Moss, Tiree (Argyll)  
2012: 25 July, adult at Loch na Liana Moire, near Askernish, South Uist (Outer Hebrides)  
2013: 27–31 July, at Scatness/Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shetland)  
2015: 22 June, adult at Skipi Geo, Birsay, Mainland (Orkney)

with about 350 further records elsewhere in Britain to the end of 2015. There have been 18 accepted records in Ireland in the same period.

The post-2004 Scottish records mostly group with the previous spring/summer peak of occurrence from 7 May to 31 July, though the 2010 Tiree bird was 12 days earlier than the previous earliest find date. The 2008 Tiree bird is

only the second in autumn. Elsewhere in Britain, the pattern of find dates extends from mid-April to the end of October, with a notable peak from mid-April to late May, a smaller, broader peak from late June to late July, and a third peak from late August to mid-September. The Scottish records all fall within this period, all but two in the spring and mid-summer peaks which almost certainly comprise hormone-charged overshoots of the normal (western) breeding areas.

The geographical distribution of the post-2004 Scottish records is virtually identical to the previous pattern with a notable bias to coastal sites in the Northern and Western Isles and western Scotland. By contrast, the 2016 Dunbar/Kinneil bird chose the Firth of Forth for its stay mirroring the 1977 Bo'ness sighting. Elsewhere in Britain, there is a strong geographical bias of sightings towards southern England, generally taken to indicate that most individuals originate from breeding areas in Spain and western Mediterranean rather than the Danish and eastern populations. This may explain the records in north and west Scotland, but the two Firth of Forth records may well originate from birds displaced in the North Sea on their way to the Danish breeding areas. The 2016 Dunbar/Kinneil bird had a total length of stay of 29 days (though not seen on all of these), which surpasses the previous longest stay of 19 days observed from the 2003 Rubha Ardvule bird.

# Aspects of spring migration in 2016

C.R. McKAY

The aim of this report is to bring together sightings from across Scotland to highlight interesting aspects of spring (March–mid May) 2016. It draws upon records submitted via BirdTrack, BirdGuides, Trektellen, local birding grapevines and bird observatory blogs and focuses on non-rarities. The list of sightings is not comprehensive, nor is it in date or species order. The 'greater than' character is used to indicate direction of movement e.g. '100 >S' = 100 birds flying south.

Spring is a great time to witness migration in Scotland. Across the country summer migrants are returning to their breeding grounds; in the west there is the 'north-west passage' of Iceland-bound Whooper Swans, Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese, ducks, waders such as Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel and Dunlin and passerines such as Icelandic Redwing and White Wagtail; and in the east, falls of drift migrants can occur along the coast as Scandinavian bound migrants are blown off course by south easterly winds. The weather that produces the most birds 'on the ground' is often inclement, forcing birds to drop in to estuaries, bays and wetlands for a few days rather than simply passing overhead out of sight. This was the case on 1–2 May when a small ridge of high pressure on 1 May encouraged many Black-tailed Godwits and Whimbrels to head north, only to be grounded by overnight rain on 2 May, when almost 450 godwits were seen at various sites from Clyde to the Outer Hebrides.

## Homeward bound

Spring 2016 saw an unusually early influx of some of our classic summer visitors. By 10 April, Fair Isle had logged earliest ever dates for no less than six species - **Great Skua**, **House Martin**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Whitethroat**, **Redstart** and **Tree Pipit**, along with joint-earliest for **Sand Martin** - a truly remarkable set of records. As David Parnaby commented on the Fair Isle Bird Observatory (FIBO) website: "there can surely be

very few occasions when that happens at a site with such a complete historic data set as Fair Isle."

The start of spring migration on Tiree (Arg) was heralded by a fall of **Redwings** on 12 March, and the first **Goldcrest** of the year there the following day. A **Magpie** on Tiree on 30 March was only the second record for the island.

An early **Swallow** passed >N over Barns Ness (Loth) on 25 March, and there were 30 **Sand Martins** at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) the following day, quickly building to 200+ there by 1 April. Fair Isle had its earliest-ever **House Martin** on 4 April; six had gathered at Gavinton (Bord) by 14th, when a **Cuckoo** was calling at the Braes of Doune (UF). At about the same time there were many reports of **Fieldfares**, **Redwings** and **Bramblings** gathering in large excitable flocks, ready for their departure across the North Sea. An early **Swift** was over Hogganfield Loch (Clyde) on 23 April.

The first **Chiffchaffs** (three) on Fair Isle appeared on 29 March. By 8 April, there were no less than 28 singing along a 1.5 mile stretch of the River Tyne (Loth). A fall in the Northern Isles on 11 April brought 45 to North Ronaldsay (Ork) and 73 to Fair Isle - its highest ever spring count, beating the previous record of 50 set in 1970; it also included the first ever French-ringed Chiffchaff to be caught on the Isle. The record set on 11th was relegated into second place the next day when 87 were present. On 17th a count of 21 along the old railway line from Maryculter to Cults (NES) was considered good for the region, where the species appears to be on the increase, as in the rest of Scotland.

**Carrion Crow** passage on Fair Isle peaked at 43 birds on 5 May. An extraordinary **Swallow** record came from North Ronaldsay (Ork) where a juvenile was trapped on 9 May. The North

Ronaldsay blog notes: "as no Swallows will have fledged yet in the UK this bird was likely born in the Mediterranean (where Swallows can start to nest in February) and has migrated north with breeding adults".

