

# **FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY ANNUAL REPORTS**

**for  
1955 & 1956**



**KENNETH WILLIAMSON**  
**Director**

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Printed by George Waterston & Sons Ltd., Edinburgh  
for the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

Price 5/-

(Issued free to Friends of Fair Isle)

## FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST

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Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland

(Tel : Fair Isle 8)

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With the generous help of the Pilgrim Trust, the Observatory Trustees have established an Endowment Fund for Ornithology and Bird Preservation in Scotland. The objects are :—To establish the Fair Isle Bird Observatory on a permanent financial basis; to extend Fair Isle research methods to other stations in Scotland; and finally to develop Bird Sanctuaries and Bird Preservation in general.

Capital subscribed to the Fund will be held as a permanent Endowment Fund by the Trustees and cannot be spent. Income from the Fund will be carefully used by the Bird Observatory Executive Committee in keeping with the above objects.

Please write to the Hon. Secretary for particulars.

## FOREWORD

Firstly, I must apologise for the extreme lateness of the appearance of the Annual Reports for 1955 and 1956 - due in a large measure at least to an abortive proposal that it should form a section of a general report on the progress being made in revitalising the community on the island by our valued allies The National Trust for Scotland.

As in previous years, the Report consists mainly of a record of the work done at the Observatory under the guidance of Kemet Williamson whose eager capacity for research has over the years of this venture done much to throw fuller light on many of the problems that were most obscure when he began his work on Fair Isle.

It would, I think, be not unduly boastful to say that the work on Fair Isle has been an example and encouragement to the other bird observatories around the coast of Britain, and has been in no small measure a factor in maintaining their work at such a high state of excellence.

If our financial affairs were as successful as our ornithological ones, then indeed our position would be most happy. However, a glance at the Treasurer's Report and Accounts (pps 4-10) reveals that this is not so.

Owing to the need for drastic economy measures, we have had to take leave of Mr. and Mrs. Williamson who have done so much to build up the Observatory since it was established in 1948. This is a grievous loss. We are however confident that under the guidance of our new Warden - Mr. Peter Davis - the work of the Observatory will continue on the same high plane.

In closing, may I appeal to you strongly to support the work of the Observatory by continuing to subscribe your guinea subscription as a "Friend of Fair Isle."

ARTHUR B. DUNCAN

Chairman.

### NINTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF TRUSTEES

The Ninth Annual General Meeting of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trustees was held in the Board Room of the National Trust for Scotland, 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, on Friday 25th January 1957, at 11.00 a.m.

Present: Mr. Arthur B. Duncan in the Chair; Mr. A. G. S. Bryson; Dr. John Berry; Col. W. M. Logan Home; Col. R. Meinertzhagen; Mr. E. M. Nicholson; Mr. Ian R. Pitman; Professor James Ritchie; Dr. A. C. Stephen; and Mr. Geo. Waterston. Mr. K. Williamson was in attendance.

Minutes: After the Minutes of the Eighth Annual General Meeting had been read and approved, the Office-Bearers were unanimously re-elected for 1957; viz. Chairman - Mr. Arthur B. Duncan; Hon. Treasurer - Mr. Ian R. Pitman; and Hon. Secretary - Mr. G. Waterston.

Director's Report: A Report on the work of the Observatory in 1955 and 1956 was submitted by Mr. K. Williamson. In moving that the Report be adopted, the Chairman paid a warm tribute to the work of the Director over the past eight years. He had brought great distinction to the Observatory, and in the scientific field had achieved more than had ever been anticipated. Mr. E. M. Nicholson, in support of this tribute, stated that he considered that the establishment and success of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory was one of the most adventurous and successful ornithological enterprises in Europe.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer submitted the Accounts for the year and commented on them. (See pps 4-10).

Chairman's Report: The Chairman stated that a Meeting of the Executive Committee had been held on 3rd January, 1957, as soon as the Accounts had been prepared. In view of the grave financial position of the Trust, and in fairness to Mr. & Mrs. Williamson, there had been no other alternative but to give the Williamsons formal notice of termination of their employment. The meeting agreed that the Williamsons should remain on full pay up to the end of June,

1957, and could continue to occupy the house at 17 India Street, Edinburgh, until the end of June when the lease to the Trust would terminate. The Chairman stated that Mr. Williamson had been offered and had accepted a contract with the Nature Conservancy on St. Kilda, in concurrence with the owners, the National Trust for Scotland, to spend most of the summer of 1957 there to test its possibilities for a new Bird Observatory, and to watch over the interests of wild-life during construction work in connection with the Hebrides Guided Missile Range.

On the basis of an estimated income of £1,000 in the coming year, the Chairman stated that the Trust were committed to pay Mr. Williamson £250 out of our 1957 income, leaving a possible sum of £750 available in 1957 for carrying on the work of the Bird Observatory.

Mr. Peter Davis of Skokholm Bird Observatory had accepted a proposal to act as Warden at Fair Isle at a salary of £400 for the six summer months. This would leave us a sum of £350 to cover other expenses such as cost of removal, travel, and publications. The number of Bulletins issued each year would depend on our resources.

