

Bird-Watcher's Diary

By

MARY DUCHESS OF BEDFORD

*Edited by Arthur Duncan*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Duchess of Bedford was a field naturalist of more than usual ability and with more than usual opportunity of indulging in bird-watching in out-of-way places. That is the conclusion to which one must inevitably come in reading the excerpts from her Diaries that make up the bulk of this book. She was a bird-watcher rather than a closet naturalist, though she in no way despised the work of the specialist, as so many later-day bird-watchers affect to do. Nor does the title 'bird-watcher' mean in her case any lack of appreciation of the needs of the museum-man or any disinclination to shoot birds for specimens when they were required. Her most important work was done in the years before the War, when, in her yacht *Sapphire*, she cruised in northern waters. Undoubtedly her major achievement was development of Fair Island as a migratory station, the work there done by herself, and the aid that she gave to Dr. Eagle Clarke to enable him also to work there. The esteem and gratitude of Dr. Eagle Clarke are forever placed on record in his dedication to her Grace of his *Studies in Bird Migration*, one of the classics on that subject.

Her Grace's interest in Ornithology was not, however, wholly personal, and there are two manifestations of her energy that are worthy of note. Firstly, the Woburn Boys' Ornithological Club, which she personally conducted, and which was composed of the boys of the Woburn County Council School. Its object was to imbue in those youngsters some of the love for bird-watching which she herself felt so strongly. In this teaching of the young she was eminently successful, and in later years she wrote: 'I have several pupils who have never shot a bird in their lives who can identify them every bit as well as I and Dr. Eagle Clarke. I originated my Bird Club to teach them to do this.' And again she writes:

'A boy of 12, one of my pre-War Bird-Watchers' Club, belonging to the Country Council School, who had never left Woburn in his life except to visit a groom brother at Nottingham, went with me to Fair Isle, St. Kilda, etc., and identified 126 species at sight, including a King Eider.' The other activity to which some reference should be made is the so-called Blue Book Club which, though not originated by the Duchess, was kept up by her to the last.

The Club consisted of fellow bird-watchers to whom every year she sent a list of the birds on the British List in the form of a little blue book, and the members of the Club wrote against each bird where and when they first saw it during the year. These books were then returned to the Duchess at the end of the year and she read them over and commented in letters on the list which each member had submitted.

The opinions of one with such experience of bird life as she had cannot fail to be of interest, and on many subjects they are clearly and sometimes trenchantly expressed in her Diaries and letters.

The Duchess's views on collecting generally are summed up in the following extracts from her correspondence: 'I have no patience with private one-man collections, and I think there is a great deal of very reckless collecting for museums; but, unless our knowledge is to be confined to that of the average writer in children's storybooks, we must have books and we must have museums and we must have limited collections, I should suppress egg-

collecting altogether. The greatest expert in that line cannot identify an egg unless you tell him exactly where it came from. I have never had to apply to an egg collection to teach me anything about birds. Far more harm is done by collecting eggs than by shooting rare birds. If the one were entirely stopped, the other would not matter, except where egg-collecting had made the birds extremely rare.'

Stressing the value of local collections of well-mounted birds for the purposes of education, she writes: 'Personally, I should like to see Scolt Head in charge of an entirely reliable naturalist who would collect one male and one female specimen of every bird that arrived there, and no duplicates, the said birds to be deposited in a local museum for the general public to learn to identify what they saw. I do not believe in many of the identifications of watchers who may not shoot; and the birds that come to Scolt Head will never breed there. Of course, the protection of those that do is another matter, which should receive attention as well, but the real interest of Scolt Head is - what does occur there?'

'Fair Isle was ruined by shooting everything for a museum, even though any number of specimens had already been recorded.'

Of private collections she writes further: 'I think individual collections should be discouraged .... Have you seen Mr. Whitaker's collection of pied and white birds? I believe it is a very good one, and I have even contributed to it. I regard this as interesting and entirely harmless.'

With her long and varied experience of identifying birds in the field, it is noteworthy how she always insists on the need for accuracy in making certain of the identity of each bird each time and how chary she is of accepting sight-identification of certain birds. Thus she says: 'It amazes me how first-class naturalists affect to identify some birds at sight, and I have proved them wrong to their own dissatisfaction. The Arctic and Common Tern are birds that they frequently mix up. I have seen one look so grey underneath that one could swear it was the other. Nothing is a certain guide but the bill, and that is most difficult to see, even if they are hovering over one's head. I once remarked to Dr. Eagle Clarke that it was difficult to tell my pupils how to know a Shag from a Cormorant, not in breeding plumage, and out at sea. He scoffed at the idea, and gave me the usual answer that there could be no difficulty, owing to size and colour. A few hours after, one of them flew by, and I asked him quickly which it was. He had forgotten the morning's conversation, and at first hesitated. Then he called it a Shag and then a Cormorant, and when it was quite out of sight said, "Yes, of course, there is no doubt at all it was a Cormorant!"'

The skill of the Duchess of Bedford as a naturalist was universally acknowledged. She was one of the first women admitted to the Linnean Society. In 1909, when the British Ornithological Union first decided to admit women to its membership as honorary members, if they had special qualifications, the Duchess of Bedford was one of the chosen five deemed to have such signal qualifications as to entitle her to be amongst the first to be elected honorary lady members of the world's premier Ornithological Society. But, when all this has been said, the two factors that weighed most with the Duchess of Bedford as a naturalist were the charm of birds and the love of solitary places. Although in later years devotion to other interests and other duties prevented her from pursuing her favourite hobby, the urge was still there, and in a letter, written not long before her death, she says: 'I want a real rest and fresh air and the birds and loneliness.'

## FAIR ISLE - PART I

*Fair Isle is without doubt the most famous station for observing bird migration in the British Isles. This island was selected in 1905 by Dr. Eagle Clarke as a likely place on which to observe the seasonal ebb and flow of bird life. How amply his wildest dreams were fulfilled is now common knowledge. No fewer than 240 forms out of the total British Avifauna of 490 have been recorded from Fair Isle - a barren, treeless island of about 3 square miles.*

*With Dr. Eagle Clarke's pioneer work on Fair Isle the Duchess of Bedford was closely associated, visiting the island nine times between 1909 and 1914 ; and also taking Dr. Eagle Clarke thither in the Sapphire on other occasions. She also assisted towards the establishing of the Stouts - George and Stewart - and of Jerome Wilson as bird recorders on Fair Isle. The pioneer work of Dr. Eagle Clarke has been carried on by other ornithologists, notably by*

*the late Admiral Stenhouse, and many secrets will yet be wrung from the barren rocks of Fair Isle, but never can the sensational results of the early period of 1905 be surpassed.*

*On her first visit, the Duchess of Bedford stayed at the Skadan Lighthouse, on the southern end of the island. After this first visit, she rented Ortolan Cottage, and paid eight more visits to Fair Isle before the War - visits lasting from two to six weeks. Five of the visits were during the spring migration, and four during the autumn. It was during these visits that the Duchess did her most important ornithological work.*

*From among the great amount of interesting data it is hard to single out any particular day or item, but perhaps May 14th, 1910, stands out most vividly, a day when she saw inter alia 3 Red-spotted and 1 White-spotted Bluethroats, 2 Ortolans, and a Hoopoe!*

## 1909

*April 29th, 1909.* Left Invergordon at 7.30 p.m. for Fair Isle, which place we reached after a tempestuous passage at 7.45 a.m.

It is a very picturesque island, with steep crags and wonderful caves and arches. Now and then, as one walks round the island, one comes across a great cavern where the sea rushes in below. There are about 100 inhabitants. They are extremely poor and apparently have barely enough to live upon. Many of their huts of the usual wretched type that one meets with in the Outer Hebrides, but there is amongst them a good sprinkling of stone houses. They do very little fishing, as they have no means of sending fish away and therefore only catch enough for their own needs. Post arrives once a fortnight, weather permitting. If weather does not permit, it apparently waits another fortnight, as the mail steamer simply 'passes by on the other side.' As soon as I went near the cottages, an inhabitant emerged from each with a bundle of knitted goods of wondrous colours and patterns; the patterns are said to be of Spanish origin. One of the Armada ships was wrecked here in 1588. Apparently not a tree or bush grows upon the whole island, and when we arrived this morning it was covered with snow. In spite of snow showers and a gale from the north-north-east I managed to see a few interesting birds, notably two White Wagtails.

Mr. and Mrs. Wallace, of the Skadan Lighthouse, having very kindly placed some rooms at my disposal, and it being very doubtful whether the yacht would be able to stay at her anchorage, Billingham and I took up our abode in the Lighthouse after dinner. Mr. Sewell caught a halibut on rod and line today which weighed 140 lb.

The following birds were seen by me to-day and other dates as noted:

Raven. May 1st, and, 4th, 6th.

Hooded Crow. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Rook. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Starling. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Twite. Very abundant. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Brambling. Also May 5th, 6th, 8th.

House Sparrow. A good many round the cottages. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Tree Sparrow. A small flock. They are said to nest here. Also May 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th.

Reed Bunting. One male bird. Also May 1st.

Snow Bunting.

Skylark. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Meadow Pipit. Also May 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Rock Pipit. Very abundant. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

White Wagtail. Two male birds. Also May 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

Willow Wren. Also May 2nd, 4th, 6th.

Fieldfare. Also May 4th, 7th.

Ring Ouzel. Also May 2nd.

Blackbird. Also May 1st, 8th.

Wheatear. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Redstart. Also May 4th.  
Hedge Sparrow. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 7th.  
Wren. Also May 4th.  
Peregrine. Also May 2nd, 5th, 7th, 8th.  
Scaup. One female. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th. Same bird.  
Eider Duck. Abundant. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Shag. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Gannet. May 2nd.  
Fulmar. Also May 4th, 5th.  
Woodpigeon. Two. Also May 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Oyster-Catcher. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th.  
Purple Sandpiper. Also May 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th.  
Redshank. Also May 3rd.  
Herring Gull. Very abundant. Also May 1st, and, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Great Black-backed Gull. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Kittiwake. Very abundant. Also May 2nd, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Black Guillemot. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Puffins. Also May 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.

May 3rd. - To-day I saw a Robin. 4 White Wagtails, and 12 Purple Sandpipers. The Puffins are arriving in thousands. When first we arrived, there were hardly any about the cliffs.

The yacht has had to leave as the wind has changed to the south and is blowing into the anchorage so for the present *volens volens* I must remain where I am.

May 4th. 1909. - The wind has gone to the south-east, and the weather being much milder there has been a great arrival of migrants, etc. Where there were 10 Puffins when we first landed on April 30th. I think I might safely say there are a thousand to-day. The cliffs are literally smothered with them.

I began the day well by seeing a Whimbrel before breakfast just outside the Lighthouse. After breakfast. I started on my rounds again, and noted an increase amongst the White Wagtails, meeting with 6 of them in the first hour. They are the only species of Wagtail I have seen here. On the rocks in the harbour I counted 15 Purple Sandpipers. In the Reevas, I saw a Wren, a Redstart, and a common Whitethroat. Walking round the crofts I was lucky enough to see an Ortolan Bunting which Mr. Eagle Clarke shot, a fine adult male. Shortly after I saw a Great Skua flying over the island. In the afternoon I walked up to the Skroo Lighthouse to have tea with Mr. Eagle Clarke. The cliffs at that end of the island are extremely grand, and I do not remember ever having seen a finer bit of coast scenery.

The following birds were seen to-day in addition to those already seen on the island:

About 14 Whimbrel. Also May 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Two Swallows. Also May 5th, 7th.  
Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Also May 5th, 8th.  
Ortolan Bunting.  
Common Whitethroat. Also May 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th.  
Three Snipe. Also May 6th.  
Great Skua.

May 5th, 1909. - A freshly killed Wood Wren was picked up near the Lighthouse this morning. The only new birds for my list are the Goldcrest and Chaffinch, which was also seen on May 6th.

I again saw 2 Woodpigeons, a good many Whimbrel, which was extremely tame, several small parties of Purple Sandpipers, 5 Bramblings, 1 Common Whitethroat, the Goldcrest, and 2 very dark cock Chaffinches. There

seems to have been an arrival of female White Wagtails; for several days I have seen nothing but males. To-day the males have gone and I have seen 7 females. The heads of the females are grey like the back. The thousands of Puffins which I thought had come to stay and breed have departed, and where yesterday the cliffs were swarming with them, to-day there is not a bird to be seen. A great number of the Wheatear seem to have left also, and the diminution in the number of birds in general is very striking. I am sure that many of the Twites have gone also.

*May 6th, 1909.* - Whinchat. Also May 7th.

Landrail.

Razorbill. Also May 8th.

Mr. Eagle Clarke shot the very dark Chaffinch which I yesterday. It appears to be a case of melanism. I saw the Whinchat, a Willow Wren, Woodpigeon, and White Wagtails very soon after starting out on my rounds, and thought we were going to have a great day, but beyond the Landrail I saw no other fresh migrants. Rooks, Bramblings, Whitethroats, Purple Sandpiper, and Whimbrel were seen again.

The inhabitants will not kill their sheep here in the spring, as they are too lean to eat, so they exist on imported bacon. The Jubilee Nurse told me that she lived on eggs and milk.

*May 7th, 1909.* - Saw 2 Lapwings.

*May 8th, 1909.* - A House Martin and a Wryneck were the only fresh migrants I saw; but in addition to them, the following were seen by Mr. Eagle Clarke and Stewart Stout during our visit: Hawfinch, Lapland Bunting, Pied Flycatcher, Chiffchaff, Lesser Whitethroat, and Swift. All these birds were seen on an island where there is not a tree or bush of any kind; in fact, at the time of our visit, there was nothing growing that was six inches in height. Most of the migrants were observed on the stone walls, fences, or on the face of the cliffs.