### The north-west passage

Passage of one of our earliest spring migrants, the **Whooper Swan** got under way in mid-March with 50 >N at Anstruther (Fife) on 12th followed by a marked passage in the Outer Hebrides over the next few days including 32 >N South Glendale, South Uist and 13 >NW at Carinish, North Uist on 13th and 89 >N at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist on 14th followed by 63 >N there on 16th - part of a total of 334 seen passing over the islands during March. Passage in the east of the country occurred later in the month, with 50 >NW at St Monans (Fife) on 26th and a spectacular 80 >N past the Isle of May on 5 April. Satellite tracking by WWT of birds marked at English wintering sites has shown that these birds will most likely have been heading direct to Iceland. However, there is a migratory divide between birds from sites in eastern England such as Welney (Norfolk) which pass north through eastern Scotland, and those from western sites such as Martin Mere and Caerlaverock which pass through Argyll and the Outer Hebrides.

Most of our spring **White Wagtail** records probably relate to birds heading for Iceland rather than Scandinavia, with numbers at east coast sites being typically much lower than on the west. Migrants began to appear from early April with four on Fair Isle on 4th, seven at Bishopston (Clyde) on 8th and three at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 12th. Numbers increased in the west throughout the month, with highest counts of 43 at Longhaugh Point (Clyde) and 35 on Tiree (Arg) on 25th. Ten were at Airth sewage works (UF) feeding on chironomids on 29th. In early May, there were five at Lochwinnoch (Clyde) on 1st, three at the head of Loch Tay (P&K) on 2nd and seven near Kirkintilloch (Clyde) on 5th and 10 between Port of Ness and the Butt of Lewis (OH) on 6th. Sixteen at Barns Ness (Loth) on 9 May was a high count for the east coast, and 10 on Fair Isle on 6th and 12 May were its highest counts of the spring. In contrast, the



**Plate 243.** Five of the 32 Whooper Swans >N past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 11 April 2016. © John Kemp

Isle of May recorded only four singles in the whole spring, and most Shetland records were of singletons.



**Plate 244.** Male White Wagtail, Rubha Ardvule, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 24 April 2016. © John Kemp

**Whimbrel** passage got underway on the east side of the country on 16 April with 22 >N over N Queensferry (Fife) and a single over Powfoulis (UF) followed by two >N over Fair Isle on 19th. A small 'fall' of c.35 was noted at Powfoulis on 23 April. Movement in the west was most obvious in the Outer Hebrides, where birds heading >N or >NW were regular in small numbers from 18 April onwards, with peak counts of 15 at the Butt of Lewis on 24th, and 35 at West Gerinish, South Uist on 30th. However, the main arrival was in early May, starting with 30 on Barra on 2nd, followed by 112 on Balranald on 4th and 100 on the West Gerinish Range, South Uist on 7th.

Elsewhere on the west side of the country, there were 21 at Ardmore (Clyde) and 14 at West Ferry (Clyde) on 25 April and 21 at Blackwaterfoot, Arran (Clyde Islands) on 30 April. Flocks of 14 >N over Lochwinnoch (Clyde) on 29 April followed by 20 >S on 1 May were presumably staging birds commuting to and from a temporary roost site. On 2 May, North Ronaldsay (Ork) had its highest count of the spring - 20 birds, and on 6 May there were still 18 at West Ferry (Clyde), with Fair Isle not recording its peak count of 17 birds until 18 May.

The first **Black-tailed Godwits** of the year on Tiree (Arg) were 19 at Loch an Eilean on 24 April and 19 at Loch a' Phuill on 26 April. A marked passage in late April and early May started with 102 at three sites on Tiree (Arg) on 29 April. On 1 May, there were 54 (most in full summer plumage) at the head of Loch Tay (P&K), 16 in Ardmore North Bay (Clyde), 100+ >N Aird at an Runair, North Uist (OH) and 16 at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis (OH). An impressive total of 393 counted on Tiree by John Bowler on 2nd saw 78 at Loch an Eilean, 180 at Loch Bhasapol (including a bird leg-flagged in France) and 135 at Loch a' Phuill. Clearly the Hebridean machairs and wetlands provide perfect feeding areas for staging godwits. Inland on the same day, there were 30 near Carsebreck (P&K), 24 at Baron's Haugh (Clyde) and two at the head of Loch Tay (P&K). In contrast, the first birds of the year for Fair Isle didn't appear until 4 May, and only small numbers were recorded here and on North Ronaldsay thereafter.

Other Iceland-bound waders included the annual impressive build-up of **Golden Plovers** on Tiree (Arg), with 3,600 on the Reef on 29 April. There were 220 **Ringed Plover** on Tiree on 2 May, followed later in the month by large numbers of **Dunlin**. Counts of 1,000+ each of Dunlin and Ringed Plover at Carsethorn (D&G) on 18 May evidenced the western bias for these species.

### Mysterious Hawfinches

This secretive denizen of mature parkland woods and policies is surely one of our least familiar Scottish birds. The most reliable way to see a Hawfinch in Scotland is to pay a visit to Scone Palace (P&K) where a small wintering population takes advantage of the wide variety of ornamental trees, feeding on the fruits and

buds of species such as Yew and Hornbeam. It had always been assumed that the Scone birds were drawn from birds breeding in the vicinity, and Neil Morrison and John Calladine carried out a colour-ringing and radio-tracking project in the hope of learning more about their movements. Not surprisingly, the birds proved difficult to track as they moved around surrounding woodlands, but some at least did breed in the vicinity. So it came as a big surprise when an adult female colour-ringed at Scone on 17 February 2004 was found dead three years later 1,031 km due east in the Halland region of **Sweden** (Figure 1). Clearly not all Hawfinches wintering at Scone have a Scottish origin!



Figure 1. Movement of a ringed Hawfinch between Scone, Perth & Kinross and southern Sweden (based on an image from the BTO ringing website).