The Chairman stated that the Bird Observatory could not on its own go ahead with the proposition without some guarantee being made available against possible loss on the Hostel. By effecting various economies, it was hoped that the Hostel would "break even" during the coming year. The Trust was solely interested in the continuance of scientific research at Fair Isle, whereas the upkeep of the Hostel was more the province of the National Trust for Scotland, - the owners of the island. In view of its importance in the general scheme for rehabilitating the island, he hoped that the National Trust would be able to find ways and means for guaranteeing a possible loss on the Hostel.

In conclusion, the Chairman stated that he hoped that a Fellowship might be obtained eventually for Mr. Kenneth Williamson to enable him to make a three year study of the work co-ordinating research at all the British Bird Observatories

### TREASURER'S REPORT

This year's Accounts give you the results for the two years 1955 and 1956, and I am afraid they do not make encouraging reading.

In 1955 our overall loss for the year was £1,460: 1: 11d. This was mainly due to the loss on the Hostel, the termination at the end of seven years of several Covenants including one large private contribution to the Director's salary, and a falling off in the number of regular subscribers. It was obvious to your Trustees that this annual loss could not be allowed to continue.

Such was the position at the end of that year that we had grave doubts as to whether we could continue the work of the Observatory for another season. It so happened however that the owners of Fair Isle, the National Trust for Scotland, were at this very moment making a unique effort to encourage the repopulation or at least stop the gradual depopulation of Fair Isle; and there was no doubt that the Bird Observatory Hostel and its visitors were an enormous asset to the island and the islanders.

Since the Bird Observatory was established on the island, the Hostel has provided the islanders with a ready market for their produce - milk, eggs, butter, vegetables, etc; and the visitors have purchased the beautiful hand-knitted garments for which the island is famous. The discontinuance of the Hostel would have had serious economic repercussions. Realising this danger, the National Trust with the help of its supporters agreed to guarantee the F.I.B.O. Trust against loss up to £1,000. It was only because of this guarantee that we were able to continue in 1956. Despite strong efforts to curb expenditure, our loss in 1956 amounted to £1,143:18:6, and since the close of the 1956 Account we have received payment of the £1,000 guaranteed.

As you will have read in the Minutes of the

Ninth Annual General Meeting of the Trustees, it was decided that drastic action would have to be taken if we were to continue our work. We could not continue to employ Mr. Williamson at the same rate of pay, and with great reluctance we have had to dispense with his services.

Our future will depend entirely on the support given by you and our other "Friends of Fair Isle." Your Executive Committee have taken strong measures to cut down our expenditure, and we have every hope during the present season (1957) that the Hostel will no longer make a loss, and will "break even." We may however have to cut down on our issue of "Bulletins" unless we can persuade more people to support us.

In order to encourage more people to take advantage of the facilities for a bird-watching holiday at Fair Isle, we have reduced our charges. We are however asking visitors to look after their own rooms and to assist with the washing-up after meals. This is necessary as we have cut down our domestic staff. The results this season have been good; and we have more people booked than in any other season since the Observatory began.

Faced with rising costs everywhere, we have to watch our financial position extremely carefully. We are however confident that, provided our income is maintained, we should be in a better financial position at the end of 1957.

May I reiterate the Chairman's closing remarks - do please continue your subscriptions, and if possible enrol some of your friends as "Friends of Fair Isle." We have as you know established an Endowment Fund as a permanent institution. The capital can never be spent, but the income can be used for research not only at Fair Isle but elsewhere if required. Our present holding amounts to £4,300; but much more is required.

IAN R. PITMAN  
Hon. Treasurer.

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST

1. HOSTEL REVENUE ACCOUNT

<u>Expenditure:</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>
To Stock in Store	£ 58. -. -. .	£ 58. -. -. .
" Foodstuffs, Supplies, etc.	859. 14. 5.	972. 2. 7.
" Telephone	17. 12. 4.	25. 12. 9.
" Wages & National Insurance	405. 2. 9.	317. 6. 1.
" Sundry Payments	30. 16. 5.	81. 5. 4.
" Insurance of Huts, Contents, etc.	68. 10. --.	68. 10. --.
	<u>£ 1,439. 15. 11.</u>	<u>£1,522. 16. 9.</u>

<u>Income:</u>		
By Board and Booking Fees	£ 776. 16. 5.	£ 870. 8. 0.
" Miscellaneous receipts	3. 15. 8.	5. 7. 1.
" Stock in Store	58. -. -. .	58. -. -. .
" Loss for Year	601. 3. 10.	589. 1. 8.
	<u>£ 1,439. 15. 11.</u>	<u>£1,522. 16. 9.</u>