The women seem to do a great deal more work than the men, who stroll about most of the day with their hands in their pockets. They are always on the lookout for 'driftwood,' which they pile up on their crofts but apparently never use. The habit is said to have descended to them from their 'wrecking' forefathers. There was great opposition on the island to the building of the two lighthouses. The inhabitants are shy but friendly. They are very primitive in their habits and dispense with knives, forks, and plates at meals. They have a pot in common containing their bacon or fish and potatoes. Each one helps himself to bacon in one hand and potato in the other. They are a very red-haired race, and many of the women are very good-looking.

When first I arrived there emerged from every house I approached an inmate with a bundle of knitted hosiery, jerseys, etc., which I was requested to buy. They were not, however, persistent beggars, and on my explaining to the first few who came that I would assist them in paying for their 'Queen's Nurse' instead of buying something from each one, the proceeding immediately ceased. On my return to the island in the autumn, not a soul asked me to buy anything. They are mostly very poor, and I was told had great difficulty in collecting the money for the Nurse. She is, however, invaluable to them, as there is no doctor on the island, and it costs £20 to import one for a single visit.

The ploughing is done by oxen.

In the evening we left for Rousay Sound, Orkney.

*September 20th, 1909.* - I left Cairnsmore (i.e. Newton Stewart) at 10.40 p.m. for Aviemore *en route* for Fair Isle. The dangers in that island in the shape of oxen, Shetland ponies, ferocious collies, and rabbits living on the edges of the cliffs, being too great to risk for 'Che Foo,' he was for the first time left behind and 'Marquis' my retriever, taken in his stead.

I arrived at Aviemore at 7.30 a.m., after such a shaking as I have seldom been treated to in the train. It did not, however, equal what we got the following night on the yacht. At 5 a.m. I was wanted by the Captain on the

telephone to know what he was to do, as we could not land on Fair Isle. At about 7 a.m. he called me up again to have a look at it as we passed, and the prospect was truly forbidding. Compelled to go on to Lerwick, we arrived about 11.45 a.m. Though some of the streets are quaint and narrow. I was surprised to find what a very superior town it was to Kirkwall and Stornoway. I have never seen such fine public buildings or anything approaching them in a town of me same size. There were also many villa residences of a superior order. During my enforced stay there of a day and a half, I saw nothing of any interest in the way of birds.

On Friday, the 24th, I landed on Fair Isle, and took possession of the little cottage I have rented at me moderate rental of £2 per annum! The said cottage has three rooms and an outhouse, in which me coals, stores, and 'Marquis' (at night) are stored. I have set up a small tent in addition as a larder.

The accommodation being limited and the 'ways' of the inhabitants of Fair Isle not being our ways, Billingham and I go shares in the housework, and I begin me day by cleaning the grate at 6.45 a.m. and go through the programme of floor-scrubbing, dusting, bedmaking, etc., before breakfast. After breakfast I clean my boots, chop firewood (i.e. box lids), and perform sundry other duties before my morning's bird-watching. At this time of the year most of the birds are in the potatoes and turnips, and accordingly we tramp these crops till lunch-time. The only very rare bird I have seen alive myself is the Yellow-browed Warbler, but the Great Snipe, Lapp Bunting, Rustic Bunting, and Ortolan Bunting have been shot and shown to me just after by Mr. Eagle Clarke and his two boy collectors during my visit.

Billingham officiates in the kitchen department, so after luncheon I am free to go out again till dusk, and then return to do 'Marquis's' toilet (a more serious matter than 'Che Foo's'), prepare his dinner, clean my gun, etc., etc., and lay the table for dinner. By bedtime I feel that I have earned my rest as much as most of the male inhabitants of Fair Isle who, with the exception of a little desultory harvesting, are still extensively engaged during the day parading the hill tops and cliffs with their hands in their pockets, in a search for driftwood, which seldom arrives, and when it does is piled up round their gardens apparently exclusively for ornament.

It is very difficult to identify birds one is accustomed to see in trees and hedges when they flit about in potatoes and turnips. Willow Wrens, Garden Warblers, and Lesser Whitethroats have been quite 'common' (with reservations) in the crops. The Twites, Skylarks, and Meadow Pipits add to one's difficulties very much, as they are very abundant. Mr. Eagle Clarke and his two satellites are extremely quick at identifying the birds, and make me feel very humble; but I comfort myself by wondering how much they would have done without ears. Even the expert has lapses, for he and I pursued a Hedge Sparrow in bracken for some twenty minutes, and not till I had shot it did we solve its identity.

On October 1st I saw a flock of about 40 Siskins feeding on the ragweed. On the same day I saw a young male Crossbill feeding on a thistle. It was exceedingly tame. Stewart Stout shot a Reed Warbler on the corn stooks.

On September 30th I saw the Great Spotted Woodpeckers on the face of the cliff in the Reevas; the Tree Sparrows go there nightly to roost in considerable numbers. A Woodpigeon has also sought shelter in the same place.

The first Ring Ouzel this autumn appeared on October 2nd. All the Wheatears here now belong to the large Greenland variety.

The Tree Pipit is not uncommon.

There are a good many Snipe on the island, and I have shot several, both Jack Snipe and Common, for 'Marquis's' amusement. They pitch in the marshy places just in front of my house.

I am taking Stewart Stout back to Woburn with me to look after the foreign birds. Till I sent him to Lerwick the other day for an outfit, he had never been off the island.

He is fourteen years of age, and though he and his brother have shot and identified more rare British birds than anyone in Great Britain, he has yet to make the acquaintance of the Pheasant, Partridge, Tits, Grouse, etc. He has never seen a tree, bush, or train!

On October 3rd I put up a Reed Bunting and Short-eared Owl in the bracken, and another Reed Bunting in the potatoes on the 4th; I also shot a Yellow-browed Warbler in the potatoes.

The Stouts saw a Swift on October 3rd and 4th. On Monday, October 4th. I packed up all my belongings and left for Cairnsmore. Had I arranged to go a day later I should have lost my chance for a week or more, as we came in for terrible weather before reaching Skye, and the somewhat belated equinoctial gales have been raging ever since.

*Birds seen at Fair Isle, September 24th to October 4th, 1909:*

Raven, Hooded Crow, Rook, Starling, Siskin, Twite, Crossbill, Chaffinch, Brambling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Reed Bunting, Snow Bunting, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, White Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher, Willow Wren, Yellow-browed Warbler, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Lesser Whitethroat, Song Thrush, Redwing, Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Redstart, Hedge Sparrow, Wren, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Short-eared Owl, Peregrine, Merlin, Kestrel, Heron, Wigeon, Eider Duck, Merganser, Shag, Gannet, Woodpigeon, Golden Plover, Curlew, Whimbrel, Snipe, Jack Snipe, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Black Guillemot, Landrail - 53 species.

## 1910

*May 10th, 1910.* - Arrived at Fair Isle after a lovely passage, and as the wind was north-west, the anchorage was about as peaceful as it ever is. The inhabitants, to whom I have brought the first fine day they have had for ages, were very busy with agricultural operations. It was quite refreshing to see them so generally occupied, for the most part ploughing with their oxen. The harrows are dragged by both men and women with a rope over the shoulder. The women are made to carry the heavy loads of peat, as it is considered *infra dig.* for the men to do so.

I saw Fulmars round the Steep Craig and White Wagtails as soon as I landed.

*May 11th, 1910.* - A south wind is blowing strongly and the yacht has had to leave. There were not many migrants about, but Wheatears are more plentiful than I have ever seen them.

*May 12th, 1910.* - The day began very wet and windy. I walked out, but as there were no birds about, came home again to wait for better things. About an hour and a half after I came in, Mr. Eagle Clarke came to report a great arrival of birds since the morning. The wind was blowing strongly from the east, but the rain had ceased. Spotted Flycatchers. Reed Buntings, and Redstarts were all over the place on the west and south-west of the island. Willow Wrens. Wood Wrens, Whitethroats, Chiffchaffs. etc., were flitting about the cliffs. I saw a number of Bramblings and Spotted Flycatchers on the rocks below the Southern Lighthouse. The Wood Wrens, of which I saw certainly three and possibly four, were extremely tame, and allowed one to get within a yard or two of them. I counted 7 Ring Ouzels between the Lighthouse and Ortolan Cottage. Just as I was returning home in the evening I came upon a Pied Flycatcher, this making the seventeenth new bird for my Fair Isle List to-day.

I have seen no White Wagtails about for two days, which looks as if they had left.

One often saw 6 or 7 Reed Buntings together; some of these were on the rocks on the shore, which at high tide are covered by the sea. A strange place for Reed Buntings!

*May 13th, 1910.* - A lovely sunny day, with the wind still in the east. I started out on my rounds at 9 a.m., and very soon came across some migrants. Willow Wrens, Flycatchers, and Redstarts were still very plentiful on the cliffs and seashore. There were still a few Ring Ouzels about, but I should say not as many as yesterday. Also fewer Reed Buntings.

Soon after starting out I came across 2 Tree Pipits on the cliffs, also 2 or 3 Fieldfares. A Mallard flew up from the sea across the land. Two or 3 Swallows and a Cuckoo were flying about below me. Amongst the many Willow Wrens and Flycatchers, I detected a Wood Wren on the cliffs and a female Chaffinch and Hedge Sparrow. Now and then one came across a Ring Ouzel. Walking down the ditch where I had seen the Pied Flycatcher the previous evening, I again came across him, a fine adult male. On the rocks below the Lighthouse, which are covered at high tide, were many Redstarts, Common and Lesser Whitethroats and Willow Wrens, 2 Purple Sandpipers, and a Redshank. On the grassy slopes above the Lighthouse I put up 1 Whimbrel. Farther inland on the cultivated ground I came across 2 Red-backed Shrikes, a Whinchat, a Sedge Warbler, several Bramblings, and a Song-Thrush.

I returned to lunch shortly after two o'clock and at three set out again for the north-east side of the island. There appeared to have been a great arrival of Lesser Whitethroats, also many more Fieldfares and flocks of between 40 and so Bramblings.

At the Mill I came across a Robin and saw a Peregrine fly over.

One sees many strange sights on this island, but not the least of these was a Wryneck feeding on the ploughed land and a grassy bank on my return to the cultivated land, I arrived just in time to see Wilson shoot an Ortolan Bunting, the second he has killed to-day.

Exceedingly footsore and weary, at 7 p.m. I turned my steps homeward once more. As Mr. Eagle Clarke left me, he expressed the hope that I should see a rare bird before I got home. I replied that it would have to come very much in my way if I did, as I was far too tired to look for it after over nine hours' hunting. Just as I came in sight of Ortolan Cottage, a large bird rose close in front. For a moment its black and white wings gave me the impression that it was some strange Great Spotted Woodpecker, but the momentary delusion immediately gave place to the pleasant certainty that it was no other than a Hoopoe. I followed it up for a long way, several times getting within forty to fifty yards of it, then it flew away low on the moor and out of my sight.

Probably owing to the entire absence of trees, bushes, or any vegetation over six inches high, the birds look extraordinarily bright in colour here. It is particularly noticeable with the Shrikes, Redstarts, Bramblings, and Wood Wrens.

The following is a list of the birds seen to-day: Raven, Hooded Crow, Starling, Twite, Chaffinch, Brambling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Ortolan Bunting, Skylark, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, White Wagtail, Red-backed Shrike, Spotted Flycatcher, Pied Flycatcher, Willow Wren, Wood Wren, Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Fieldfare, Song-Thrush, Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Whinchat, Redstart, Robin, Hedge Sparrow, Swallow, Hoopoe, Cuckoo, Peregrine, Mallard, Eider Duck, Shag, Oyster Catcher, Lapwing, Purple Sandpiper, Redshank, Whimbrel, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Puffin - 46 species on a barren, rocky island!

*May 14th, 1910.* - The first bird I saw when I looked out in the morning was a Red-backed Shrike, the second, a Redstart. This promised well for the day, as it showed that migrants were still plentiful. I immediately afterwards came across a Whinchat, and then met with the Hoopoe in exactly the same place I had seen it the previous evening. When I was looking for it again Mr. Eagle Clarke came hurrying up to tell me to come and look at a Bluethroat, which he had seen in a ditch about half a mile below. We found it again and I tried to shoot it flying, but missed, and it went away over the cliffs. The bird is very easily identified by its red tail with broad band across the tips and by the distinct light eye-stripe. Reed Buntings were extremely plentiful. I counted thirteen sitting on a fence together. I again saw large flocks of Bramblings, many of which were in all the beauty of their perfect adult plumage. A Wryneck was feeding by a ditch and I saw a second later in the day.

As Mr. Eagle Clarke was anxious to have the Hoopoe for die Museum, I again returned to the neighbourhood of Ortolan Cottage to try to find it. On the way we came across a pair of Blackcap in a ditch, many Willow Wrens, a flock of Fieldfares, and pair of Tree Pipits. We found the Hoopoe again, and after a good deal of stalking on all fours, I shot it.



Returning again to the cliffs, I saw a Wood Wren, Sedge Warbler, White Wagtail, several Swallows and House Martins, and a Robin. The morning, which had been cloudless, was now spoiled by thick fog, and I feared our bird-watching for the day was over. I went to send off some telegrams from the Post Office, and almost immediately after I came out detected two Ortolan Buntings feeding on the stubble, one of which I shot for the blind Baker-Naturalist, Dye of Great Yarmouth. It was a beautiful adult male. After luncheon I walked out towards the northern end of the island. The stone walls in the neighbourhood of Anderson's house were literally alive with Lesser Whitethroats and Willow Wrens. In the whole course of my bird-watching existence, I have never seen as many Lesser Whitethroats, Redstarts, Willow Wrens, and Reed Buntings as I have seen in one day to-day. I only saw 1 Common Whitethroat and have again seen 3 Red-backed Shrikes (all males).