The Hawfinch's Scottish breeding range has contracted, and the size of the Scottish breeding population is estimated at less than 40 pairs, and these are now restricted to Perth & Kinross (*The Birds of Scotland* 2007). Despite this, the number of migrants recorded in Scotland has increased since the mid-1980s. An average of 30–40 spring migrants is now recorded annually, most occurring in the Northern Isles. The received wisdom is that these are birds from continental Europe heading for Scandinavian breeding grounds and drifted off course.

Early 2016 saw good numbers of wintering birds at Scone, with 40+ along the main drive on 12 February and up to 20 remaining to at least 7 March. Migrant Hawfinches started to appear

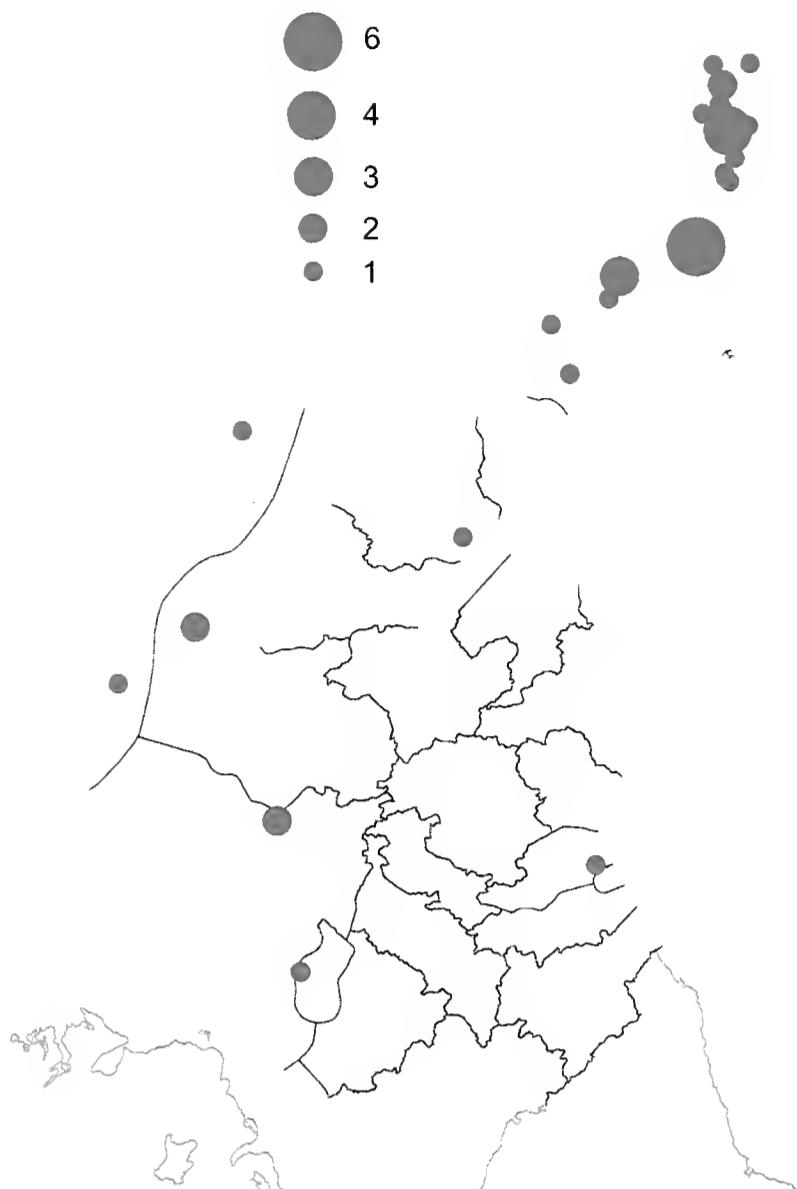


Figure 2. Distribution of migrant Hawfinch records in Scotland, spring 2016.

across the country from late March onwards, totalling approximately 45 records from 32 sites spread across Scotland by mid-May.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the great majority of birds occurred in the Northern Isles, but the scatter of sightings along the west coast raises questions about the origins of these birds. The first spring migrant appeared at Lional, Ness at the north end of Lewis (OH) on 28 March. As is often the case, this bird, a cracking male, was at a garden bird feeder, where it remained until the 30th.

There was a small influx in Orkney on 4 April, with three on North Ronaldsay and one in a garden at Evie. A single on Fair Isle on 5th was followed by a significant 'arrival' in the north on 6th with five at various locations in Shetland, one on Sanday (Ork) and another garden bird in Golspie (High). A new bird appeared on Fair Isle the next day, and there were several subsequent records from various Shetland localities, which may or may not have been previous arrivals moving around the islands searching for policy woodlands or well-stocked bird tables (!). On 27 April, a male trapped on



Plate 245. Male Hawfinch, Lionel, Ness, Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 18 March 2016. © Sallie Avis



**Plate 246.** Hawfinch getting its bearings, Sumburgh, Shetland, 6 April 2016 [note the gnats sheltering behind the weather vane - a calm day in Shetland!]

© Rob Fray

Fair Isle was found to be carrying a high fat load, suggesting that it had been feeding well previously - as noted in the FIBO website: "a male at the Obs, which was later caught and ringed, was found to be carrying plenty of fat and weighed in at 69.8 g (a whopping 18.3 g heavier than the previous Hawfinch ringed this spring), leading to BirdGuides to refer to it as a 'rotund male'!" Perhaps this bird had been feasting at a bird table in Orkney or Highland?