## 2. TRUST REVENUE ACCOUNT

<u>Expenditure:</u>		1955	1956
To Wages and National Insurance		£ 1,078. 15. -.	£ 1,205. 12. -.
<u>less</u> Private contributions		375. -. -. <u>          </u>	375. -. -. <u>          </u>
		703. 15. -. <u>          </u>	830. 12. -. <u>          </u>
" Supplies		16. 11. 2.	32. 3. 8.
" Rent, Rates, Taxes, Insurance, etc.		183. 17. 11.	213. 12. 11.
" Repairs, Renewals, etc.		406. 15. 2.	99. 12. -. <u>          </u>
" Printing, Stationery, etc.		370. 16. 9.	297. 4. -. <u>          </u>
" Travelling Expenses		231. 17. 4.	150. 4. 9. <u>          </u>
" Subscriptions		4. 11. 2.	7. 6. 4. <u>          </u>
" Expenses of administration		91. 17. 3.	70. 7. -. <u>          </u>
" Freight, Carriage, etc.		52. 12. -. <u>          </u>	37. 14. 7. <u>          </u>
" Loss on Hostel		601. 3. 10.	589. 1. 8. <u>          </u>
" Loss on Savings Bonds realised		25. 9. 9. <u>          </u>	-. -. -. <u>          </u>
		<u>£ 2,689. 7. 4.</u>	<u>£ 2,327. 18. 11.</u>
<u>Income:</u>			
By Subscriptions, etc.		£ 751. 19. 6.	£ 713. 7. 6.
" Income Tax recovered		395. 6. 3.	337. 14. -. <u>          </u>
" Interest on Savings Bonds		81. 19. 8.	11. 1. 6. <u>          </u>
" Income from Endowment Fund		-. -. -. <u>          </u>	21. 5. 6. <u>          </u>
" Donations, etc.		-. -. -. <u>          </u>	100. 11. 11. <u>          </u>
" Deficit for Year		1,460. 1. 11.	1,143. 18. 6. <u>          </u>
		<u>£ 2,689. 7. 4.</u>	<u>£ 2,327. 18. 11.</u>

### 3. BALANCE SHEET

#### Liabilities:

	1955	1956
Capital Account - Balance per last Bal. Sht.	£ 6,779. 18. 6.	£ 1,462. 13. 10.
Deduct: £4,000, 3% Savings Bonds 1960/70 at cost transferred to Endowment Account	3,857. 2. 9.	- . - . - .
Add: Sundry Creditor written off	2,922. 15. 9.	5. - . - .
	1,460. 1. 11.	1,467. 13. 10.
Less: Deficit on Revenue Account for Year	1,462. 13. 10.	1,143. 18. 6.
	5. - . - .	323. 15. 4.
Sundry Creditor as per last Balance Sheet	1,141. 8. 2.	2,036. 3. 11.
Sum due to Messrs. J. & F. Anderson, W.S.	£ 2,609. 2. - .	£ 2,359. 19. 3.

#### Assets:

Buildings, Traps, etc., as per last Bal. Sht.	£ 350. - . - .	£ 350. - . - .
Furniture, Furnishings, etc. ditto at Fair I.	600. - . - .	600. - . - .
" " " at 17 India St.	470. - . - .	470. - . - .
Scientific Equipment as per last Bal. Sht.	196. - . - .	196. - . - .
Investment - £642, 3% Savings Bonds 1960/70	619. 1. 3.	619. 1. 3.
Consumable Stores - Foodstuffs, Livestock, Fuel,	58. - . - .	58. - . - .
Advance to Manager.	128. 15. - .	- . - . - .
Cash in Bank and on hand	187. 5. 9.	66. 18. - .
	£ 2,609. 2. - .	£ 2,359. 19. 3.

EDINBURGH, 16th May, 1957: Examined and found correct.

(Signed) Lindsay, Jamieson & Haldane, C.A.

#### 4. ENDOWMENT FUND - Trustees, The Bank of Scotland

	<u>CAPITAL ACCOUNT</u>	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>
Balance brought forward		£ 283. 1. 6.	
Donations received		262. 3. 6.	£ 28. -. -. .
Transferred from F.I.B.O. Trust £4,000, 3%			
Savings Bonds 1960/70 (Cost £5857. 2. 9.)		3,380. -. -. .	
		£ 3,925. 5. -. .	£ 28. -. -. .
Bank of Scotland Trustees Acceptance Fee			£ 3. 12. 4.
Bank Charges			9. 6.
Investments made & taken over £4,000, 3%			
Savings Bonds 1960/70		£ 3,380. -. -. .	
£500 " "		279. 9. -. .	
Balance		265. 13. -. .	23. 18. 2.
		£ 3,925. 5. -. .	£ 28. -. -. .
	<u>REVENUE ACCOUNT</u>		
Net Income Received			£ 84. -. -. .
Income Tax recovered			25. 10. -. .
			£ 109. 10. -. .
Bank of Scotland Trustees Acceptance Fee			£ 23. 14. 6.
Bank charges			1. 1. -. .
Transferred to Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust; Income			21. 5. 6.
ditto: Income Tax recovered			24. 9. -. .
Balance of Income carried forward			39. -. -. .
			£ 109. 10. -. .

4. ENDOWMENT FUND - Trustees, The Bank of Scotland

BALANCE SHEET

Liabilities:

Surplus from Capital Account: Year 1955	£ 3,925. 5. -.
Year 1956	23. 18. 2.
	£ 3,949. 3. 2.
Balance of Income on hand	39. -. -.
	£ 3,988. 3. 2.

Assets:

£4,300, 3% Savings Bonds, 1960/70	£ 3,659. 9. -.
Balance due by Bank of Scotland:	
Capital	£ 289. 14. 2.
Revenue	39. -. -.
	328. 14. 2.
	£ 3,988. 3. 2.

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE

DIRECTOR

1955 & 1956

G e n e r a l

Our 1955 season began early in May, as in the previous two years; but in 1956 we were at Fair Isle a month earlier than this, and in both years observations were maintained until mid-november.