In a stream by one of the little Mill houses, I thought I caught sight of another Bluethroat, but the fog was so thick that I could not follow it. However, very shortly after I saw one settling on a stone wall and shot it. It proved to be a Red-spotted Bluethroat. Much elated at my success, I started on the rather hopeless mission of trying to find Mr. Eagle Clarke in the fog. I returned to the ditch where I had fired at the Bluethroat in the morning, and to my surprise found it again. As there is always the chance of a White-spotted Bluethroat, I fired again and killed it. To my great satisfaction I found it was a White-spotted Bluethroat, the fifth recorded for Great Britain, two of which have now been obtained in Fair Isle. My shot brought up Mr. Eagle Clarke, and I had the satisfaction of showing him Red-and White-spotted Bluethroats shot within half an hour of each other - the one a Central European breeding bird, the other a Northern European breeding species. About 7 p.m. the fog cleared off, and though very footsore and weary, I once more trudged to the Mill I put up a Kestrel, which we have not yet seen here, and which made the twenty-fourth migrant I have seen to-day. Once more I came across another Bluethroat. I returned to Ortolan Cottage at 8.10 p.m., having been on the hunt for ten hours, but I have been well rewarded, as I doubt whether many people can claim to have seen such rare birds in the British Islands in one day as: 3 Red-spotted Bluethroats, 1 White-spotted Bluethroat, 2 Ortolan Buntings, 1 Hoopoe.

In addition to this, there has been the wonderful opportunity of seeing the great 'rush of commoner migrants,' practically the whole of which are extremely tame and can be watched on the ground and walls within a few yards of one.

The Red-and White-spotted Bluethroats are identical in plumage except for the 'spots.' They jerk their tails up just as a Robin does.

To-day's record sounds somewhat bloodthirsty, but with the exception of the bird shot for B. Dye, the victims were obtained for the Royal Scottish Museum, and without our national collections bird books could not be written. There have been occasions when I have had to shoot birds elsewhere, because my identification would not have been accepted, and though there is a great deal of satisfaction in having one's record placed beyond dispute with the outer incredulous world, having no collection of my own, I should not shoot birds for that purpose here.

*May 15th, 1910.* - Another lovely day and the migrants are still here, though the wind is more northerly. Yesterday I did not see a single Ring Ouzel. To-day there are quite a number of them. The first bird of interest that I came across was a Blue-headed Wagtail. This bird is far more uncommon in Fair Isle than the Grey-headed Wagtail, and never having seen the latter, I very much hoped that it would have been one; but, after a very great deal of stalking, I managed to get near enough to see the white eye-stripe. They are very shy birds, but persistently keep near the ponies and cattle.

I ought to be getting used to the tameness of birds in general at Fair Isle, but each normally shy bird that I meet with, which treats me with as much contempt as it would a sheep, fills me with wonder. It is not as though they were exhausted birds, for they are all in the most perfect plumage and robust health. To-day I met with a Corncrake which interested me immensely. It was in an open ditch and only a few yards off. Certainly it did not do much, for we only looked at each other; but it is the first time that I have been stared out of countenance by a Landrail.

A few yards farther down the ditch, I put up a Great Snipe almost at my feet.

In the morning, I had seen one Red-spotted Bluethroat, flitting about amongst some 'crubbs' on the Moor; in the afternoon I saw three more. One of these was sitting on a stone in the burn under a little alcove of mossy green bank. It sat facing me, its brilliant blue gorget glistening in the sun. I crawled up to within twenty-five to thirty feet of it and then watched it for a quarter of an hour or more. It made the most lovely little picture in its moss-green frame.

I put up a Wryneck on the bare moorland. These birds, which are never particularly shy, allow one to approach within three or four yards. I saw a female Red-backed Shrike on a 'crubb.' This is only the second female that I have seen, though there have been many males about.

On the promontory beyond North Harbour I put up a small wader, but it was too quick for me, and I did not identify it. It seemed very like a green Sandpiper. A number of Shags were sitting on their nests, and there were a great many Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls. Of migrants, I saw Whimbrel, Tree Pipits, Willow Wrens, and last but not least, a Long-eared Owl. I peeped over a cliff where there was a deep inlet of the sea, and very few yards below and opposite me sat the Owl on a ledge facing the open sea. Its 'ears' looked so long that for a moment in the shade of the overhanging rock it looked more like a brown rabbit. I threw down a pebble to wake it up, but it never moved except to glare at me with its deep orange eyes. I did not wish to disturb it violently, and each pebble that I threw down only produced the same effect. What wonderful eyes they are! In the morning I walked up to the Western Cliffs, where one looks straight down to the sea from a height of 600 to 700 feet. The view is altogether beyond my powers of description, but how I longed for an artist who could paint it! Never in the whole of my travels have I seen any wild, rugged coast scenery which surpasses or even in its way equals it. Not even in Norway. Spitsbergen is wonderfully beautiful, but in a different way. There the wonderful colour of the blue ice and the spotless snow are responsible for the beauty of the scenery. As I sat on the edge of the cliff glorying in the view, I sang a 'Te Deum' that, [until aviation becomes more popular, probably Fair Isle can never become the resort of the tourist](#). In the absence of a safe anchorage lies its safety.

*May 16th, 1910.* - A very strong wind blowing from the north-east which very greatly interfered with our day's bird-watching, as, apart from tearful eyes and the difficulty of holding glasses steady, the birds hide themselves, and it is difficult to see them.

I found 2 of the Bluethroats again, one in the 'crubbs' and one in the burn, and saw 2 more Wrynecks. Tree Pipits seemed rather numerous. I saw no Reed Buntings all day till after 8 p.m., when I came across two large flocks, one of twenty or more birds, the other of fourteen.

A Black-Redstart was seen to-day, but I did not come across it. I heard that the Great Snipe had been seen by others.

*May 17th, 1910.* - There were a good many Ring Ouzels about to-day, very few Spotted Flycatchers, a great many Tree Pipits, Redstarts, and Reed Buntings. I saw a Bluethroat and 2 Ortolan Buntings. By far the greater part of the Reed Buntings are females. Common Whitethroats seem to have taken the place of Lesser Whitethroats, and, though nothing like as numerous as these were a few days ago, there were quite a number of them about. A few small Rocks of Fieldfares, a large flock of Bramblings, 2 Dunlins, 1 Lapwing, several House Martins, several Kestrels - all females as far as I could see - 1 Merlin, 1 Red-backed Shrike, 1 Sedge Warbler, 1 Wryneck, 2 Hedge Sparrows, 1 Blackcap, 1 White Wagtail and a Green Sandpiper were the other birds seen.

Billingham sent me a flat-iron to crack the brazil nuts with at dinner, as my establishment does not run to nutcrackers.

The day I landed was the only day we have had on which I could have landed all my luggage and established myself in Ortolan Cottage. It was very lucky, as I should have missed the great 'rush' of birds had I come one day later and been unable to land. The people were all extremely genial and apparently pleased to see me. The men are all so extraordinarily alike with their red beards that I never know which I have spoken to before, but as they are quite ready to go through the performance several times a day of shaking hands with violence and

enquiring after my health and expressing the hope that I am enjoying my visit to Fair Isle, it does not much matter.

*May 18th, 1910.* - A south-east wind blowing all day, which is the best for the birds, and I hope may bring us fresh migrants tomorrow. I begin to think I know every bird on the island and exactly where to find them, and shall be glad to see some newcomers. The most interesting bird seen to-day was the Blue-headed Wagtail, which we saw some days ago, and which Mr. Eagle Clarke has now shot, it being the second only recorded for Fair Isle. I saw another Red-spotted Bluethroat and the Green Sandpiper.

The yacht paid a flying visit to bring stores, but she liked it not and fled.

Whenever one meets the native at close quarters, he or she always advances to shake hands. Unfortunately, either from nervousness or a desire to appear at their best, the absence of a pocket handkerchief always appears to be felt at this crisis and the back of the hand I am about to shake does duty. I have to sum up my courage to grasp their paws genially, much as I should to witness a surgical operation. Their 'washing' always amuses me; it is spread out on the peaty soil, and makes one wonder what it was like before it was washed. I afterwards came to the conclusion that 'washing' must be put out to 'wash', not to dry. The identical pieces of linen remained out for four days, and were there when I left, apparently waiting for rain.

*May 19th, 1910.* - The south-east wind, as I hoped, has brought some fresh birds. There are a few Song-Thrushes about and a great number of Swallows and House Martins. I also saw 1 Sand Martin. On the meadows I saw a male and female Grey-headed Wagtail.

I shot the male, which was a very fine specimen. Two more rose shortly after, and on a ploughed field I shot a female which I believe belongs to the same species, but it has a bright yellow eye-stripe and a tinge of grey on the nape. The male is easily distinguished from the Blue-headed Wagtail, as the head is a dark slate-grey and there is no eye-stripe. Both are a brilliant yellow on the breast.

In the afternoon I saw 4 more. Quite late in the afternoon there appeared to be an arrival of birds, as I saw 4 Sand Martins, 2 White Wagtails, and the Grey-headed Wagtails. A lot of the Wheatears with black primaries appeared to-day. I feel sure they are the visitors and those with brown primaries are the native race.

*May 20th, 1910.* - 1 shot another pair of Grey-headed Wagtails and again saw a Green Sandpiper; also a Cuckoo, Corncrake, Nightjar, and Heron. The Anderson boy brought me another Cuckoo which he had shot.

In the afternoon I saw a Black Redstart. There were several Cuckoos seen during the day and a decided increase in the number of Whinchats. I saw at least 4 other Grey-headed Wagtails.

*May 21st, 1910.* - The Corncrakes always keep to the ditches here, just like Water Rails. I shot a female Red-spotted Bluethroat, the first female I have seen. The Ring Ouzels seem to have left, as I only came across one during the day. The Bluethroat had a slight tinge of red where the spot in the male is, and I should have thought it could always be distinguished from the female White-spotted Bluethroat, though it is said to be almost impossible. The Bluethroats are invariably to be found near water, generally actually in the ditch. In the morning I saw a Siskin, and during the day 3 more Grey-headed Wagtails, a Wryneck, 3 or 4 Cuckoos, etc.

Two Blackcaps were seen close to the place where I saw them on the 17th, and are therefore probably the same pair, but why a Blackcap should elect to remain for nearly a week on Fair Isle, where stone walls are its only shelter, is a matter that only the Blackcaps can explain. The Grey-headed Wagtails seem to travel in pairs, as one always finds a pair together. This is an unusual proceeding with migrants, and the only other birds I have noticed which are frequently found in pairs are the Whinchats. The last glow of sunset was still visible when I went to bed at 10.50 p.m.; the moon was nearly full, and the sky cloudless. A little way off I could see the great cliffs and in the distance the sea. The Lighthouse lantern sheds its rays on my little cottage every half minute. If only I were not deaf, I should hear the waves against the rocks, for there is still a swell left as a legacy of the recent winds. As it is, I hear only the grazing of the little Shetland ponies just outside my garden gates. It has

always been my ambition to have a house where I could hear the waves breaking against a rocky shore. 'L'homme propose, Dieu dispose.' I have the house, but, thunder as they will, I shall never hear the waves.

*May 22nd, 1910.* - The hottest, most windless and cloudless day I have had at Fair Isle. Being Sunday, we have to keep to the cliffs and away from the crofts, as bird-watching on Sunday shocks the inhabitants.

My garden fences are a great resort of birds to-day. At one moment and sitting within a few yards of each other were, 2 Common Whitethroats, a Lesser Whitethroat, 1 Flycatcher, 1 Red-backed Shrike, 1 Whinchat, 1 Reed Bunting, and 1 Redstart.

I also saw a Grey-headed Wagtail a Curlew and 5 Gannets. There are decidedly more Common Whitethroats and Spotted Flycatchers here to-day. There were also 2 extremely tame Cuckoos at the south end.

In the afternoon I walked round the Western Cliffs to the North Lighthouse and home by the road. With the exception of occasional Wheatears and Hooded Crows and Ravens, one sees nothing on the Moor except the cliff-breeding birds. I saw 11 Grey seals on a rock and more in the water. The Common seal is comparatively rare at Fair Isle. I was told this was so, but am rather inclined to doubt it, as in the autumn I saw a number of Common seals and none of the Grey seals. On the way home I saw a Blackcap, a Redstart, several Whitethroats of both kinds, and a Fieldfare.

Mr. Eagle Clarke, who has watched sheep-dipping operations on the island, which are carried out in deference to the law, tells me that they 'round up' the sheep with their collies, which are entirely untrained, and the sheep are only folded when too exhausted to run any more. The islanders pour the disinfectant (sheep dip) over their backs out of an old tea-pot! I saw this done myself in the autumn.

Cleaned my boots at 10 p.m. by daylight, to enable me to get out early in the morning! I always get up between 6.30 and 6.45 a.m. to clean the grate, etc., and am generally awake at four, as without blinds and shutters it is impossible to keep out the daylight.

*May 23rd, 1910.* - My last day on Fair Isle, which I spent rushing about and saying 'Good-bye' to the inhabitants. I distributed remains of meat and bread amongst one or two of the poorest of them, some of whom are said to be starving. The steam trawlers have driven all the fish away from the island, and they now get practically nothing. As they formerly lived by the fishing and their crofts alone will not support them, I do not know what will happen. I deposited one parcel at the house of a poor wretched specimen of humanity, whom I had never seen before, as he is very shy and bolts when any stranger comes near. He did not seem quite to take in that the meat was meant for him, and as I walked away he called out, 'Are ye going to leave *all* that?' I left him gazing at the box in considerable bewilderment.

I was very anxious to get a photograph of old George Stout, the oldest man on the island. He is very picturesque and looks a typical Norseman. He seemed quite incapable of keeping still and I spoilt many plates. I told him that when I said 'Now' he was to keep still till I had counted 'one, two.' I had no sooner got the cap off and begun to count than he said, 'Aye, aye, one, two!' I fear my efforts will have been in vain.