This north-eastward progression of records could potentially indicate that these are birds moving from within the UK rather than migrants drifted from the continent. This is suggested by a subsequent run of records at western sites in late April, with two in a garden at Dunvegan, Skye (High) on 20th, one in a garden at Pinmill, Arran (Clyde Islands) on 21st, two at a bird feeder in Loch Uisg, Mull (Arg) on 23rd and a single at South Glendale, South Uist (OH) on 24th. A later bird was on Vatersay (OH) on 14 May. These western records seem at odds with the idea that these are birds from continental wintering areas heading for Scandinavia. Perhaps there are as yet unfound wintering populations in, for example,

the hazel and oak woods of Argyll, or perhaps even in Ireland? Few birdwatchers visit such habitats in winter which, when added to the bird's secretive nature, would make such populations easy to miss. [N.B. Although extremely rare in Ireland, BirdGuides notes that up to four Hawfinches were present at Curraghchase Forest Park, Co. Limerick, SW Ireland in February–March 2016!].

On the other hand, maybe these records simply reflect the return migrations form a larger than usual influx of continental birds in autumn 2015? *The Birds of Scotland* reports an exceptional spring migration having taken place in spring 2000 when 57 birds were recorded between 13 April and 8 May, including 22 in Shetland, three on Fair Isle, 16 on Orkney and six on the Outer Hebrides. A comparison of records in 2000 with those in 2016 shows that this spring's migration was on a similar scale (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Comparison of migrant Hawfinch numbers in Scotland in spring 2000 and 2016.

Recording area	Spring 2000	Spring 2016
Shetland	22	23
Fair Isle	3	6
Orkney	12	6
Outer Hebrides	6	3
Highland		3
Moray & Nairn	1	
North-east Scotland	2	1
Angus & Dundee		
Fife		1
Argyll	1	2
Borders	1	
Lothian		1
Clyde Islands		1
Total	49	46

### Acknowledgements

Fair Isle Bird Observatory ([www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk/latest\\_sightings.html](http://www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk/latest_sightings.html)), North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory ([northronbirdobs.blogspot.co.uk](http://northronbirdobs.blogspot.co.uk)), Isle of May Bird Observatory ([www.isleofmaybirdobs.org/birds/news](http://www.isleofmaybirdobs.org/birds/news)), Western Isles Wildlife ([www.western-isles-wildlife.com](http://www.western-isles-wildlife.com)), BirdGuides, SOC ([www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/summer-migrants](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/summer-migrants)) and local bird newsgroups, and all photographers for use of their images.

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# Scottish Bird Sightings

## 1 April to 30 June 2016

S.L. RIVERS

**Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.**

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

April saw the start of an unprecedented showing of Cranes, but conversely the west coast skua was the worst for many years. May brought one of the best hauls of spring migrants for several years, with several gems from southern and eastern Europe including the first Green Warbler for Scotland, a surprise appearance by a Black-browed Albatross, and the unexpected discovery of three top-flight vagrants from North America.

June was somewhat quieter, but still brought a second Nearctic sparrow of the spring and the second ever American White-winged Scoter.

**Ross's Goose:** one was near Bathgate (Loth) on 3–9 April, with it or a Snow Goose at Skinflats (UF) on 12 April. **Richardson's Cackling Goose:** one was at Port Ellen, Islay (Arg) on 12 April, and two at Loch Gruinart, Islay on 19 April. **American Wigeon:** single drakes were at Port Allen (P&K) on 21 April; at St. John's Loch (Caith) on 13 June, and on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 28–30 June. **Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were still at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) to 3 April; at Caerlaverock (D&G) to 5th; at Loch Shiapabhat, Lewis (OH) to 7th; at John Muir CP, Tynningham (Loth) to 10th, and on Loch Flemington (High/M&N) to 19 April. Singles were at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 6 April; at Kinneil (UF) on 9–19th and 28–30 April and Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 14th; at Loudoun Hill (Ayr) on 10 April; one at the Inner Bay,

Tynningham (Loth) again on 23 April to 1 May; one at Lochwinnoch RSPB Reserve (Clyde) on 28 April; one at Loch Bhasapol, Tiree (Arg) on 1 May, and one at Mull Head, near Kirkwall, Mainland (Ork) on 8 June. **Black Duck:** the returning drake (since 2011) was at Strontian (High) on 17th and 27 April and 29 June. **Ring-necked Duck:** single drakes remained at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) to 6 April and at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) to 18 April. A drake was at Leumrabagh, Lewis (OH) on 4 April; one was at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 15–17 April; a drake at Loch Finlaggan, Islay (Arg) on 29 April to 14 June; one at Loch Meodal, Isle of Skye (High) on 8 May, and one at Clumly Quarry, Mainland (Ork) on 21 June. **Lesser Scaup:** a drake (with a Portuguese nasal-tag) was on Barr Loch (Clyde) on 30 April to 1 May.

**King Eider:** the regular female was off Ruddons Point (Fife) to 21 April; an adult drake was at Achiltibuie (High) from 14 April to 11 June; the returning drake was



Plate 247. King Eider with Common Eider, Achilitibuie, Highland, May 2016. © Martin Benson



Plate 248 a-c. American White-winged Scoter, (centre right) with Velvet (centre left) and Common Scoters, Murcar, North-east Scotland, June 2016. © Nick Littlewood

on the Ythan Estuary (NES) from 18–28 April, 8–12 May and 31 May to 30 June; a drake flew past Burghead (M&N) on 19 May; a (the regular) female was off Musselburgh (Loth) on 9th and 18–28 June. **Surf Scoter:** single adult drakes were still at Musselburgh/Joppa (Loth) to 28 April; off Ruddons Point, Largo Bay (Fife) to 6 April, and off Easting, Unst (Shet) to 3 April; in Gosford Bay (Loth) on 30 April; off Belmont, Unst (Shet) on 4–30 May; a first-summer drake was off Musselburgh on 30 May to 30 June; a first-summer drake was off Murcar Links (NES) on 29 June, with two on 30th. **American White-winged Scoter:** a drake was off Murcar Links/Blackdog from 25 June into July - the second Scottish/British record of this subspecies.