Visitors in 1955 were fewer than in former years, student-weeks numbering only 93 as against 158 in 1954. There was an improvement in 1956 when 91 people stayed for a combined total of 127 weeks. August again proved to be by far the best month, with an average of 10 student-weeks, followed by September with 6, May and July with 3.5, June with 3, and April and October with 1 only.

In 1955, we enjoyed a return visit of the Joint Schools' Expedition which first came to Fair Isle in 1953. This comprised a party of 16 boys from two public schools, Merchant Taylors (Grosby) and Monkton Combe (Bath), in charge of Mr. Noel Wylie and Mr. Paul Witherington, the two masters who organised the earlier expedition. The party camped close to the Bird Observatory and played a full part in all our activities, in addition to doing natural history work on their own account. One student, Mr. David Hardy, came again with the two masters in 1956 for a private holiday during which he continued a study of the Lepidoptera begun in 1955.

At the invitation of the Executive Committee, Mr. H. E. Axell, Warden of the R.S.P.B. Nature Reserve at Dungeness and the Bird Observatory there, visited Fair Isle in early October 1955, along with Mr. I. J. Ferguson-Lees, the executive editor of "British Birds." Students who took advantage of facilities afforded by the Observatory in the past year were Mr. Jiro Kikkawa, a Japanese holding a scholarship from the British Council and working at the

Bureau of Animal Population, Oxford, whose special interest was the biology of the field-mouse Apodemus sylvaticus fridariensis; and a young Danish ornithologist, Miss Annie Larsen, who wished to apply our Bird Observatory techniques to migration studies on the West coast of Jutland. A team from the B.B.C. West Region Television Unit stayed for a fortnight, filming Fulmars at their nests. In the autumn, Mr. and Mrs. Noel Pritchard of the University Department of Botany at Oxford were accorded laboratory and other facilities during a week's stay for botanical collecting.

There was a brief while in early June 1956 when we hardly knew who was staying and who was not. First, a contingent of the National Trust for Scotland arrived, closely followed by a body of Zetland County Councillors, and finally a deputation representing various Government Departments and other public bodies (not to mention a sprinkling of journalists and cameramen!) Their combined business was to look over the island in preparation for a Conference on its future which took place at Lerwick on 8th June. The Earl of Wemyss and March, Chairman of the National Trust for Scotland, returned from this conference for a few days at the Bird Observatory; and Trustees who visited the isle at the same period or later in the summer were Mr. Ian Pitman, Professor M. F. M. Meiklejohn and Mr. George Waterston.

Staff. Miss Valerie M. Thom stayed at the Observatory as field-assistant throughout the 1955 season, and Mr. G. Stansfield occupied the same role in 1956. Shortly after the hostel closed in 1955, two of the domestic staff, Mr. William Eanson of Fair Isle and his fiancée, Miss Willa Wishart of Walls in Shetland, were married and left the isle to take up work on a farm in Dorset. They have settled happily and the Trust wishes them every possible success in their new life.

Social. Picture-shows, whist-drives and dances in the Coronation Hall were again a feature of both seasons,

enabling the islanders to enjoy social contact with our visitors and staff. During the autumn of 1956, the islanders secured their own cinema, and hostel visitors helped to swell the attendances there.

Acknowledgements. Relations between the Fair Isle folk and the bird-watchers continue to be most cordial, and again it is a pleasure to express our gratitude to the islanders for so readily permitting access to their crops, and helping our activities by reporting rare birds, and assisting us in many other ways.

A warm word of thanks is due to Dr. A. C. Stephen of the Royal Scottish Museum for making available for use at Fair Isle a reference collection of bird-skins.

### B r e e d i n g     B i r d s

#### (a) The Arctic Skuas

The colony increased by 11 pairs to 44 in 1955, and by a further 7 pairs to 51 in the following season. The birds had two good years, rearing 53 chicks from a total of 25 eggs laid (just over 70% success) in the first, and at least 69 young from 96 eggs (nearly 72% success) in the second.

At the close of the 1955 season, 76 of the breeding adults carried colour-rings, and of these 67 came home in 1956. Thus 9 failed to return, representing a loss to the effective breeding strength of 11.84%, - a much lower figure than the 19% obtained from a smaller sample of 35 birds in the previous year. This figure may approximate to the adult mortality between the two seasons, but this is not certain. One pale morph bird which nested in 1954, and was "missing believed dead" in 1955, turned up again in 1956 and took a new mate at the new territory not far from its original home. It remains to be seen from future observations how rare or regular a feature of Arctic Skua breeding-biology such "absenteeism" is.

Two old favourites were lost during the summer of 1955. One was the white-winged mutant ♀ which was already nesting at Fair Isle when we arrived in 1948.

her history is given in the Bulletin Vol. 3, p.50. (Her mate, incidentally, survived her by only one year, being found with a broken wing in July 1956). The other, also a ♀, broke a wing when she struck the telephone wires a few days after her young had hatched: her mate succeeded in rearing the two chicks in a normal fledging-period of 30 days.

One of the new 1955 pairs of Sukka Moor practised "injury-feigning" and other anxiety reactions whenever we visited their territory; but it is practically certain that no egg was laid, and when we placed a dummy egg in the nesting-scraps in June, the pair accepted at once. Later, we gave the pair an egg from from another skuas' nest, and they adopted and reared the chick, which fledged in 30 days. Details of this and other interesting events at the colony in 1955 are given in the Bulletin, 3: 51-56.