He invited me into his house, and except that the witches of Macbeth would not have been engaged in so homely an occupation as knitting, I could have imagined myself suddenly admitted into the presence of those ancient harridans. Directly in front of me was a large open fireplace. Hanging over the small peat fire was a large black cauldron. In front of the cauldron on the hearthstone was the cat. On either side of the fireplace sat two very ancient females with the most typically witch-like countenances any artist could devise. One I was told was eighty-seven and the other can have been but little younger. They were both knitting garments of many colours with the weird patterns peculiar to Fair Isle. The third old lady was somewhat younger and of less forbidding aspect; she was nursing cat No.2.

I remarked afterwards to old George Stout that it was very wonderful that they could knit such intricate patterns without spectacles. He asserted, but said there were too many old people for one house, and evidently thought it was time that one or two were transported where they would take up less room.

Though I did practically no bird-watching, I saw 3 Red-backed Shrikes, several Common Whitethroats, one Lesser Whitethroat, some Redstarts, 2 Wrynecks, several Reed Bunting, 1 or 2 Willow Wrens.

We weighed anchor at 8.30 p.m.

*July 6th, 1910.* - Arrived Fair Isle at 7.10 a.m. Landed to take 'Old George' his photographs. Walked about for an hour and saw nothing of any interest except White Wagtails, which are presumably nesting there again. Left again for Baltasound at 10 a.m.

*September 24th, 1910.* - Left Orkney 7.15 a.m. Arrived Fair Isle. A gale of wind was blowing which gave us a good tossing, but, as it fortunately blew from the north, we effected an easy landing. There seem to be very few migrant birds on the island, but Wilson shot a Yellowshank today. Meadow Pipits are very numerous.

*September 25th, 1910. Sunday.* - The wind has gone to the south and the day began wet and foggy, but later cleared up and the wind went to south-south-west. A Song-Thrush sitting on my fence in the early morning raised hopes that more migrants had come with the change of wind, but there were very few. Being Sunday, I had to keep clear of the crops, so attended the service at the Wesleyan Chapel for the first time. Contrary to the predictions of Mr. Eagle Clarke when I threatened to go in the spring, the presence of an alien black sheep in no way disturbed the equilibrium of the lay reader, whose fluent eloquence over the extemporaneous prayers was remarkable. I had been told that he could hardly read, which was a libel, as he read a sermon of forty-five minutes' duration without a pause.

There are evidently some migratory Wrens on the island, as I came across them in unusual places. I put up a Teal and a Snow Bunting near the Mill and saw 1 Hedge Sparrow.

*September 26th, 1910.* - My birthday. The yacht arrived dressed for the occasion, to the excitement of the inhabitants. South-east wind. Very thick, wet fog in the morning, which cleared off later in the day, but it proved a sadly birdless one. I only saw 2 Snipe and 2 Curlews in addition to resident birds, and, though I tramped about all day, only met with 2 Wheatears.

*September 27th, 1910.* - South-west wind, clear in the morning, foggy in the afternoon. The number of Wheatears has greatly increased, and there are a great many on the rocks below the South Lighthouse. There seems to have been a small arrival of birds, as the day's list includes Chaffinches, Garden Warblers, Lesser Whitethroats, Herons, and Wigeon.

At 9 p.m. the fog-horn is blowing steadily, but the wind has gone decidedly to the south-east, so once more I hope for better things tomorrow.

*September 28th, 1910.* - Migrants seen to-day were 1 Chaffinch, 1 Blackcap, 1 Lesser Whitethroat, 1 Song-Thrush, 2 Herons, 1 Merganser, 1 Ringed Plover, a flock of Golden Plover, 7 Snipe, 1 Jack Snipe, and 1 immature Black-headed Gull. There were a good many Wheatears about.

*September 29th, 1910.* - 1 Chaffinch, 1 Brambling, 1 White Wagtail, 1 Blackcap, and 1 Merlin is the total of the migrants seen to-day. There was a gale blowing from the west, which will not improve matters. Stewart shot a Wheatear, of which the wing measurement was 106 mm. To-night, when returning from escorting Betsy over the Moor, I saw a Meadow Pipit fly up and settle again in the grass. I turned my electric lamp on it, and held it about two feet above the bird, which never moved. I think I could have caught it.

*September 30th, 1910.* - A strong gale from the west blowing all day, which made bird-watching impossible; but a fruitless day in this respect was more than compensated for by seeing the Fair Isle cliffs. In the late afternoon I walked round the South Lighthouse and saw a large number of Black-headed and Common Gulls, evidently driven to the island by the storm, as they are comparatively scarce here under normal conditions. I also saw some of the young Lesser Black-headed Gulls with broken wings on the shore. A White Wagtail, Song-Thrush, Heron, and Curlew were the only other migrants noted.

*October 1st, 1910.* - Migrants seen: 4 Chaffinches, 1 White Wagtail, 1 Blackcap, 1 Song-Thrush, 1 Redstart, 1 Redshank, 1 Curlew. Wind south. In the afternoon I rode Mr. Anderson's pony 'Colin' to the North Lighthouse and saw a number of Wheatears.

*October 2nd, 1910.* Sunday. - Wind south. Very thick fog till 4 p.m. Several Wheatears, 1 Redstart, 1 Heron, 3 Widgeon, 6 Curlews, 2 Snipe.

*October 3rd, 1910.* - 2 Chaffinches, 1 Snow Bunting, 1 Merlin, many Common and Black-headed Gulls, 1 Curlew. Strong gale from west-south-west.

*October 4th, 1910.* - Thick fog and rain in the morning. Westerly gale in the afternoon. A marked increase in the number of migrants. Large flocks of Bramblings and Chaffinches have arrived. I also saw Redwing, White Wagtail, and Snipe.

*October 5th, 1910.* - 1 shot a large male Greenland Wheatear with a wing measurement of 107 mm. A gale of wind was blowing all day and I could not do much bird-watching; but I saw a good many Chaffinches, Bramblings, a Blackbird, Ring-Ouzel, Merlin, and Snipe. There was a marked increase in the number of Skylarks.

*October 6th, 1910.* - My last day on Fair Isle. It has been a sadly disappointing visit as far as the birds were concerned, but I thoroughly enjoy leading the simple life, and there is much to compensate for the dearth of birds.

'Good-bye day,' however, is always a serious matter; I have to say it to so much unspeakable dirt. It would not matter if I had only to say it, but I have to shake hands with it, and often, when pressing hospitality cannot be refused, to sit down in it. If the handshakes were those of the world over the sea, I could get it over before I had time to think, but a Fair Islander's grasp lasts anything from one to ten minutes; indeed, in some cases I do not know what the limit might be, were I not strong enough to withdraw my hand when my rings have cut through to the bone.

As to their dwellings. It will not be the Fair Islanders' fault if the population of the British Isles decrease. They appear to produce hardy annuals or biennials until they have a crop of at least six or eight. All these small brats, the chickens, the ducks, dogs, and parents occupy a room 14 feet by 12 feet. If 'I thank God I am not as other men are,' it means that I thank Him for not having placed me where I should have to learn what I should do under the circumstances.

Writing of the prolificness of the inhabitants reminds me of the mice. Betsy has caught between thirty and forty in my cottage and outhouse since her arrival. There appear to be three species, one a very large one.

Lest these notes should ever find a reader, let him not think that I am squeamish about the dirt inseparable from cleanly poverty. Excessive cleanliness is an expensive luxury, but the Fair Islander knows no washing - I was going to say - below his face; but I am not sure that many of the men ever clean up that portion of their persons, even on a Sunday. They all sleep on straw; the men have beards (I have no objection to them, if they are kept clean), and there are other details of their manner of living which will not find a record in these pages. 'Cleanliness comes next to Godliness'; but in Fair Isle, where they are excessively religious, cleanliness has somehow got left behind.

Though they are undoubtedly not a hard-working race, they have many good points. Punishable crime appears to be practically unknown, largely to be attributed to the absence of a public house and the impossibility for most of them of getting strong drink except at long intervals from visiting steamers. Family affection is very strong, and they are devoted to their children. They are mostly very hospitable, and almost compel one to walk in their crops, even amongst the cabbages. They are, moreover, extremely grateful; and I was much impressed by the gift on two occasions of the only mackerel obtained by one of the poorest men in the island on one of their rather unproductive fishing expeditions. The hardened Southerner may smile, but I know that he neither expected nor received anything in return.

Many of them have beautiful teeth, which are peculiarly white. As I do not suppose they ever came in contact with a toothbrush, I can only suggest that it may be due to the absence of tobacco and a vegetarian diet.

I consider that the women are greatly superior to the men, but I may be prejudiced. They work harder.

## FAIR ISLE-PART II

1911

The year 1911 has to begin with a rather melancholy record of a lost opportunity in the past. When walking through a patch of turnips on Fair Isle in September, I put up a bird which I thought might be a Garden Warbler, but as I was not sure, I tried to find it again. Shortly after, Stewart Stout and J. Wilson walked through the same piece of turnips, and I saw them flush the same bird. Stewart called out to me, 'Garden Warbler.' The following morning they found it again in the same turnips and shot it. In the evening, Stewart showed it to me as a Reed Warbler. It seemed to me much too yellow on the underparts and not sufficiently red-brown on the back for that bird, but as Stewart was much more accustomed to handling skins of small birds than I, I deferred to his opinion, only remarking that it was not like the Reed Warblers that I knew, but possibly their plumage was different in autumn.

The skin has now been identified by Mr. Eagle Clarke and Mr. Hartert as Blyth's Reed Warbler, *Acrocephalus dumentorum* - the first occurrence in Great Britain.

*May 5th*, 1911. - Landed on Fair Isle via the cliffs. There do not appear to be many species of migrants, but there are a great many Wheatears. Off the south end I saw a Great Skua, and in other places 1 Corn Bunting, 1 White Wagtail, 2 Swallows, 2 Oyster Catchers, 1 Whimbrel, 1 Moorhen.

*May 6th*, 1911. - Wind south and south-west. My list of migrants for the day was 1 Brambling, 1 Reed Bunting, 2 Snow Buntings, 1 Swallow, 4 Woodpigeon, 1 Green Sandpiper, 1 Moorhen.

*May 7th*, 1911. - Wind south to south-west. Had a very close view of the Green Sandpiper. Five Woodpigeons and the Moorhen were the only other migrants seen. When the rain came on in the afternoon, hundreds of Herring Gulls settled on the grass and crofts, looking like snowflakes all over the island - a very pretty sight.

When I arrived last Friday I was asked to give a passage to Lerwick on the yacht to six of the islanders, two of whom wished to get married. I said I would do so if they would run and fetch the future bride and relations quickly, but the yacht could not wait long, as there was a pretty heavy swell coming into the anchorage. Apparently they have to spend a week in Lerwick before they can get married. They did not know which day I was expected, but these matters require little arrangement in Fair Isle. The bride is to be taken at first to the home of her future father-in-law, a house which, much against my will, I was compelled to enter last year, and which was so full of children, dogs, ducks, chickens, etc., that I do not think an English hen would have tolerated the introduction of another chicken.

*May 8th*, 1911. - Migrants seen: 1 Siskin, 2 Snow Buntings, 2 Wigeon, and 5 Mealy Redpolls; these last are the first I have ever seen alive.

*May 9th*, 1911. - Wind south-east. A warm and almost cloudless day, and to add to the beauty of things in general a very heavy swell coming in from the west. The waves flung themselves against the mighty cliffs, gathering up into great curls of purest transparent green and breaking into spray which dashed to the roofs of the caverns and arches with which this rugged coast abounds.

I was talking to the Factor's wife, a native of the island, this evening, about the women doing all the hard work. She put her hand on my arm and said, 'Dear woman, if ye did but know how some of these women work, ye'd wonder that they are alive.' I can quite believe it, as most of them look as though laughter were unknown to them.

A few migrants have arrived, but no great rush. I saw 1 White Wagtail, 1 Common Whitethroat, 1 Fieldfare, 1 Redwing, 1 Swallow, 1 Cuckoo, 2 Woodpigeons. In addition to these, Mealy Redpolls, Willow Warblers, Wigeon, Lapwings, and Whimbrel were seen by Wilson and Mr. Eagle Clarke.

*May 10th, 1911.* - Wind south to east. Migrants seen: 1 Mealy Redpoll, 1 Brambling, 1 Redstart, 1 Whinchat, 1 Black-headed Gull, 2 Golden Plovers.

*May 11th, 1911.* - Wind south-east. A perfect summer day. A number of migrants have arrived. Those seen by myself were: Reed Buntings, 4 Willow Wrens, 1 Redwing, 1 Fieldfare, Ring Ouzels, Redstarts, Whinchats, 1 Swallow, 1 Kestrel, a pair of Teal, 1 Sheldrake, 1 Dunlin, 1 Black-headed Gull.

*May 12th, 1911.* - Wind south-east. A great rush of migrants to-day, Redstarts, Whinchats, and Willow Wrens being especially abundant. On the rocks by the Lighthouse I saw a beautiful male Black-Redstart and a Pied Flycatcher. By the upper mill I saw 1 male Red-spotted Bluethroat. In addition to the above, 3 Bramblings, 1 Reed Bunting, 3 Common Whitethroats, 1 Chiff-Chaff, 3 Redwings, 5 Fieldfares, 2 Ring Ouzels, several Swallows, 1 Kestrel, 1 Woodpigeon, 2 Green Sandpipers, 2 Whimbrel, 1 Snipe, and 1 Landrail.

*May 13th, 1911.* - Wind north-east. Foggy for part of the day. The ground was alive with Willow Wrens. Redstarts and Whinchats were also very abundant. I sat down on the rocks this evening just above the high-water-mark and at one moment had the following birds in view on the rocks. 1 Wood-Wren and many Willow Wrens and Common Redstarts, 1 Black-Redstart, 2 Pied Flycatchers, and 12 Whimbrel. Whilst looking for the Black Redstart a few minutes earlier, I put up 2 Green Sandpipers and a Common Sandpiper.