**White-billed Diver:** one was off Burghead (M&N) from March to 23 April; one still at Herston, South Ronaldsay (Ork) to 30 April, and one off Eoligarry Jetty, Barra (OH) to 1 May and again on 18 May and 5 June. Two were off Port Skigersta on 2 April; one at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 7 April; one at Loch Broom, near Ullapool (High) on 11th; one at Poolewe (High) on 13th; one off Port Skigersta, Lewis on 17 April, with two there on 19th and one to 23rd, two on 24th, and one still on 29 April; seven were off Portsoy (NES) on 21 April, with one there on 23 April; one off Hopeman (M&N) on 21 April; one off Burghead (M&N) on 22–23rd; one was at Basta Voe, Yell (Shet) on 22 April to 5 May; one was off Portsoy on 28th, with five there on 30 April, nine on 1 May, and one

still on 14 May; one off Burghead again on 28–29 April, and it or another at Lossiemouth on 1 May, and one off Burghead again to 12 May; one was at Bornesketaig, Skye (High) on 30 April; the returning bird was off St. Margaret's Hope, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28 April to 2 May; one off Buray (Ork) on 2 May; one at Busta Voe, Yell (Shet) on 4–5th; singles flew past Esha Ness, Mainland (Shet) on 7th and 13th; one was off Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 18th; one off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 18th; one at Basta Voe, Yell on 28 May to 6 June; one off Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 29 May, and one flew past Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 30 May. One was off Brevig, Barra (OH) on 5 June, and one off Uriel, Fetlar (Shet) on 5 June.



**Black-browed Albatross:** one was present off Buness/Sheep Rock, Fair Isle on 28 May - a first for the island. **Little Egret:** poorly reported from the usual SW and central Scotland haunts; notable records elsewhere were one at Grein Head, Barra (OH) on 1 May, and one touring individual could account for sightings at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 7 May; on Fair Isle on 20 May - the first for the island, and on Foula (Shet) on 21 May. **Great White Egret:** one remained at Balranald, North Uist (OH) from March to 15 April; one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 5 April, one at Cotehill Loch (NES) on 1–2 May; and then nearby at Sànd Loch, Collieston (NES) on 2–13 May; with presumed same at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 15–18 May; and 6–30 June, and nearby at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 24 June; one was at Loch of Mey (Caith) on 8 May; one at Poolewe (High) on 31 May; one at Loch Mor/ Liniclate, Benbecula (OH) on 14–17 June, and one at Loch Hallan, South Uist (OH) on 16 June. **White Stork:** two flew over Opinan, near Gairloch (High) on 23 May. **Glossy Ibis:** two were present at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 8–9 May - the first county record, with one still to 19 May; one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 16–22 May, with one nearby at Slains Pool on 20th (presumably Montrose bird) which then joined the Strathbeg bird on 20–26 May, with two seen near Wick (Caith) on 4 June. **Spoonbill:** two were at Musselburgh, then Aberlady Bay and at White Sands Quarry, Dunbar (all Loth) on 14 June; one flew NW past Dunbar on 28 June, with presumed same at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 30 June.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** one was on Loch Feorlin, near Minard (Arg) on 6–9 May. **Black Kite:** one was at Moniaive (D&G) on 21 April; one was at Liurbost, near Stornoway,

Lewis (OH) on 25–27 April, and one at Machrihanish, Kintyre (Arg) on 11 May. **Northern Harrier:** the male present on North Ronaldsay intermittently to 28 February reappeared there on 2 April. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one remained near Lochindorb (High) from March to 8 April; one was at Tomatin (High) on 21 April; one at Langholm (D&G) on 26 April, and one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2 May. **Hobby:** sightings included one at Balcomie, Fife Ness (Fife) on 6 May; two at Alturlie, near Inverness (High) on 11th; singles at Loch Carnan, South Uist (OH) on 12 May; at Harperigg Reservoir (Loth) on 23 May; on Eigg (High) on 7 June; at Forvie (NES) on 13 June, and at Arbroath (A&D) on 26 June. **Gyrfalcon:** the immature white-morph female was still in the Balranald area, North Uist (OH) to 9 April, and a white-morph bird was near Barvas, Lewis (OH) on 24 April.

**Crane:** in April, one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 2nd; one at Rattray Head/Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 8th; two were at Loch na Claise, near Stoer (High) on 13th; one at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 20–21st; one at Buckie (M&N) on 21st; one over Noss (Shet) and one at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 22nd; one on Fair Isle on 23rd; a pair at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 23rd; two flew over Peat Inn (Fife) on 24th; one was at Snarravoe, Unst (Shet) on 24–30 April, and on Mainland Shetland three were near Sandwick on 27th, at Toab on 28th, and Bigton on 29th, with one at Scalloway on 30 April. In May, two flew over Troup Head (NES) on 7th, with presumed same at Garmouth (M&N) also on 7th; one was at The Loons RSPB Reserve, Mainland (Ork) on 9th; four flew over Montrose Basin (A&D) on 11th; four were on Benbecula (OH) on 12th; two at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 14th, with one still to 16th, and

nearby at Slains Pool on 15th; singles on South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 14–17th; at Hamar, Unst (Shet), Fair Isle and at Carsebreck Loch (P&K) all on 15th; at The Range, South Uist (OH) on 15–19th, then Benbecula (OH) on 21 May to 28 June; singles at Westing, Unst and Cullivoe, Yell (Shet) on 18 May; at Loch of Lythe, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 19th; on Fair Isle on 20–22nd; at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 22nd; and over Ringasta, Unst (Shet) on 23rd; two were near Drumbeg (High) on 23rd; one was over Newton Stewart (D&G) on 24th; one near Wigton (D&G) on 26th; one at Hermaness, Unst (Shet) on 26th; one at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 28 May; one at Loch of Brow, Mainland (Shet) on 29th; two near Wick (Caith) on 31 May. In June, one remained on Benbecula (OH) to 28th; one was at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 1–6th; one near Drumbeg (High) on 7th; one over Loch Nedd, Isle of Skye (High) on 7th; one near Rerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 9th, and at Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 17–30 June.