Analysing the state of the colony in 1956, we have the following information. The new intake comprised 26 birds, or just over 28%; 29 of the 1955 intake, or just over 28%, were home again; and 47 birds, representing 46% were individuals which first nested in 1954 or a previous year. Thus, nearly 54% of the colony consisted of young birds in their first or second breeding seasons. Of the 51 partnerships, 18 continued old-established matings, 10% preserved matings first formed in 1955; and 14% were formed by entirely new pairs. The balance of 41% were changed matings resulting from various causes, and largely involving the young intake of the previous year.

The most gratifying feature of these seasons was that 10 of the new breeding-birds carried rings which had been put upon them as nestlings in former years. Of those captured in 1955, one was from 1950 (nesting for the first time at 5 years of age), 2 were from 1951, and 2 from 1952; in the past summer, we had 2 from 1952 and 3 from 1953. The nests of the 3-year-old birds contained only single eggs in every case.



Only one of these birds, a pale morph ♀ reared by intermediate-type parents in 1952, had retained its full complement of colour-rings, and had been recognised as a non-breeder in immature plumage in 1954. Unfortunately, it failed to return to the colony in 1956. In addition to these, there have now been 9 recaptures at new nests of birds ringed as non-breeders at the Skuas' bathing-pool near the Airstrip in 1954. Details of all these are given in Bulletin 3: 115-116.

During the autumn of 1956, four of the season's crop of youngsters were reported from abroad, in Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Denmark. The first had proceeded 1,000 miles south to Asturias by August 26th, a date when many skuas were still at the isle; and another was found dead in November near the head of the Little Belt in Jutland some 50 miles from the North Sea coast (Bulletin, 3: 114).

(b) The Bonxies

The Bonxies increased their strength to 13 pairs in 1955 and 17 pairs in 1956. With 20 young reared from 26 eggs (77% nesting-success) they did better than in any previous year, and although they fared well in 1956 also, they achieved only 72% success. Curiously, the 6 new pairs taking territories in that season did rather better than the more experienced birds.

A young first-time breeder which had held territory but had not laid in 1955, and which reared two young in 1956, was a bird we had ringed as a chick on Vaasetter in the summer of 1950. For some more details of the two seasons, see Bulletin, 3: 93 and 131.

(c) The Fulmar,

A team of boys of the Joint Schools Expedition which was with us at the end of August undertook a dawn-to dusk watch of a group of Fulmars' nests, containing 30 chicks, on the cliffs at Johnny's Peats, where observations on the incubation and fledging periods had been carried out in 1953-54. The study

was designed to teach us more about the parent-young relationship towards the close of the fledging-period. The so-called "starvation-period" to which the chicks are said to be subjected by their parents in the fortnight or 3 weeks before fledging was found to have no foundation in fact. Most of the youngsters left the cliff from one to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  days after receiving their last feed, and in two cases the young were fed, and left on their maiden flights, on the same day. A short account was given in Bulletin, 3:

For the third year in succession, our "blue" x normal mating at Johnny's Peats produced a "blue" chick. In 1952, and again in 1956, the youngster was of the normal colour-phase.

(d) Other species

Snipe had been suspected of nesting on the island for four years, but no direct evidence came to hand until two half-grown chicks were found in 1954. In 1955, there were at least 2 pairs, and one nest, in Homisdale, was "discovered" by the size 10 boot of one of our visitors in July! In the same month, another nest was found at Gilsetter and this hatched successfully. Direct proof of nesting was not obtained in 1956 though birds were at Gilsetter throughout the summer.

Three pairs of Ringed Plover nested on Bunness in 1955, but only one pair in 1956. There were two pairs of Lapwings in the Thione fields in the former season, and although there were 3 pairs last year, only two raised young (Bulletin, 3: 112). The Peregrine Falcons which nest in most years, and had their eyrie on Sheep Craig in 1954, were absent in summer in 1955 and 1956. Corn-crakes, formerly common in the crofting area, were very few in 1955 and entirely absent last year.

## Migration 1955

There were interesting movements at the beginning of May, mainly of Robins and incoming summer visitors such as Willow Warblers, Redstarts and Pied flycatchers, and again during the last days of the month and the first days of June. A full report of the events of these periods has been given in Bulletin 3: 11-20. Rarities recorded were a Short-toed Lark of southern or SE European origin on May 4th; a Hudsonian Whimbrel between May 27th and 31st; and a young ♂ Red-footed Falcon from June 4th-10th.

The Hudsonian Whimbrel, Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus is the North American representative of our European Whimbrel which is a common bird of passage at Fair Isle on its way to breeding-grounds in the Faeroe Islands and Iceland. It lacks the white rump of the European bird and there are differences in the tone of colouration of the upper and under-parts, the American being cinnamon rather than dark brown in shade. It is indeed a very distinctive race, and as it spent much of its time in company with migrant parties of European Whimbrel we had many excellent opportunities for comparing the two. This was the first occasion on which the Hudsonian Whimbrel had been identified in Britain, and the first record for Europe for 80 years.

The Red-footed Falcon, Falco vespertinus, was caught on 8th June in a clap-net tastefully decorated with mealworms and dead mice! After careful examination in the laboratory it was ringed, photographed and released. This small and very handsome falcon is an inhabitant of eastern and SE Europe, and this was the first of its half-dozen Scottish occurrences to be noted at Fair Isle. (Bulletin, 3: 5).