The telegraph cable has gone wrong, so 'I am left without means of communicating with the outer world, which has been bombarding me during the course of the day with' replies prepaid.'

Birds seen to-day included:

Many Reed Buntings, 5 Pied Flycatchers, Willow Wrens in abundance, 1 Wood-Wren, 1 Fieldfare, 2 Redwings, many Ring Ouzels, Whinchats and Redstarts in abundance, 1 Black Redstart, 2 Robins, 1 Swallow, 2 Wrynecks, 3 Kestrels, 3 Common Sandpipers, 3 Green Sandpipers, 13 Whimbrel, and 1 Corncrake.

I counted 15 Willow Wrens on the tombstones and wall in the tiny churchyard at one moment.

I met the skipper of a trawler at the Post Office, and had a little conversation with him. They had put in to send telegrams. At 10.30 p.m. I was surprised to receive a present of a fine haddock from him. A most acceptable gift in our *ménage* where fresh fish is scarce.

The above skipper returned to the island on Monday, after taking his cargo to Aberdeen. Mr. Eagle Clarke invited him to the Lighthouse in the evening. He told Mr. Eagle Clarke that it paid the owners of his boat to allow him to fish within the three-mile limit in spite of the heavy fine. Generally they went to prison for it, as it was not held to be any disgrace, but *his* owners paid up. I afterwards found that this man was very good to the islanders, giving them large quantities of fish and 'fetching-and-carrying' for them from Aberdeen. As the Fair Island men spend most of their time prowling round the cliffs, with their hands in their pockets, watching for trawlers fishing within the three-mile limit, for which they get a large reward if their evidence ends in a successful prosecution, there is evidently a little method in his generosity. As I now share in his benefits and am an established Fair Islander, I presume I also am being squared! He is such a cheery, genial old sinner, that I hope I shall remain ignorant of what the three-mile limit looks like from the shore.

*May 14th, 1911. Sunday.* - Very thick fog all day. Saw nothing fresh.

*May 15th, 1911.* Wind east, migrants still here. Fewer Redstarts, but great numbers of Willow Wrens and Whinchats. Seven different Pied Flycatchers seen during the day; 6 males and 1 female. The Red-backed Shrike was the only new bird on the list. Whinchats and Willow Wrens were abundant. Other birds were: Brambling,



12 Reed Buntings, 4 Tree Pipits, 1 White Wagtail, 1 Red-backed Shrike, 2 Common Whitethroats, 1 Ring Ouzel, a great many Redstarts, 2 Robins, 1 Common Sandpiper, 4 Dunlin, 1 Corncraze.

Wilson shot what Mr. Eagle Clarke says is a Nightingale. It does not seem to me to be nearly russet enough for our common one.<sup>1</sup>

The Islanders kill the Herring Gulls when they get a chance and possess a gun, as they say they eat the freshly sown corn. I was a little doubtful whether they were not getting worms on the freshly ploughed land, so to-night I shot one and held a post-mortem: the gizzard was packed with undigested corn. The Lesser Black-backs were similarly engaged. The little croft was white with Gulls when I shot the above miscreant, and I wonder that any corn escapes. I do not know of more than two guns on the island and the islanders do not use scarecrows. Possibly they have found them useless. A Herring Gull sits daily on my wall waiting to take 'Che Foo's' bone directly he leaves it.

*May 16th, 1911.* - Wind south-west. Birds seen were: Brambling, many Reed Buntings, a considerable number of Tree Pipits, 1 White Wagtail, several Fieldfare, 1 Song-Thrush, 2 Ring Ouzels, very numerous Whinchats, 1 Bluethroat, 4 Pied Flycatchers, 1 Chiff-Chaff, Willow Wrens in abundance, 1 Blackcap, 1 Swallow, 1 Wryneck, 2 Kestrels, and 3 Whimbrel. The Blackcap was hunting flies amongst the seaweed on the shore! The Wryneck was doing the same on the grass bank just above. Never have I seen so many Willow Wrens in one place as I have seen to-day.

*May 17th, 1911.* - Wind west. Nearly all the Willow Wrens, Redstarts, and Whinchats have gone. Where there were 50 Willow Wrens yesterday there would scarcely be one to-day and I have not seen a single Whinchat. House Martins, Sand Martins, and Grey Wagtail appeared for the first time. There were a number of Tree Pipits. Other birds seen were: a few Reed Buntings, 3 White Wagtails, 1 Fieldfare, 1 Pied Flycatcher, 1 Wryneck, 2 Kestrels, 4 Dunlins, 1 Whimbrel, and 1 Corncraze.

To-day all the islanders are celebrating the wedding of the Factor's daughter. They have a marriage feast in the old schoolroom, which began at 3 p.m. to-day and, I am told, will probably come to a timely end by 5 a.m. to-morrow morning. I was invited, but according to Biblical precedent, 'made excuse,' as I had been told how the ceremonies were conducted. All the guests were expected to be present at 3 p.m., when a glass of port wine is given to each person, one glass only being used for the whole. After the port, whisky is handed round in the same way. Then they are given tea, which is a lengthy business, as they are helped in detachments. After tea there is dancing, and this alternates with eating and drinking till a.m. next day! The food, fish, etc., is taken with the fingers out of one common pot. To their credit, be it said, I did not see anyone the worse for drink.

*May 18th, 1911.* - I have to leave Fair Isle to attend a 'Court' at Buckingham Palace on the 24th. Owing to the uncertainty of being able to get away, I dare not postpone my departure. I leave with a complexion more worthy of my Crofter's cottage than the Courts of Kings and Queens.

We had a lovely passage, leaving Fair Isle at 2 p.m. and arriving at the Isle of May, Firth of Forth, at 6 a.m. next morning.

*September 29th, 1911.* - The wind has gone round to the northwest, which is precisely the most desirable for landing at Fair Isle. Left at 6 a.m., and when we left the Orkneys behind, had the usual pitching and rolling. Had the wind been anywhere else, we could not have landed, but we did it in peace at 10.30 a.m.

Similar luck did not attend my arrival at Ortolan Cottage. Carrying a box in one hand and trying to restrain 'Che Foo' with the other, I upset the camp washstand, and the whole of the jug of water rolled over my bed. Ortolan Cottage is not the most commodious of dwellings in which to air and dry bedding. I have only just room to walk round my table; and sitting-, dining-, and bedroom are one.

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<sup>1</sup> This bird proved to be a Thrush-Nightingale: the only certain occurrence of that species in Great Britain.

The only migrants seen were:

1 Chaffinch, 1 Stockdove which, strange to say, is the first recorded for Fair Isle, 1 Redshank, and 2 Snipe.

*September 30th, 1911.* - A north-west gale blowing and the sea was more worth looking at than the birds. Of migrants I only saw the Stockdove and Heron of yesterday, 2 Snipe, and a Curlew. The islanders went out to fetch their new life-boat, which was brought by a steamer. It was a wonderful sight to see them manoeuvre their boat in the gale through the "roost" which rushes outside the South Harbour and through the forbidding-looking rocks which guard the entrance. Fourteen of their best men went out; and, whatever one may think of them on shore, one is bound to admire their splendid seamanship.

I had a peep at a large family having their dinner to-day. There was a piled-up centre dish, from which they were all helping themselves with their fingers. A repulsive sight.

*October 1st, 1911. Sunday.* - 1 Snow Bunting, 1 Heron, 1 Snipe, 3 Curlews. A nice day but Sunday, and therefore bird-watching was limited to those parts of the island where my ungodly behaviour could not shock the inhabitants. I went to church once, but the

'Anti-expectoration League' doctrines have not reached this island, and I was so nearly made ill that I have not repeated the performance. The lay preacher did not use a pocket handkerchief! I went to the top of Ward Hill instead.

*October 2nd, 1911.* - A south-east wind and rain, changing to east later in the day. Saw 2 Wheatears, 6 Herons, 3 Golden Plovers, 1 Redshank, 3 Curlews, and 1 Snipe.

*October 3rd, 1911.* - The south-east wind only blew for a few hours yesterday, but it brought the birds. To-day I have seen very large flocks of Chaffinches, a good many Wrens, a number of Redwings, 1 Brambling, 1 Willow Wren, 1 Heron, several Curlews, 1 Mealy Redpoll, a large number of Snipe, six of which I shot (and could have got several more, but there is no one to eat them outside Ortolan Cottage), 1 Kestrel, 1 Oyster-Catcher, 1 Jack Snipe. Wind north-east and blowing hard.

The Factor's wife called upon me this afternoon. As I thought it might interest her to see my evening dress, I told Billingham to show her a new pink, broché silk tea-gown, trimmed with sequins, which she has just made for me. After gazing at it in rapt admiration and feeling it all over inside and out, she looked up at me and said, 'Woman! Woman! why dinna ye wear it outside and show yersel?' I pointed out to her that a pink silk broche dress with low neck short sleeves was not quite the most appropriate thing to wear outside in a north-east gale on Fair Isle, to which she replied somewhat regretfully, 'Ah, well! If ye did, they'd all be cla' aing (clawing) of ye!' Obviously to her half the beauty of the dress was the feel of it, and I thought she would never let go of it.

*October 4th, 1911.* - Wind north-east. A great many of the birds have left, and though I saw much the same number of species, they were but a remnant of those here yesterday. There were, however, a number of Snipe, and as Mrs. Campbell, from the North Lighthouse, relieved me of some of yesterday's bag, I was able to shoot some more to the delight of poor little 'Che Foo,' who cannot bear to see a Snipe go away unshot at. He is a capital little dog for Snipe-shooting, and invariably finds them for me. He is wonderfully quick at hearing (or seeing?) them rise, even when quite out shot. Several Chaffinches, 1 Brambling, several Wheatears (one I shot, as I wished to see if it belonged to the Greenland race, which it did, wing 103 mm.), 1 Willow Wren, 1 Merlin, 1 Kestrel, 1 Pintail, 2 Curlews, about 1 dozen Snipe, 5 of which I shot, and 1 Jack Snipe.

*October 5th, 1911.* - Wind north. Birds dwindling in numbers: 1 Chaffinch, 1 Redwing, 2 Wheatears, 1 Merlin, 1 Heron, 2 Ringed Plovers, 1 Redshank, and 2 Curlews.

*October 6th, 1911.* - Wind east-south-east to south. Evidently some birds have come, but as I spent 3½ hours trying to get near what I believe to have been two Richard's Pipits, I lost the best of the morning. However, walking home just before luncheon, I shot a Lapland Bunting in some turnips. This is the first I have seen. There

were several Wheatears about, evidently the large race, a good many Chaffinches, 4 Redwings, 9 Herons, 1 Kestrel, 2 Oyster-Catchers, 2 Ringed Plovers, 2 Redshanks, and 2 Curlews.

There are a great many Hooded Crows on the island, most of which I am sure are migrants.

My routine for the day is as follows:

Rise at 6.15 a.m.

Put all my bedding to air out of doors, weather permitting.

Clean my grate.

Dress.

Tidy room for breakfast at 8 a.m. and make the bed.

Clean my boots at 8.30 a.m.

Out bird-watching at 9 a.m.

In at 1.45 for luncheon.

Out bird-watching at 2.30 p.m.

In for tea at 5.30 p.m.

Give 'Che Foo' his foot bath, necessitated by the iron water in the bogs. Clean my gun. Write up note-book and letters till dressing time. Dinner 8 p.m. Assist Billingham with the 'washing up.' Half an hour's reading and bed at 10 p.m.

*October 7th, 1911.* - Wind south-west, but very little of it and a lovely day for bird-watching. I began the day on murder intent, if I could find my Pipits. After some five hours' stalking spread over the two days, I shot one and find it is a male Richard's Pipit. The Pipit was a young bird, and is very much darker than the adult. Other birds seen were: 1 Snow Bunting, 4 Redwings, 3 Wheatears, 1 Willow Wren, 1 Kestrel, 1 Heron, 2 Redshanks, and 2 Curlews.

*October 8th, 1911.* - A stormy night, strong north-west wind in the morning. Directly I got outside my gate I put up 5 Snipe. During the night they have come in in great numbers, both Jack Snipe and Common, and, had it not been SUNDAY, I might have made a record bag. This, however, is not the saddest part of it, for evidently there are a great many other birds in, and my wanderings are confined to the cliffs and moors, which at this time of year are generally barren ground.

Under these distressing conditions, I saw large flocks of Redwings, 2 Wheatears, 1 Kestrel, 1 Heron, 2 Geese, which I believe were Grey-lags, 2 Mergansers, 1 Redshank, and a great number of Curlews. I crept down the rocks very close to a Great Grey Seal, and photographed his muzzle sticking up out of the water.

*October 9th, 1911.* - Only 3 Snipe left on the island, but a great number of Redwings. I made a most successful stalk after the two Grey-lags, but when, within shot, waited for a moment to get my breath after the stiff climb, 'Che Foo,' unable to restrain his feelings, gave a shrill yap and started them off before I was ready to fire. I thought I had missed, but as I afterwards saw one alone, I am afraid the other must have died somewhere. There were a great many Redwings about, and I also saw six Wigeon, but being my last day, all my time was taken up with sending telegrams and saying 'Good-byes.' Amongst these last I always have to include 'Old Nelly.' To-day she was grubbing up potatoes behind the Nurse's house. Seeing me, she rushed to the water butt at the back of the Nurse's house and washed her hands in it-the water butt being the Nurse's only supply! The Factor has three ponies which are always tethered in the field above my cottage. One of them, which is about twenty years old, has learnt to pull up the peg with his teeth and set himself free to wander over the moor. As the rope is thirty to forty yards long, it shows considerable intelligence, as it is quite slack when he goes for the iron peg. I am glad to say the Factor has not the heart to defeat him by other means. I went out at 7.15 a.m. this morning hoping to shoot some Snipe to take home. They are much fatter than those we get at Cairnsmore. But as already mentioned, I only saw three, and out of these I shot the only thin Snipe I have killed here. Possibly this was the reason why it remained behind when the greater number passed on.