**Avocet:** one at Tynningham Bay (Loth) in March remained to 5 April; two were at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 20 April, two at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 21–22nd; three at Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 22nd; three on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 23–30 April, and two again at Skinflats Lagoons on 25 April. **Stone-curlew:** one was at Balnakeil, near Durness (High) on 28–30 May; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 May, and one near Forres (M&N) on 25 June. **Pacific Golden Plover:** an adult summer bird was at Slains Pool (NES) on 21–22 May. **Temminck's Stint:** one was on Sanday (Ork) on 3 June. **Whiterumped Sandpiper:** one was at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 2 June. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** singles were on Papa Westray (Ork) on 6 May; at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland

(Shet) on 22 May, and at Sorobaidd Bay, Tiree (Arg) on 27 May. **Stilt Sandpiper:** an adult was reported at Carsebreck Loch (P&K) on 24–25 June. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was at Europie, Lewis (OH) on 29 May. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one was at Mosset Burn, Findhorn Bay (M&N) on 16 May. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 2–7 May; one was at Kirkton of Logie Buchan/River Ythan (NES) on 7–8 May, and one was on Foula (Shet) on 17–18 May. **Red-necked Phalarope:** away from breeding areas, one was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 23 May; one at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 28 May; one on Papa Westray on 3–5 June, and two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9 June. **Grey Phalarope:** one was seen in The Minch (High/OH) from the Ullapool to Stornoway Ferry on 12 May.

**Pomarine Skua:** three were off Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 6 April, but after a decent start spring passage fizzled out almost totally - higher counts were 67 off Balranald on 2 May, and 400+ off there on 3rd; but just five from there on 4th, and best day counts anywhere of just three thereafter - all off Balranald on 19th, 20th and 23 May. **Long-tailed Skua:** a very disappointing passage - first were two off Balranald/Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 1 May, with a single from there on 2nd, and off Newbie (D&G) on 3rd; eight off Balranald on 3rd, five on 4th and six on 5th; one was seen off a boat in the Firth of Forth (Fife side) on 14 May; one off Balranald on 17th, nine on 18th, singles on 19th, 21st and 23 May; one was off Saltcoats (Ayr) on 21st; one off Fishtown of Usan (A&D) on 29th, and singles at Balranald, North Uist (OH) and Duncansby Head (Caith) on 31 May. Two were off Brevig, Barra (OH) on 2 June and finally one off Papa Westray (Ork) on 7 June. **Mediterranean Gull:** very few reported away from the Firth of

Forth or Ayrshire, but a second-summer at Nethy Bridge (High) on 29 June was notable. **Ring-billed Gull:** one was reported at Dervaig, Isleof Mull (Arg) on 16 May, and one at Kinneil Lagoons (UF) on 6 June. **Caspian Gull:** a first-winter was at Drums (NES) on 2 April, and a first-winter at Skateraw (Loth) on 5th and 8–9th April. **American Herring Gull:** the first-winter was at Garrygall, Barra (OH) again on 3–22 April.

**Iceland Gull:** at least 25 were present in April, and more widespread than its larger cousin, but with no site counts greater than two. Most in the north and west but also Lothian, Upper Forth, Fife, Angus, NE Scotland, Moray & Nairn, with a juvenile inland near Kirriemuir (A&D) on 13th particularly notable. Numbers about halved at start of May, again mostly singles in north and west, but at least four juveniles along The Range, South Uist (OH) on 15th, and east coast sightings from Lothian, Fife, NE Scotland and Moray & Nairn. In June just a handful seen, with a second-winter on Sanday (Ork) on 1st; a juvenile at Rubha Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 1st; a second-summer at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 6th; one at Vorran Island, South Uist (OH) on 24 June, and a juvenile at Traigh Ghrianal, Tiree (Arg) on 27 June. **Kumlien's Gull:** a near-adult was on Papa Westray (Ork) on 8 April, and a juvenile at Loch an Eilein, Tiree (Arg) on 11–26 April. **Glaucous Gull:** about 15 were still present into April, with no site counts above the twos at Kylesku (High) on 7th, Balranald, North Uist (OH) on 10th, and Ullapool (High) on 17th, and virtually all in north and west except for a juvenile at Inverbervie (NES) on 2–21st, and at least one juvenile at Torness/Skateraw and Dunbar (Loth) on 5–16 April. About five lingered into May, though up to a dozen were noted mid-month, with the highest count two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20th.

Again all were in the north and west except for a second-winter at Hopeman (M&N) on 30th May. At least four widespread singles were still present into June, with a juvenile all month at Ullapool (High) and east coast sightings were a juvenile at Tarbat Ness (High) on 9th, a second-summer at Lossiemouth (M&N) on 9th, and a second-winter at Hopeman (M&N) on 11–19 June.

**Gull-billed Tern:** one was at Belhaven Bay (Loth) on 28–29 May, Tynningham (Loth) on 3 June and Kinneil (UF) on 3–6 June, Skinflats (UF) on 8th, Seton Sands (Loth) on 12th, Musselburgh/Cockenzie (Loth) on 13th and Kinneil again on 14–25 June. **Caspian Tern:** one was at Graemeshall Loch, Mainland (Ork) on 3 June. **White-winged Black Tern:** one was at Coot Loch, Benbecula (OH) on 12–14 May; one near Westing, Unst (Shet) on 9 June, and one at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 22 June. **Roseate Tern:** one was at the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 15 May; one on the Isle of May on 19 June, and intermittently into July; one at Kinneil Lagoons (UF) on 23 June; one in the Sound of Harris (OH) on 26 June; one at the Ythan Estuary on 26 June, and one at Musselburgh (Loth) on 28 June.