There was an unusually big weather-movement of Curlew on July 2nd-3rd, over 100 being present on the island as a result of drift from the coast of the Low Countries in a SE airstream ahead of a North Sea

occlusion, as described in Bulletin, 3: 46.

A Greenish Warbler, Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus, the third at Fair Isle and ninth for the British Isles lived in the Gully between July 15th and 24th, and was trapped on three occasions. This Siberian species is slowly extending its range westwards into Europe, where it is now breeding in Finland and some of the Baltic States. Practically all the British records have come from the Bird Observatories as described in Bulletin, 3: 6-8, and indeed later in the summer an example spent several days on the Isle of May.

The main feature of the early autumn was a tremendous rush of Wheatears in anticyclonic weather from August 27th-29th, no fewer than 106 birds being trapped and put through the customary laboratory examination between dawn and dusk on the peak day, 28th. Strong movements of the big Greenland race, Oenanthe oe. leucorrhoa followed in early September, enabling us to achieve a record ringing total for this species of 761 birds.

There were no well-marked influxes of drift-migrants until October, but several interesting rarities turned up, such as our first Melodious Warbler, Hippolais polyglotta, - only the second appearance in Scotland of this small south European bird. The same movement brought two adult ♀ Lesser Grey Shrikes, Lanius minor, one of which we trapped at the Haa. This is another bird we have not seen since the Bird Observatory was founded in 1948, although no fewer than 7 of the 9 Scottish records come from Fair Isle. Their probable course from southern Europe to Fair Isle is discussed in Bulletin 3: 59.

At the same time, an American duck, either a Cinnamon or Blue-winged Teal, was present on the island: it was so fearless of approach that we felt sure it must be an "escape" from some waterfowl collection. A third Lesser Grey Shrike, this time a

bird of the year, was in the Gully catching-box with a Wood Pigeon for company on the morning of October 8th. This was a few days after our capture of a Red-breasted Flycatcher, Muscicapa parva, an eastern species of which no fewer than 6 were recorded in the Shetland area in the late autumn, whilst others appeared at Bird Observatories as far from Fair Isle as Portland Bill, Dorset, and Great Saltee off SE Ireland.

The highlight of the autumn migration was the Thick-billed Warbler, Phragamaticola aedon, which was caught on October 6th by means of a small net and the light-weight aluminium catching-box designed and given to the Bird Observatory by Mr H.A. Craw. Our visitors from Dungeness were suitably impressed by this timely demonstration of the "Yeoman" technique, which has had great success in the past with rare and much-coveted warblers, - Reed, Marsh, Barred Greenish and Yellow-browed, - but had not until that moment enabled us to register a species entirely new to the European fauna. For the Thick-billed Warbler, a bird the size of a Great Reed Warbler and very similar in its plumage and habits, breeds in SE. Siberia and Manchuria and winters in eastern India and Burma: and the appearance of a specimen at remote Fair Isle, 5,000 miles off its normal migration route, emphasizes the quite astonishing effects that down-wind drift in adverse weather may have. A full report of this unique occurrence is given in the Bulletin, 3:3-4.

There were two Yellow-browed Warblers, Phylloscopus inornatus (also a Siberian species) shortly afterwards, and Short-toed Larks, Calandrella cinerea, were in the root-crops on October 20th, November 14th and November 27th. The mid-November bird belonged to the south European race Brachydactyla whereas the others had greyer plumage suggesting affinity with the eastern race longipennis, which is the more usual at Fair Isle in autumn.

The main Redwing immigration took place on October 5th, the usual smaller movements of the darker Icelandic birds, Turdus m. coburni, following later in the month. After an early movement between October 19th and 21st, and minor influxes on 23rd and 31st, the immigration of winter-visiting Blackbirds failed us, and our total trapped - despite the new ditch-traps awaiting them - was the poorest of any year since 1949. There was a trickle of Northern Bullfinches, mostly bright-coloured ♂♂, through Shetland and Fair Isle in late October and November, and other interesting visitors at this period were Great Grey Shrikes, Waxwings and a Black Redstart.

The autumn entry of Greenland Redpolls, Carduelis flammea rostrata, was unusually strong and protracted, lasting from August 26th until December 5th, with a flock of 30 in anticyclonic weather on November 15th, the biggest number seen on Fair Isle at any one time. In mid-September, the irruption was more marked at Foula, 45 miles to the NW, where over 100 are said to have been present on some days. We trapped and ringed 21 of these charming birds - more than in all previous seasons - and one ringed by Mr C.K. Mylne on Foula was caught a month later in Unst, the northernmost of the Shetland Isles.

On the other hand, there was practically no passage of Lapland Buntings from the same source, although a few individuals were seen on Foula and Fair Isle; and Icelandic Merlins, Falco columbarius subaeson, were also unusually scarce, so that we captured only 2 birds as against a dozen in most years.

There was an interesting passage in mid-October, and again on two days towards the end of the month, in a system of north winds flowing down from Spitzbergen and NE Greenland. It was composed mainly of geese, especially Barnacles, Branta leucopsis, which we have not previously seen about Fair Isle in flocks. Mixed flocks of Greater Black-back and Glaucous Gulls were also concerned, and small parties of marine ducks such as the Red-breasted Merganser and Long-tailed Duck.