## 1912

*September 22nd*, 1912. - Arrived Fair Isle at noon. Being Sunday, I had not intended landing, but as the wind freshened a little in the afternoon and I did not see myself turning away, perhaps not to land for a week, I decided to take one small cart-load of luggage on shore and settle into my cottage.

Mr. Eagle Clarke, who had landed on Wednesday, had seen a Scarlet Grosbeak and a Barred Warbler.

*September 23rd*, 1912. - Migrants seen to-day! 8 Snow Buntings, 1 Blyth's Reed Warbler, 1 Swallow, 3 Ringed Plovers, 3 Redshanks, 2 Snipe.

*September 24th*, 1912. - Wind south to south-east. A great number of Wheatears in, mostly of the large race. I shot a Barred Warbler. It looks very grey in flight. Other migrants seen: 8 Snow Buntings, 1 Redstart, 1 Willow Wren, 2 Hedge Sparrows, 1 Turtle-Dove, 4 Dunlins, 3 Redshanks.

*September 26th*, 1912. - A Barred Warbler came and sat on my window sill at 6.30 a.m. to wish me 'Many Happy Returns of the Day.' The yacht also came, 'dressed' for the first time. The wind was south-south-east and the Barred Warbler and a great number of the Greenland Wheatears made me hope for a good day's bird-watching. I started out at 8.10 a.m., but on the whole the day was disappointing, only 1 Pied Flycatcher, 1 Willow Wren, 6 Herons, 2 Mergansers, and 1 Whimbrel being seen. The Pied Flycatchers have no trace of black in their plumage now.

The Barred Warblers show very little barring. Traces of bars are seen only on the flanks and undertail coverts. The feet are very coarse and light in colour and the bird looks very grey in flight.

*September 27th*, 1912. - 1 Chaffinch, 2 Pied Flycatchers, 3 Willow Wrens, 2 Herons, 1 Curlew. Wind south-south-east.

*September 28th*, 1912. - Wind south-east. A number of migrants in. We found another Barred Warbler and a Scarlet Grosbeak, a new bird for me. Other birds seen: 2 Siskins, 1 Chaffinch, possibly more than 67 Bramblings, 1 White Wagtail, 1 Grey-headed or Blue-headed Wagtail, 3 Song-Thrushes, 1 Redwing, 1 Whinchat, 1 Robin, 1 Willow Wren, 4 Blackcaps, 1 Heron, 1 Wigeon.

In the afternoon Mr. Eagle Clarke got a Little Bunting and saw a *Black Wheatear*.

I took some photographs of Fair Isle sheep dipping, as carried out with the blue enamelled teapot.

*September 29th*, 1912. *Sunday*. - Wind south-east and blowing hard. Evidently a lot of birds in, as although crofts had to be avoided, we made a good list. I tried to find the *Black Wheatear*, but had no luck.

One Blue-headed Wagtail, 1 Fieldfare, several Song-Thrushes and Redwings, 1 Ring Ouzel, 1 Blackbird, 1 Redstart, several Robins, 1 Blackcap, 1 Heron, 3 Woodpigeons, 1 Wigeon (which I shot), 3 Teal, 1 Curlew.

*September 30th*, 1912. - Wind east-south-east. The *Black Wheatear* was seen again to-day, but not, alas! by me. There were a great many Blackcaps in the turnips and potatoes.

Other birds seen were: 1 Chaffinch, a large flock of Bramblings, 2 Fieldfares, several Redwings, Song-Thrushes, and Blackbirds, 1 Garden Warbler, 1 Kestrel, 1 Heron, 2 Woodpigeons, 1 Mallard, 2 Snipe (one of which I shot), and 1 Jack Snipe.

*October 1st*, 1912. - A north-east gale blowing and very cold. There are a number of Blackbirds, Song-Thrushes, and Redwings in. I also saw: 1 Chaffinch, 2 large flocks of Bramblings, several Ring Ouzels, many Redwings, 4 Redstarts, 3 Robins, 1 Goldcrest, 2 Woodpigeons, 1 Wigeon, 1 Teal (which was shot), 2 Curlews, and 2 Snipe (which were shot).

*October 2nd, 1912.* - A bitterly cold day, with north-east gale blowing and sleet and hail storms at intervals. I was bombarded in an absolutely shelterless spot with hailstones the size of peas driven by a mighty squall and was glad when the Heavenly artillery ceased 'fire.'

I was out bird-watching from 8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 2.30 to 5.30 p.m. and was nearly frozen, but in spite of the additional drawback of being unable to hold one's glass steady, saw: 1 Chaffinch, a flock of Bramblings, 1 doubtful Tree Pipit, many Song-Thrushes and Blackbirds, several Redwings, 4 Robins, 3 Herons, 1 Dunlin, 3 Redshanks, 1 Curlew, 3 Snipe (1 of which I shot), and Wrens in turnips, which presumably means on migration, unless this weather has driven them in from the cliffs.

*October 3rd, 1912.* - Wind north-west and a pleasanter day. Two Bramblings, several Song-Thrushes, 1 Redwing, several Blackbirds, 1 Robin, 1 Willow Wren, several Blackcaps, 1 Hedge Sparrow, 4 Herons, 1 Curlew, 3 Snipe (one of which was shot), 3 Jack Snipe (one of which was shot) and 1 Landrail.

*October 4th, 1912.* - The north-east gale has given place to a south-westerly one. It has cleared off nearly all our migrants, and we shall probably get no more as long as it lasts.

The wind is whistling through every crevice in my little cottage tonight, and, a little way off, the Atlantic is thundering against the cliffs. In a storm like this the sea seems equally rough in the bays on both sides of the island, and only in the North Haven and close under Bunes do the Eider Ducks and Gulls find a little shelter. I walked up to the North Lighthouse, when I had the full benefit of the gale. A Blackcap and a Robin were sheltering in the South Harbour in the afternoon.

During the gale I watched the Great Grey seals playing about in the roughest part of the sea and within a few yards of the rocks. Every few minutes a great wave gathered up and hurled itself on the jagged rocks with a fury which it seemed impossible the seals could withstand, but, no sooner had it spent itself and smothered the rocks with foam. than the big black head, also streaked with foam, reappeared just where the wave had overtaken it.

I was told by one of the islanders that their method of catching seals was to row into the caves when the young ones were a week to ten days' old and club them on the head. The mothers apparently leave them in the caves, and the islanders like to get them as young as a week old, as the skin then retain the long white hairs when dressed.

*October 9th, 1912.* - Wind south-west to south. Nothing new except a few Brambling and a Water Rail.

*October 10th, 1912.* - Wind south and moderating. A good many birds in. Large flocks of Bramblings, several Chaffinches, 2 Song Thrushes, many Redwings, 6 Blackbirds, 1 Willow Wren, 1 Common Whitethroat, 1 Kestrel, 1 Heron, 3 Lapwings, and 1 Water Rail.

The last was brought to Mr. Eagle Clarke alive, and I took it home to show Harry Lewis and let it go as soon as he had seen it. It flew away quite strongly. To-day, another Islander brought it up to us alive.

*October 11th, 1912.* - Wind south-west and very wet in the morning. Had a telegram from Mr. Studman, saying the W.B.O.C. boys had won the Shield. When I first took them over they were said by the Secretary of the R.S.P.B. to be 'very bad.' They have competed three times since, the first two years taking second place and now the first.

Four Blackbirds, 1 Kestrel, 1 Dunlin, 3 Turnstones, 2 Curlews, 1 Snipe.

*October 12th, 1912.* - Wind south-east. Four Chaffinches, 1 Redwing, 4 Blackbirds, 1 Merlin, 2 Herons, 1 Merganser, 1 Curlew.

*October 13th, 1912.* - Wind south-east, blowing hard and very thick all the morning, also very wet.

A great rush of birds has arrived, chiefly Redwings, Fieldfares, Starlings, and Blackbirds; but of course it is *Sunday*, and therefore we cannot look about the crofts. There were flocks of 200 to 300 Redwings and Fieldfares on the island and large flocks of Starlings. I also saw a great number of Bramblings, probably nearly 200. Chaffinches, Song-Thrushes, a flock of Reed Buntings, 1 Ringed Plover, 1 Turnstone, 1 Curlew, 1 Heron, but why, oh why, do these things always occur on Sunday? To-morrow they may be all gone. Many Redwings were killed at the Lantern, and I found several dead ones on the rocks below it.

*October 14th, 1912.* - Harry Lewis came up from the Lighthouse at 4 a.m. to tell me that a great many birds were coming to the Lantern, so I dressed as quickly as possible, and, electric lamp in hand, hurried down to the Lighthouse. It was pouring with rain and blowing hard, and as the Lighthouse was over a mile from my cottage, it was not the pleasantest of walks. However, I know every ditch and lump of stones in the dark, as I take Betsy back over the Moor every night, and forty minutes from the time Harry knocked at my door found me at the Lantern. It was not a *great* rush, but a number of Redwings and Fieldfares were constantly flying up all the time I was there. It was a weird and most interesting sight. High up on the balcony, just below the lantern, we stood on the lee side of the tower, sheltering from the wind and rain. Many feet below us were the rocks with the sea dashing over them and lit up at regular intervals by the rays of the lantern. The birds flying up in the rays looked like exaggerated snowflakes, as the light makes them appear quite white, and only when they come quite close to one can the colour occasionally be detected. Many of the birds which strike the lantern fall on a grating above our heads. Others, dazed by the bright light, alight and run round it, and can often be caught.

When faint traces of daylight appeared the birds grew fewer, so I went to bed for three-quarters of an hour in the Lighthouse, and then walked home at 6 a.m., when Fair Isle in general was still asleep. The Gulls were awake, but nothing else.

I was out again bird-watching at 9 a.m., but the wind increased and went to the south-west and west, which, combined with torrents of rain, made bird-watching almost impossible. There seemed to be a great many birds in, but it was all I could do to walk, much less use glasses.

There were hundreds of Fieldfares and Redwings on the island, probably thousands. Bramblings were also plentiful, and for the rest I noted: 1 Jackdaw, large flocks of immigrant Starlings, Reed Bunting, 4 Chaffinches, 1 Song-Thrush, Blackbirds, 1 Long-eared Owl, 3 Snipe (which I shot).

In the evening the Northern Lights were seen very distinctly on the north-west of the island.

I walked up towards Ward Hill in the afternoon and tried to see the sea and cliffs on the Atlantic side, but this was too much for me. When I turned round it blew me 'at the double' downhill, and more nearly approached the feeling of flying, which I sometimes experience in my dreams, than anything I have experienced when awake.

*October 15th, 1912.* - The islanders are very busy digging up potatoes. Though very genial when one speaks to them and all too ready to shake hands, seeing how dirty their hands are, when they see one approaching they all turn their backs and bend down to their occupation as if their lives depended upon it. It is the custom for the whole family, including married sons and daughters, to dig one croft together, and at first I found it very difficult to address a genial 'Good morning' to this view of their persons, but we should not be on the friendly terms we are if I gave way to my shyness as they do to theirs.

One ceremony I have struck at. I used to be invited into their houses, and all the family filed in one by one and sat down on the forms round the room and stared at me, leaving all conversation entirely to me, except for a few monosyllabic answers. I have now intimated to some of those I know and like best, that I am always pleased to meet them in single combat outside, but that ten to one is not fair play. One benevolent individual addresses me as 'Mother,' and when other subjects of conversation fail, always falls back on 'Are ye well, are ye well?' His wife varies it by 'I hope ye're keepin foine.' When asked how they are, they frequently reply - 'No' so bad' or 'Foine.' I asked one old man if he had finished harvesting. His answer was, 'No, not yet; we've got the corn in, but we've no' dug the potatoes.'

Migrants seen: 4 Chaffinches, several Bramblings, scattered, i.e. not in flocks, a few flocks of Fieldfares in small numbers, a few flocks of Redwings, about 12 Blackbirds, 1 Merlin, 1 Heron, 2 Redshanks, 2 Snipe (which I shot).

Wind south and strong. Very wet in the afternoon.

*October 16th, 1912.* - The yacht came, but as it was too rough for the cliff landing and too late for North Haven, only Mr. Eagle Clarke went off in her to Lerwick. Later in the evening I had good reason to be thankful we had not started. At 9 p.m. I went to the back of the house to fill the buckets and cans with water for the morning, and could hardly get back to the front door.

*October 17th, 1912.* - Though the gale was from the west and north-west, there were a lot of birds in, and they continued to arrive during the morning. I saw large flocks of Redwings coming over the sea and Snipe came in small parties continuously.

Whilst sheltering from rain, 3 Merlins flew in from the sea and settled on the telegraph wires close to me. G. Stout saw a Shore Lark and Lapland Bunting. The Snipe settled in the gardens, potatoes, stubble, etc. It is seldom one can get a shot at them, as there are always houses, dogs, ducks, or people in the neighbourhood, and a Snipe does not give one time to look round to see if the coast is clear. I only shot 11. Coming home when it was getting dark, I shot a Snipe and a Skylark at one shot. Both were flying, and of course the Skylark was accidental. I could probably have shot more Snipe had I been looking for them only, but I only got those that came in my way while looking for other birds.

One Jackdaw, several Reed Buntings, a number of Chaffinches, and Bramblings scattered all over the crofts, Redwings and Snipe in abundance, 1 Song-Thrush, many Blackbirds, 5 Merlins, a small flock of Purple Sandpipers, 5 Redshanks.

*October 18th, 1912.* A rough, wet day. Very few birds. There are still one or two Wheatears and a few Snipe, one of which I shot.

*October 19th, 1912.* - Wind south-east, afternoon wet and stormy. Sunday. I walked out to Bunes and saw 10 Glaucous Gulls amongst about 40 Great Black-backs. These are the first Glaucous Gull I have seen in Great Britain. There were a good many Redwings about and a few Blackbirds, a Merlin, Snipe, and a Woodcock, and 9 Curlews.