**Turtle Dove:** singles were at Cardoness (D&G) on 5 May; at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 18–21st and 24 May; on Fair Isle on 22–24th and 26 May; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 23rd; at Ferry Den, near Montrose (A&D) on 27th; at Kinnabus, Islay (Arg) on 28 May to 15 June; at Hough, Tiree (Arg) on 6 June and Balephuil, Tiree on 8 June; on Foula (Shet) on 9th, and on Fair Isle on 14 June. **Black-billed Cuckoo:** one was at Bayhead, North Uist (OH) on 22–31 May - the first Outer Hebrides (5th Scottish) record. **Snowy Owl:** one was found dead at Mangersta, Lewis (OH) on 27 May. **Nightjar:**

one was on Foula (Shet) on 21 May, and one on Sanday (Ork) on 1–3 June. **Alpine Swift**: one was at Point of Fethaland, Mainland (Shet) on 26 June. **Hoopoe**: singles were at Balgowan, near Laggan (High) on 27 April; reported at Newtyle (A&D) on 28 April; at Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 3 May; at Tugnet (M&N) on 5 May; at Laggan Bridge, near Dalwhinnie (High) on 9–10th; at Inverpolly (High) on 11th; at Kinnaird (P&K) on 15th; at Loch Duntelchaig (High) on 25th; at Culloden (High) on 26th; on Fair Isle on 27 May, and at Westhill, near Aberdeen (NES) on 28 May. **Wryneck**: singles were at Bornish, South Uist (OH) on 28 April; at Barns Ness (Loth) on 1–2 May; at Geosetter, Mainland (Shet) on 8 May; on Out Skerries (Shet) and on the Isle of May on 9th; on Fair Isle on 9 May, with it or another on 10–11th, and one at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 12 May.

**Golden Oriole**: one was at St Abbs Head (Bord) on 6 May; a first-summer male was at Musselburgh (Loth) on 22–23 May; one at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 25 May, and a female on Fair Isle on 15 June. **Red-backed Shrike**: in May there were at least eight on Shetland from 9–30th; at least nine on Fair Isle between 10–29th, and at least six on Orkney between 14th and 30th. Elsewhere there was a male at Torness/Thorntonloch (Loth) on 8–9 May; a male at Sands of Forvie NNR (NES) on 9–10 May; single females on the Isle of May on 10–11th and 13–14th; one at Crimond Airfield (NES) on 13th; one near Cairngorm car park (High) on 15th; a male at Collieston (NES) on 15th, and a female on the Isle of May on 28th. In June a male was at Timsgarry, Lewis (OH) on 2–3rd; a male and female on the Isle of May on 5–6th, with a second female on 6th; one at Grunitaing, Whalsay (Shet) on 9th, and single females on Fair Isle on 10th and 20 June.



Plate 250. Woodchat Shrike, St Abbs, Borders, June 2016. © John Nadin

**Great Grey Shrike**: singles were at Burnmouth (Bord) on 4 April; on Fair Isle on 6–10th; near East Kilbride (Clyde) on 7th; at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 10th; at Forvie (NES) on 11–13th; at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) at Clousta, Mainland (Shet) and at Muddisdale, Mainland (Ork) on 12th; at Levenwick, Mainland (Shet) and at Crimond (NES) on 15 April; at Killimster, near Wick (Caith) on 16 April; one again at Levenwick, Mainland on 22nd; at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 22–26 April, and on Shapinsay (Ork) on 29 April. **Woodchat Shrike**: a male was on Fair Isle on 11–24 May, and a male at St Abbs Head (Bord) on 19–23 June.

**Firecrest**: one was at St Abbs Head (Bord) on 20 April, and one on the Isle of May on 4–5 May. **Calandra Lark**: one was on Fair Isle on 10–13 May – a remarkable 6th island record. **Short-toed Lark**: one was on Fair Isle on 2–8 May, and one at Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 8 May. **Shorelark**: two were at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 14 April; one at Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 5–9 May, and one on Fair Isle on 29 May. **Red-rumped Swallow**: one was on Fair Isle on 5–6 May.

**Greenish Warbler**: one was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 5 June.

**Green Warbler**: one at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 13–16 May is the first for Scotland (second British). **Barred Warbler**: a splendid adult was at Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) on 6 June. **Subalpine Warbler sp.**: a female was on Whalsay (Shet) on 8 May; a female on Fair Isle on 10 May, and a male at Bayhead, North Uist (OH) on 27 May. **Eastern Subalpine Warbler**: a female was on Fair Isle on 8 May and a male on 10th; a male was at Mossbank, Mainland (Shet) on 9–11 May; a male was on Foula (Shet) on 17–20 May at least. **Western Subalpine Warbler**: a male and a female were on Fair Isle on 9 May, with a female still on 10th; a male was at Loch Kinnabus, Islay (Arg) on 16 May; a male was at Ristie, Foula (Shet) on 22 May; a female was on the Isle of May on 27–31 May (DNA corroborated).