## M i g r a t i o n     1 9 5 6

A long anticyclonic spell at the close of March and early in April got many birds on the move, and a big passage of Rooks, Lapwings, Skylarks and Blackbirds developed. The first Wheatear appeared on 28th and a Black-bellied Dipper haunted the Gully burn and waterfall from 29th until April 5th. There was a good Blackbird recapture on March 28th, an adult ♀ first ringed during a rush of this species on October 19th 1955: doubtless it had wintered at the isle, and it looks as though we got it both on the way in, and on the way out ! Between these two occasions it had increased its weight by 20% in 23 weeks to scale 110 gm

I personally got off to a brilliant start by failing to see a ♂ Snowy Owl on April 17th and a Rough-legged Buzzard next day. Apart from Wheatears, no summer visitors arrived before 24th-25th, when the first Redstart, Willow Warbler, Tree Pipit and Cuckoo appeared. The first few days of May, the 10th, and the beginning and end of the fourth week were times of passage which never amounted to more than a mere trickle, and the spring passed by without any of the exciting and enjoyable "falls" we have witnessed in previous years.

Near the end of May, two rare waders provided a full measure of delight. The first was a Curlew Sandpiper in "red" breeding plumage, lord and master of a Dunlin flock on the Leestat shore from May 24th to 26th, - the first of its kind to be noticed in the spring. The other was an American visitor first found on May 27th (the anniversary of our Hudsonian Curlew of 1955), again with Dunlins and other small waders on a south-side beach. After an hour's close watch on May 28th, we decided this must be either a Western or Semipalmated Sandpiper, and that afternoon, after setting a Japanese mist-net in its favourite feeding-area, we caught it and were able to identify it in the laboratory as a Semi-palmated, the first Scottish and third British record.

The most satisfactory feature of the spring was

the prolonged and often heavy passage of Wheatears, especially of birds bound for Greenland and Iceland, and some excellent trapping days gave us a total of over 200 ringed by the time the migration ceased in mid-June. April 19th-20th were busy days, marking the settling-in of much of the local stock and the passage of Shetland birds; also May 4th-8th, with the first wave of Greenland Wheatears and the intermediate kind called Oenanthe oe. schioleri, bound presumably for Faeroe and Iceland. The biggest Wheatears we have yet handled, a ♂ and ♀ each weighing over 41 gm., were trapped on May 5th. From May 19th to 22nd good "bags" were almost exclusively of these big birds, but one of the typical race ringed early on 19th died on board a trawler 300 miles to the NW., some way past the Faeroe Islands, on the afternoon of 22nd, having doubtless lost its way in the sea-mists which were prevalent at this time. Analysis of the age/sex groups in the samples trapped shows that in both local and NW. groups adult ♂♂ tend to precede 1st year ♂♂, with ♀♀ following somewhat later; whilst a comparable age/sex distribution in the NW. birds was attained a fortnight later than in the local stock.

Icterine Warbler, Grey-headed and Blue-headed Wagtails, Black Redstart, Red-spotted Bluethroat and Ortolan Bunting were interesting spring "sub-rarities", and a Pink-footed Goose which paid the price for a late migration had been ringed on the Solway on October 26th 1954 by the Wildfowl Trust. (It was unfortunate in being the first bit of fresh food to arrive at the island for 17 days, - a period when first a 'flu epidemic, followed by stormy seas, kept "The Good Shepherd" bound to the isle).

We had two Turtle Doves "off-passage" between the end of May and early July, each spending 17 days on the island; and the later one kept company with a lost homing-pigeon at the Bird Observatory, often feeding beside it on grain and bread-crumbs put on the kitchen window-sill. A Dotterel appeared on June 23rd, and an even rarer visitor was seen on the same day, an immature



Long-tailed Skua - the first recorded for the Isle. A handsome Long-tailed Drake in full breeding-dress spent 15 days in North Haven from the beginning of July.

As in 1955, there was a midsummer migration of Curlew in early July, though it was not on the same large scale. There were two distinct waves with SE. weather ahead of fronts stretching from Orkney across the North Sea to the Dutch coast. One of two Merlins, Kestrels and Peregrines also appeared under these conditions, which were very similar to those which brought our midsummer influx in 1955.

One other feature of the summer needs to be mentioned, an irruption of Crossbills which began on July 1st with a party of 5 ♀♀ and peaked next day with about 200 birds. They decreased gradually through ca. 80 on 5th and 50 on 9th to a score or so between 10th and 14th. There was no follow-up of this movement which was quite widespread (records came from places as far apart as Faero and the Isle of Man), until the autumn migration was well under way. Ten appeared on August 29th, to be followed by a dozen on September 4th, and a final influx of 10 on September 8th. The main body in July stuck to the higher reach of Ward Hill, and only 4 were trapped. Another irruption species which made brief appearances in the autumn was the Pied Woodpecker, individuals being seen on August 25th and Oct. 8th and 24th.

Marsh, Reed and Aquatic Warblers were trapped between the shortest day, June 21st, and the wettest, August 11th. Late August was good, the usual passerines appearing with a sprinkling of uncommon waders such as Wood Sandpiper, Ruff, Spotted Redshank and Little Stint.