In the morning, I saw 4 Whooper Swans.

I had intended leaving Fair Isle twelve days ago, but at present I am a fixture, as it is too rough for the yacht. We are beginning to have to effect economies as our supplies are getting somewhat reduced, and unless the yacht comes to-morrow, I shall have to purchase a lamb. Laundry work has had to be started.

*October 21st, 1912. Monday.* - The yacht came and we packed everything, but the swell was too much for her and she steamed back to Lerwick. It was a lovely day, and as there were Snipe and Woodcock in, I went out for the former before breakfast at 7.30 a.m. and for the Woodcock afterwards, but only saw 6. They are found chiefly on the sheltered hillsides, and sit in the heather behind peat hags. Before breakfast 1 Woodcock flew past my window. There were many Snow Buntings on the Moor and hundreds of Fieldfares.

The Factor assured me that 'Saturday's gale'll never see Monday's morning' and that he had proved the fact ever since he was a 'wee laddie.'

There were a great many Siskins in. Other birds seen were: 1 Jackdaw, Bramblings, Merlin, Heron, a Snipe (which I shot), 6 Woodcock (5 of which I shot), several Glaucous Gulls.

*October 22nd, 1912. Tuesday.* - A south-east wind and very stormy. I went out again after the Woodcock, but it was hard work and I only shot 6 and a Snipe.

There were 7 Glaucous Gulls on the Dam on Sukka Moor. Many Snow Buntings, 3 Mallards, hundreds of Fieldfares and Redwings, and 1 Heron.

I went to the post office to send a telegram, and was told by a small child that 'they was about lifting potatoes,' so I left my telegram on the counter!

We have come to an end of several luxuries, such as jam, coffee, flour, butter, and potatoes, so Betsy and I went to the local 'store' to see what we could find, and bought some jam and biscuits sealed up in penny packets. It is the first time that I have bought biscuits in this form. One has to carry home one's purchases, as there is no one else to deliver them. We also found some Fry's cocoa.

*October 23rd, 1912.* - This morning I bought some potatoes. They asked 6d. for 26 lb. ! I had not the heart to do myself quite so cheaply at the expense of my neighbour.

There is a furious gale raging from the south-east. There are thousands of Fieldfares and Redwings on the island. The grass and stubbles were alive with them. There were also hundreds of Starlings. I have never seen such a number of birds together. Amongst them were a number of Blackbirds, and evidently. there were a great many other birds in, as I saw a number of Robins on the cliffs and rocks, flocks of Bramblings, 3 White-fronted Geese, Mallards, Wigeon, Snow Bunting, Snipe, Woodcock, numbers of Glaucous Gulls, and 3 Short-eared Owls, but it was as much as I could do to walk, and it was quite impossible to use one's glasses. It rained in torrents all day long and the wind was terrific, but there is always the compensation of the glorious sea and to-day it was truly wonderful.

*October 24th, 1912. Thursday.* - The south-east gale continues, but mercifully the rain ceased about 10 a.m. It is sad not to be able to look carefully at the birds, as they are still here in thousands, but one cannot use glasses. I put up Woodcock under the walls, and saw them flying over, but as I am getting short of ammunition I had to reserve it, as shooting under these conditions means a reckless expenditure of cartridges with little result, and a wounded bird is blown over the cliffs directly.

I doubt whether Woodcock were ever more hardly earned than mine in the last three days. There is not an atom of shelter anywhere, and at times I could hardly get along. When I am in bed with doors and windows closed, the wind blows my hair about, and a strong breeze comes in all round the mantelpiece and where ceiling and walls nominally unite.

Huge flocks of Starlings, small flocks of Bramblings, a few Chaffinches, 1 Yellow Bunting, a great many Snow Buntings, evidently a great addition of migrant Skylarks, thousands of Fieldfares, and Redwings, Song-Thrush, a great many Blackbirds Short-eared Owls, several Glaucous Gulls, Long-tailed Ducks, 9 Lapwings, Purple Sandpipers, Redshanks, Turnstones, 3 Curlews, Common Snipe (1 of which I shot), Jack Snipe, Woodcock (2 of which I shot).

The Robins seem to have left, but in such weather they may well have escaped observation.

*October 25th, 1912.* - Wind south-east. The vast number of birds still remains. The cliffs and rocks on the shore are alive with Blackbirds. Harry saw a Blackcap. Other birds seen were: 14 Rooks, 2 Jackdaws, 6 Chaffinches, flocks of Snow Buntings, all over the island thousands of Fieldfares, great numbers of Redwings - but not so plentiful as Fieldfares - hundreds of Blackbirds, 1 Wheatear, Robins which are very numerous, 2 Merlin, 1 Short-eared Owl, 1 Mallard, Teal (which I shot), 1 Wigeon, 2 Goldeneyes (1 of which I shot), 2 Herons, 2 Golden Plovers, 7 Lapwings, about 30 Purple Sandpipers, Snipe (which I shot), Woodcock (which I shot), a few Glaucous Gulls.

*October 26th, 1912. Saturday.* - East wind. Birds much the same in quantity and species as yesterday. I wasted all my morning looking for Woodcock which were not there, with the exception of one which rose when my gun was uncocked and went away with the usual anathemas.



I saw two Hooded Crows trying to kill a Short-eared Owl. Whilst the poor bird was looking at me, one Crow alighted about 5 feet behind it and sidled down towards the Owl. Another Crow hovered overhead and spoilt the first one's sport, as the Owl took to flight, pursued by both. They have a bad time of it on the island, as the islanders shoot them also, whether for food or not I do not know; but they are not given to wasting ammunition over things they cannot eat. I gave one of them my Goldeneye yesterday, with which he was delighted. My motives were not unselfish!

Rooks, many more than yesterday, 3 Bramblings, Fieldfares, Redwings, Blackbirds, Song-Thrush, Robins, Short-eared Owls, which are very numerous, 1 Heron, 14 Mallards, 2 Wigeon, Lapwings, 4 Dunlins, 1 Woodcock, 1 Snipe (which I shot).

I had the lamb killed for me to-day, a nice fat one, for which the Factor charged me 10s. Billingham had to show him how to cut it up. He told me they did not often eat mutton on the island, all the good sheep being sent away to be sold in Lerwick. Probably therefore it is only 'braxy mutton' that falls to their lot.

*October 27th, 1912. Sunday.* - Much that I have seen in Fair Isle is indescribably beautiful, but the weather to-day was indescribably horrible. I sought consolation by standing under the shelter of the old disused chapel which borders the little graveyard, where Fair Islanders take their last long rest. It looks over the South Harbour and the wild rush and turmoil of the 'roost' outside, and a more romantic spot the lover of Nature could hardly choose for his last resting-place. But if it were me, I should not like several Fair Islanders piled on the top, with only a thin layer of turf between, which is the usual method of burial in these outlying islands.

*October 28th, 1912.* - I started out a little before 9 a.m. to look for Woodcock. A beautiful, bright, sunny, peaceful morning and something to be thankful for after all we have been through lately. The wind had moved to the west. I saw a little female Goldcrest outside my cottage. It hopped about within a yard of my feet, and seemed quite fearless. I shot 13 Woodcock and saw 3 others, 2 of which I wounded, but they got over the hill out of my sight. I also shot 4 Snipe and a Mallard.

There were even more Fieldfares and Redwings than before, and the hillsides were covered with *thousands* of them. I also saw a flock of upwards of 200 Snow Buntings, a very pretty sight.

There seemed to be a number of Wrens about, and I noticed a single Gannet, a bird which has not been here lately. Harry saw 3 Wheatears. The list for the day being: Rooks, Chaffinch, Bramblings, Snow Buntings, Redwings, Fieldfares, Song-Thrushes, Blackbirds, Robins, Goldcrest, Short-eared Owls, Heron, Mallards, Snipe, Woodcock.

I stood outside my door in the bright moonlight just before going to bed. All was so peaceful and still that I felt sure it would be my last night on Fair Isle. Though I have been a compulsory prisoner since the 10th, I would willingly stay longer. I love the life, and it is so nice living where everyone does not want to 'do' one, because one is a Duchess. I think the people like my being here, and they are grateful for any little kindness.

*October 30th, 1912.* - I went out early to look for Woodcock, but did not see one and only shot one Snipe.

The *Sapphire* appeared on the scene about 11 a.m. There was too much swell for her to anchor, but as I could get off from the North Haven, I had no further excuse for staying. I am taking with me my little Shetland pony 'Fair Isle Viking.'

Some of the islanders had caught a Grey Seal, about a week old, and had kept it alive in a box for me to see. I wished I had not done so, for its cries haunted me for hours afterwards. They were like a child moaning in pain. I begged the owners to kill it, but I do not for a moment suppose they did. They are kind to their dogs, cats, and ponies, but very brutal to their sheep and anything which has to be killed. 'Old Nelly' had a dog last year which she appeared very fond of. I asked her what had become of it. 'Oh! he was gettin' old: she told me, ' and I just took and throw'd him over the cliff.'

I saw one of the large Northern Bullfinches (*Pyrrhula, pyrrhula, pyrrhula!*), the first I have ever seen. There were clearly a number of fresh birds in, but I had no time to look for them.

As the Factor's wife bade me 'Good-bye,' she wished me 'all God's blessings,' and then in an undertone said to Betsy, who was following behind, 'But what's the good of them when she's got everything and doesn't want 'em!'

Before dark I saw Snow-Buntings and Starlings following the yacht.

### 1913

*May 13th*, 1913. 10.30 p.m. Fair Isle. - The yacht is rolling in her anchorage, and if I have to go back to Kirkwall without landing, I shall . . .

*May 14th*, 1913. - We landed at 9.30 a.m. one of the first birds I saw was an Ortolan Bunting. I afterwards found four others. There were a great many birds in, and I saw the following migrants: 3 Bramblings, 5 Ortolan Buntings, many Reed Buntings, 4 White Wagtails, 2 Yellow Wagtails, 1 Tree Pipit, hundreds of Willow Wrens, several Common Whitethroats, 1 Sedge-Warbler, several small flocks of Fieldfares, 1 Redwing, 3 Song-Thrushes, 2 Ring Ouzels, many Wheatears, several Whinchats, 2 Redstarts, several Swallows, several House Martins, 1 Sand Martin, 1 Kestrel, and 2 Common Sandpipers.

*May 15th*, 1913. - Mr. Eagle Clarke arrived on the *Sapphire*. Migrants seen: Brambling, Reed Bunting, 3 Ortolan Bunting, White Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Willow Wren, Common Whitethroat, Song-Thrush, Fieldfare, Ring Ouzel, 1 Pied Flycatcher, Whinchat, Swallow, House Martin, Sand Martin, Wryneck, 1 Kestrel, Common Sandpiper, 2 Snipe.

*May 16th*, 1913. - Wind west. Far fewer migrants. Very wet. 1 Yellow-hammer, several Willow Wrens, Whitethroat, small flocks of Fieldfares, 1 Song-Thrush, 1 Cuckoo, 2 Kestrels, 2 Lapwings, 1 Curlew, 1 Whimbrel.

*May 17th*, 1913. - Wind south. Very few migrants. Showers. Three Reed Buntings, 1 Snow Bunting, a few Willow Wrens, 4 Swallows, 1 House Martin, 1 Wryneck, which has been here three days at least, 1 Kestrel, 1 Snipe.

Tom and I walked round by the Mills and to the top of Ward Hill, where we saw the Snow Bunting. Wilson shot a Temminck's Stint yesterday, which I saw; it has yellow legs.

*May 18th*, 1913. - A westerly gale and very wet. Only saw 1 Willow Wren, 1 Kestrel, and 2 Long-tailed Ducks. Sent Tom to see the 'Blow Hole' on the Western cliffs, but the wind was too much for him, and he had to retreat, as I did last year. My 'chef' sent in a message at dinner to ask me 'only to eat the top of the pudding, as the bottom was not done!'

*May 19th*, 1913. - Westerly gale and showers. One Brambling, 1 Yellow Bunting, 3 White Wagtails, 1 Willow Wren, 1 Common Whitethroat, 1 Ring Ouzel, 3 Kestrels, 3 Ringed Plovers.

*May 20th*, 1913. - Wind south. Two White Wagtails, Willow Wrens, 1 Chiffchaff, female Kestrel, 1 Bar-tailed Godwit, 1 Curlew, 3 Whimbrels.

*May 21st*, 1913. - Wind south-south-east. Fine. Two Bramblings, 1 White Wagtail, 3 Willow Wrens, 1 Kestrel, and 1 Whimbrel.

Tom and I went up to watch the Fulmars on the Sheep Craig, and had a good view of a Peregrine. I do not think any of the sea-fowl except the Shags are nesting yet, but the Puffins have been about the cliffs for the last three days.

*May 23rd*, 1913. - Wind west. Fine. No birds. Mr. Eagle Clarke left for Kirkwall on the *Sapphire*. One White Wagtail, 1 Willow Wren, 1 Kestrel, and 2 Dunlins.

*May 24th, 1913.* - I told one of the islanders that I should like a lobster if they could catch one, and last night G. Stout brought up a large one and 5 small crabs. My officiating chef absolutely declined to have anything to do with the boiling of them, so the operation devolved upon Betsy and me. As the establishment did not run to a pot large enough to boil the lobster in, we had first to borrow one from a neighbour. Having tied up his claws and ensured that he went in head and not claws first into the boiling salt and water, I plunged him in, and, for all the S.P.C.A. may assert to the contrary, neither he nor the crabs made the ghost of a whisper, and I am convinced that they died as quickly as most things that are shot. I shall not take up lobster-boiling as a profession, but, done with reasonable care, it is no more cruel than wringing a chicken's neck and a *great* deal less so than snaring rabbits. Possibly the professional puts the lobster into cold water and boils it gradually, but if so, this refinement of cruelty is quite unnecessary, as mine, with 35 minutes' boiling, was as tender as any I have ever tasted.