**Savi's Warbler**: one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 22 May. **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**: one was at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 29 May to 6 June. **Icterine Warbler**: singles were at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 11 May; at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 16 May; on Fair Isle on 18th and

21–22 May; at Helendale, Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 20–23 May; at Tresta, Mainland (Shet) on 24 May; at Urafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 25 May; at Tresta, Fetlar (Shet) on 26th; a singing bird was at Laggan, near Dalwhinnie (High) on 29 May to 23 June; one on Fair Isle on 30 May; one on the Isle of May on 8 June; one at The Glebe, Tiree (Arg) on 9 June, and one at Kingussie (High) on 15–16 June. **Paddyfield Warbler:** one was at St. Abbs Head (Bord) on 5 June - the first county record. **Marsh Warbler:** singles were at Ibsister, Whalsay (Shet) on 28 May; on Sanday (Ork) on 30 May; on Fair Isle on 31 May, 4 June and 10 June; at Skaw, Whalsay on 3 June; on North Ronaldsay on 6 June, and one singing at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 13–14 and 22–30 June.

**Waxwing:** last of a very poor winter showing were one at Braemar (NES) on 3 April, and one on Fair Isle on 7 April. **Thrush Nightingale:** one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 9 May, and one on the Isle of May on 10–15 May. **Nightingale:** one was on Fair Isle on 11 May, one on Foula (Shet) on about 22 May, and one at Still, Fetlar (Shet) on 4 June. **Red-spotted Bluethroat:** first was a female on Fair Isle on 7 May, with around 18 more there by 30th May. Elsewhere there were a female on Noss (Shet) on 9th; one at Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 9th; a male on North Ronaldsay on 10th; eight on the Isle of May between 10–28 May; singles at Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 11th; at Norwick, Unst and Haroldswick, Unst (both

Shet) on 12th; at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 13th, and a female on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 20th. One was on Fair Isle and a female on North Ronaldsay on 6 June. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** singles were on the Isle of May on 10–12 May; on Fair Isle on 13th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 24 May; at Brevig, Barra (OH) on 29 May, and on the Isle of May on 31 May. **Collared Flycatcher:** a female was on Fair Isle on 23 May.

**Yellow Wagtail races - Blue-headed (*flava*):** single males were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3 May; on Fair Isle on 8–10th, 16th & 18–19 May and 4 June; at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 8 May; on Out Skerries (Shet) and at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 9–10 May; at Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 12 May; at West Barns (Loth) on 24 May, and a female was on Fair Isle on 18–19 May. **Grey-headed (*thunbergi*):** single males were on Fair Isle on 9th, 11–13th, and 18th May; Papa Westray and Burray (both Ork) on 10th; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 17–18 May; at Scatness, Mainland (Shet) on 30–31 May; on Fair Isle on 20 June, and a female on Fair Isle on 29 May to 3 June. **Black-headed (*feldegg*):** a male was at Skinflats (UF) on 12–13 May. **Citrine Wagtail:** one was on the Isle of May on 10–11 May. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were at Stromness, Mainland (Ork) on 9 May and on Fair Isle on 4 June. **Tawny Pipit:** singles were at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 8 May, and near Kildonan, South Uist (OH) on 13 June. **Olive-backed**

**Pipit:** one was at Seadill (Loth) on 24 April. **Red-throated Pipit:** singles were at East Denwick, Deerness, Mainland (Ork) on 13 May and on Fair Isle on 14th and 22 May. **Water Pipit:** singles were noted at Bilsdean/Dunglass (Loth) from March to 5 April; at Hunterston Sands (Ayr) on 3 April, and at Barns Ness/Skateraw (Loth) on 3–17 April.

**Common Rosefinch:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 6–7 May; one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 22 May; a male at Rosemarkie (High) on 5–6 June; one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 6 June, and one at Helendale, Lerwick (Shet) on 9 June. **(Hornemann's) Arctic Redpoll:** one was on Fair Isle on 7–17 April. **Snow Bunting:** no double-figure counts, with larger site totals of three at Easting, Unst (Shet) on 3 April; three at Butt of Lewis, Lewis (OH) on 9th; three on Fair Isle on 19th; four on Papa Westray (Ork) on 20th; six at Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 22 April; three on Noss (Shet) on 1 May and three on Fair Isle on 16th and 20–22 May. **Lapland Bunting:** very low numbers - with singles at Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 15 April; at Lamba Ness; Unst (Shet) on 26th, Norwick, Unst on 28 April; on Fair Isle on 5 May, another there on 27 May, and one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 10 June. **Ortolan Bunting:** singles were on Fair Isle on 11 May and 21–22 May. **Rose-breasted Grosbeak:** a first-summer male was at West Burra, Mainland (Shet) on 3–4 May - the first record for Shetland (fifth Scottish). **White-crowned Sparrow:** one was at South Dell, Lewis (OH) on 31 May, though present nearby at Europe/Port Nis since 3 May - the third Scottish record. **White-throated Sparrow:** one of the tan-striped morph was at Vaul, Tiree (Arg) on 10 June. **Rustic Bunting:** a male was on Fair Isle on 13 May, and a female on 27 May, and a female was on the Isle of May on 18 June. **Black-headed Bunting:** a male was at Glendale, Isle of Skye (High) on 10–12 June.

Plate 251. Thrush Nightingale, Isle of May, Fife, May 2016. © John Nadin



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# PhotoSP©T

**Photo 252.** While sitting in my car looking at some Black Grouse feeding along the edge of a field on 25 May 2016, a pair of Snipe and their young wandered into view close to the car.

Luckily, because it's such a good stretch of road for seeing Short-eared Owls perched on fence posts, I had my camera in the seat next to me. The light was poor, but I was fortunate to get some images as one of the adults fed the chicks. The birds were at ease as I snapped away, then after ten minutes they eventually moved out of view.

The photograph was taken in an area of moorland, bog and rough pasture where many pairs of Snipe breed along with Curlew, Lapwings and Oystercatchers which can be seen in good numbers. This area is also one of Aberdeenshire's few remaining inland sites where Redshank still breed.

**Equipment used:** Canon 1D mk3, 500mm f4 lens with 1.4x extender, Aperture Priority, ISO 400, shutter 1/125, aperture f10.

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