A lovely day, with no wind and next to no migrants. I saw 1 Fieldfare, over a dozen Swallows, 2 House Martins, 1 Common Sandpiper, and 1 Whimbrel. There has been a considerable increase in the number of Oyster-Catchers lately, and also I think in Hooded Crows.

*May 25th, 1913. Sunday.* - A very wet morning. Wind southeast.

Hopes of migrants rise as the barometer falls. But the barometer rose and the hopes fell before luncheon, as the wind went round to the west and the only migrants I saw were a Fieldfare and a House Martin. In the afternoon, when walking above Bunes, 3 Arctic Skuas flew over the land. These are the first I have seen here, though there are plenty of them in the Orkneys and Shetlands.

*May 27th, 1913.* Left Fair Isle.

A very disappointing visit, so far as the birds were concerned.

## 1914

*April 29th, 1914.* - Left at 8 a.m. for Fair Isle. Rather a heavy north-west swell, but, as it is the best of winds for landing at Fair Isle, I did not complain. Most of the day was spent getting things straight in my cottage, but there did not seem to be any migrants in, so I did not miss much. The only migrants seen in any number were Greenland Wheatears and Snipe, and I saw 1 Song-Thrush.

*April 30th, 1914.* - We began the day by a general scrub-up of the cottage and got everything clean and tidy. Wind north. Birds seen: 10 White Wagtails, 2 Song-Thrushes, 1 Stock dove, 1 Dunlin, and many Snipe.

Evidently there were a large number in. I had not much time for bird-watching, but saw small parties in scattered places.

*May 1st, 1914.* - A biting north-west wind, with sleet and hail showers at intervals, is neither conducive to the arrival of birds nor to the comfort of looking for them. Still, there are a few migrants to encourage one. I have never seen so many White Wagtails together as are here now. There were far more than I could keep count of other migrants seen were: 1 Redwing, 1 Purple Sandpiper, 1 Whimbrel, and 2 Snipe.

I am gradually getting through my greetings with the islanders, an ordeal requiring some courage. The Postmaster's pony, which has not seen me for a year, saw 'Che Foo' and me quite 300 yards away and very obviously recognised us. It did not scent us, as the wind was blowing from him to me. He galloped down wall and whinnied and jumped about, and as I came near, rested his nose on the wall and waited for me. In the afternoon he galloped across the field, and I could not get rid of him. Of course, 'cupboard love' was at the bottom of it, as I used to him sugar, but it was interesting to see that he recognised me sight after a year's absence. Some of 'Che Foo's' canine friends evidently recognise him also by sight.

All the Greenland Wheatears seem to have gone, also most of the Snipe; and the Puffins, which were dotted all over the cliffs on our arrival, have completely disappeared. I am somewhat puzzled by their behaviour, as the

wind and weather are the same as when we landed and they had all the appearance of settling into their nesting quarters. Are the birds we saw on migration or do they go out to sea and return again later! All the White Wagtails I have seen are males.

*May 2nd, 1914.* - Wind south-west. Fine. Migrants seen: a few White Wagtails, 1 Redwing, 2 Teal, 1 Dunlin, and 2 Whimbrels. Henry Newbury saw a Mistle-Thrush. A few of the Puffins have returned to the cliffs.

'Jacobina,' one of my neighbours, met me out walking yesterday. As she approached I saw her look at her hands, which she evidently thought were not clean enough to offer me, so she spat upon the backs of both, rubbed them vigorously upon her skirt and then shook hands. I would so willingly dispense with hand-shaking here, but apparently it is the custom, if they recognise at all, to shake hands; and men will leave their work and right across a field to you, even though it is not the first time of meeting. When they wish to avoid the ceremony, they look at you at all.

*May 3rd, 1914. Sunday.* - Wind south. Two White Wagtails, 2 flocks (18 and 12) of Golden Plovers, and 1 Lapwing.

*May 4th, 1914.* - A very wet and foggy morning. Wind southeast but backing to the west again in the afternoon. The short spell of south-east wind, however, brought some birds and I saw: 1 Linnet (which I shot), 10 White Wagtails, 1 Grey Wagtail, 1 Common Redstart, 2 Whinchats, 1 Stockdove, 2 Turnstones, 2 Common Sandpipers, 1 Dunlin, 2 Redshanks, 4 Snipe which were new arrivals, and more Purple Sandpipers than I could count.

*May 5th, 1914.* - Rain all day. Wind east. One Grey Wagtail, 1 Willow Wren, 2 Whinchats, and 1 Purple Sandpiper.

As I was tramping home to-night in the pouring rain, I met old George Stout, the oldest man on the island and the most picturesque. He must have been a fine man when younger, but is now bent with age, though his long red hair and beard have retained their colour at an age when a darker man's would probably have been white. As he has been suffering from lumbago, I asked him if he changed his coat when he went indoors. 'Ah, no,' he said, 'I'm past caring for that. I'm old and I'm a-weary and a-longing to go home.' He said it so sadly, I could almost wish his wish were granted, for life can hold but little for them in these lonely islands when their day's work is done. The weather is hard for old people, and no matter how bad it may be, so long as they can walk, they tramp out to change the ground of the sheep and cattle which are tethered, three or four times a day. There is no doctor for them, and when the 'last call' comes, they have just to slip away without anything to soothe the way, perhaps not altogether an unmixed disadvantage, for I think many a more civilised Southerner who is kept alive may envy their fate.

*May 6th, 1914.* - Wind east to south. A lovely day, but I am getting very tired of looking at Meadow and Rock Pipits and Wheatears. The only migrants seen were, 3 White Wagtails, 1 Grey Wagtail, 1 Lapwing, 1 Dunlin, 1 Common Sandpiper, and Henry saw Fieldfares and Whimbrels.

*May 7th, 1914.* - Wind north-east. Hardly any birds about. Only saw 2 White Wagtails and 5 Fieldfares in the morning; and in the afternoon Henry and I walked down to the North Haven and saw 11 Curlews, 4 Whimbrels, and 1 Dunlin. Henry saw 1 Ring Ouzel, 2 Mergansers, and a Redshank. It is curious, seeing how nearly allied the two species are, how different the Curlew and Whimbrel are in character. Curlew when adult is almost always unapproachable, whereas Whimbrel will walk about and feed within a few yards of one.

*May 8th, 1914.* - Wind east. A terrible wet and windy day, and, as I have tramped this island always in rain for ten days, I decided to spend the whole morning letter writing.

Whilst I was sitting at luncheon, a Swallow flew slowly in at the window and settled on another window sill. That meant BIRDS. So out I went, enveloped in Burberry from head to foot and not particularly hopeful, as there was far more east than south in the wind and, if anything, at times it went to north of east. However, I very soon came upon some Whinchats, and then another little stranger flew past me, and my hopes went up with a bound, for I was sure it was an Ortolan Bunting. Then I searched the little bits of ploughed land and found Ortolan

Buntings all over the place. I have never seen so many here before. By this time, my glass had become so fogged that I could not see with them, and I was nearly as wet under my Burberry as on the outside: my handkerchief was a dripping rag, and I had to go into a cottage to ask for a cloth to dry my glasses with. It was a long time before they could produce a dry cloth, and when they did, it was covered with meal. This produced a layer of dough on my lenses, and I thanked them effusively and continued my walk.

There were a number of Reed Buntings, Willow Wrens innumerable, and, in a niche of rock on the shore, I caught a poor little tired House Martin. I also saw a number of Purple Sandpipers, Bramblings, a Lapwing, a Fieldfare, and two birds I could not identify; but, by this time my glasses were so fogged inside and out, that they were useless to me, and moreover the wind was blowing so hard that I could not have used them even if they had not been 'hors de combat.' It is sad that the weather which brings the birds frequently makes watching them so all but impossible. It was very hard work toiling uphill home. When dressing for dinner, a little Willow Wren hopped in at the door and searched about for insects, but not finding it a happy hunting-ground, flew out into the garden. Though these birds do not appear to be at all exhausted, and probably find an abundance of food as soon as they arrive, many of them seem absolutely fearless. I have known Goldcrest feed close to my boots, and the Willow Wren to-day did not seem in the least upset by finding itself in my room in 'Che Foo's' and my presence. When it flew outside it only went two yards from the door and fluttered about after the insects on the wall of the house. If it had looked a little more carefully in my bedroom, it would probably have found a meal of spiders, for I suffer from a surfeit of them. There were many more White Wagtails in, and I saw another kind, but it was impossible to say which. Turnstones and Dunlins also seen.

*May 9th. 1914.* - Strong north-east wind but showers of sleet took the place of the rain, and this being drier, made bird-watching less unpleasant.

I went out at 9.30 and came in at 2.10 p.m. Again went out at 3.30 p.m. and returned at 7.30 p.m. Very nearly nine hours' tramping, and saw the following birds. I shot 1 female Tufted Duck, which seemed to me unusually dark for a female:

Good many White Wagtails, 4 Rooks, several Ortolan Buntings. but nothing like as many as yesterday, several Snow Buntings, some of the males being in fine summer plumage. several Chiffchaffs, several Willow Wrens, but not so many as yesterday, a few Fieldfares, a good many Common Redstarts, a great many Whinchats, 4 Pied Flycatchers, a pair of Teal, 4 Golden Plovers, 2 Common Sandpipers, 2 Turnstones, a small flock of Purple Sandpipers, and Redshank.

*May 10th, 1914. Sunday.* - Wind south to south-east. As there were a good many birds in, I took advantage of Church time to look round the crofts, trusting to meeting only the unrighteous like myself! The first man I met (the head man on the island) was looking round his ponies. I asked him if it really did shock the people if I used my glasses on Sunday. He assured me that they do not think it at all wrong for *me* to do it, but they would not do it themselves. I enquired somewhat anxiously if they thought me already so depraved that it would not hurt me, or why there was a different standard of morals for each of us. He said it was a case of 'every man according to his conscience.' As he then asked me if I would come with him and look at his ponies and a fine pure Shetland ram of which he was very proud, I said 'Yes, if he would come and look at the birds with me afterwards.' He saw the humour of the situation, and turning to me quite solemnly said, in a confidential tone, 'You know, I don't go to Church *every* Sunday.' As it was 11.15 a.m. and service began at 11 a.m. I said, 'Apparently not'; and then we fell to a discussion on ponies and their parentage and points.

After which I went [a-birding](#). There are still a number of Ortolan Buntings about, and in a limited walk I saw 9. There are also several Pied Flycatchers and the ladies of the family seem to have arrived, as so frequently happens with migrant birds, a day or two later than the males. Redstarts were numerous, also Whinchats. There were a few small flocks of Fieldfare and other migrants seen were 2 White Wagtails, 1 Willow Wren, 5 Whinchats, and 2 Turnstones. Henry saw a Redpoll and Song-Thrush.

In the afternoon I walked up Ward Hill and, on arrival at the Cairn, was caught in a driving shower of sleet and snow. I saw nothing but a few Wheatears and Fieldfares.

*May 11th, 1914.* - Wind east to north-cast. The birds are getting fewer again, but Tree Pipits and Merlins were new arrivals: 2 Bramblings, several White Wagtails, several Tree Pipits, several Willow Wrens, 1 Chiffchaff, 2 Song-Thrushes, a few Fieldfares, a good many Whinchats, several Redstarts, 2 male and 2 female Pied Flycatchers, 1 Lapwing, and 6 Whimbrels.

*May 12th, 1914.* - Two Ortolan Buntings, 1 Snow Bunting which was shot by Henry, a number of White Wagtails, a number of Tree Pipits, a number of Willow Wrens, 4 Pied Flycatchers, a few Fieldfares, 1 Lapwing, 2 Redshanks, and, I believe, 1 Sprosser.

Shortly before I came here, i.e. about the last week in March, there was a great arrival of Woodcock, and those who had guns (fortunately only two or three) shot as many as 50 in a day - i.e. 50 per man.

This evening the Nurse came to tea with me, and I happened to make the remark that it would be a serious matter for her if they ever got an epidemic on the island. She then told me that they had something very like an epidemic shortly before I came, when they were seized with a serious stomachic disorder, but which most providentially Nurse asserted was due to a surfeit of Woodcock. She is not a sportswoman, and was quite unaware of the illegality of their proceedings, but assured me that only those were affected who had eaten a number of them, and she attributed it to the sudden change of food, as during the winter they live mostly on fish and meal. I did not venture to cast any doubts on her diagnosis, particularly as it may have been a perfectly correct one and in any case was likely to be a far more effective deterrent than the lecture I should have given them on their wickedness.

The question of food is naturally a very important one to people so poor and isolated as they; but one cannot but be thankful when Providence intervenes in such a slaughter of Woodcock in the breeding season.

*May 13th, 1914.* - Wind west.

Probably we are now seeing the same migrants day after day. Certainly 1 Lapwing (the only one on the island) has occupied the same little strip of ploughed land for four days and 4 Willow Wrens have been in the same spot for a week. The Pied Flycatchers have also been in their haunt for four days or more. A few White Wagtails, several Tree Pipits, several Willow Wrens, 2 Chiffchaffs, 4 Whinchats, 1 Redstart, 1 Pied Flycatcher, 1 Merlin, 1 Lapwing, and 1 Snipe.

*May 14th, 1914.* - As there were no new birds in and very little prospect of their coming, I decided to leave and we got away from Fair Isle via the cliff path about 5.30 p.m.

## 1915

*March 1915.* - Drove over Blackfriars Bridge in bright sunshine. Saw the Black-headed Gulls and the tide coming in. Thought of the *Sapphire* and the sea, of North Rona and Fair Isle, then blinked my eyes, shook myself metaphorically and settled down to choose dissecting forceps and bone levers at Downs', the Instrument Makers. Incidentally, I ran off with the Assistant's pencil which he had lent me, but I don't attribute this to the Gulls.