This migration became (in Swedish parlance) an "avalanche" when an occluded front crossed the Skagerrak on the morning of September 4th, the E.NE. wind suddenly veering to SE. as the rainbelt passed across the isle. We were deluged with Whinchats, Redstarts, and Willow Warblers, which began to arrive about 10 a.m. and increased phenomenally during the day. A party of a dozen Crossbills were seen arriving off the sea, and

and soon afterwards large numbers of Tree Pipits were heard coming in. There were smaller numbers of Garden Warblers, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, a few Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats, House Martins and Wood Sandpipers. The first Bluethroat of the autumn appeared - a most tantalising sight, as the bird had a ring and there was no way of catching it! - and we found an Ortolan and a handsome ♂ Grey-headed Wagtail.

The Redstarts were everywhere, and much more evenly distributed than the Whinchats, which tended to concentrate in the oats and along the wire fences. In and about one small cornfield, in addition to untold Willow Warblers and a few chiffchaffs, were no fewer than 35 Whinchats, mostly clinging to the ears of corn. It was a fantastic sight, and this and similar experiences in other parts made nonsense of any attempt to estimate the number of birds on the isle. There must have been many hundreds of Redstarts, small warblers and flycatchers along the 4-mile stretch of the western cliffs, besides a vast overspill on to the hill ground, of which we were able to "mop up" a small tithe by frequent rounds of the traps.

All these species were just as common next day, and to complicate matters still further, a rush of small Continental Wheatears developed. Ortolan Buntings increased, and on 6th so did the Red-Spotted Bluethroats. On the afternoon of 7th we caught 4 in a Japanese mist-net inside half-an-hour, and that day there were one or two Bluethroats to every "rigg." September 5th was a record trapping day for the Observatory with 153 birds (after 101 on the previous day), and during the week of this immense movement we weighed, measured and ringed 504 birds. The period had several noteworthy features: first, the scarcity of Barred Warblers in comparison with their abundance in 1954-55; secondly, diurnal passage of flycatchers out of Shetland, reaching Fair Isle in mid-afternoon; thirdly, a continuing steady decrease in numbers late in the period, despite bad visibility due to the prevalence of fog and drizzle in stable anti-

cyclonic air.

Towards the end of the month, we got the rarities which seem to be inseparable from a migration period at Fair Isle. The first was a Dominican Plover on September 14th which the observers are satisfied belonged to the American race, Charadrius d. dominicus. Yellow-browed Warblers were trapped in the Gully on September 18th and at dusk on 27th; a small passage of 1st winter Chiffchaffs of the race Phylloscopus collybita abietinus - 'unique in our 8 years' experience' - occurred between 23rd - 25th and on 28th; and a small pale Lapland Bunting of eastern origin was trapped on 22nd, no doubt a stray from the vast influx of this species which entered the south and SE. of Britain then and later in the autumn.

Also on September 21st we got an addition to the British list in the form of a bird variously known as Bogdanoff's Shrike, Grimm's Grey Shrike or the Steppe Shrike, Lanius excubitor pallidirostris. It is a desert bird inhabiting the region between the Caspian and Aral Seas and the river-courses beyond as far east as Bokara and Tashkent; and although it enters Europe as a breeding bird at the Volga some 60-90 miles north of Astrakhan, there is only one previous record for the west, at Utsira in south Norway on September 5th 1953. The bird was trapped and a full description made, and colour-photographs were taken before it was released.

A small streaked Locustella trapped at the Haa on October 2nd proved to be a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, L. certhiola, - the third for Britain and second for Fair Isle (Bulletin, 3: 130). Late in October, an adult ♂ Iceland Snow Bunting, Plectrophenax nivalis insulae, was captured, and two Black Redstarts and a Great Grey Shrike were seen, and a Siberian Chiffchaff Ph. c. tristis was trapped.

October was a month of recurrent west and NW. gales, but for once the scarcity of Blackbirds and other Continental species (the Fieldfare was a comparatively rare bird) did not seem to matter very much,

for an invasion of Iceland Redwings Turdus m. corburni took place on a tremendous scale. Thousands must have passed through to Scotland, in one minor (October 12th) and two major waves (18th-19th and 23rd-24th), in each case riding the edge of depressions between Iceland and Norway.

The trapping revealed an intriguing behaviour difference between this race and the Scandinavian one, for the newly-arrived flocks showed a remarkable fixation for the long dry-stone wall which runs NE.-SW. across the moor towards the village, and there can be little doubt that they regarded this wall as a miniature "guiding-line." We had catches of up to 18 birds at a time in the Double-Dyke Trap, a feat one could never hope to repeat with Continental birds, as they show no attraction whatsoever to the walls. Moderate influxes of Continental Redwings alternated with the coburni rushes, especially late in the month with cold weather between Shetland and S.W. Norway. Our normal Redwing catch is slightly under or over the hundred, with about 20% Iceland birds; but in 1956 we ringed 333 Redwings of which over 200 were coburni.

## T h e     T r a p s

The Double Dyke Trap, which had been completely wrecked by the winter gales of 1954-55, was rebuilt in the following June by an island working-party, using a firm framework of old telegraph poles uprooted from the disused line on the Sukka Moor. We are grateful to the British Trust for Ornithology for a grant of £25 towards the cost of reconstruction, and to the G.P.O. for making these disused poles available for our purpose.

A new "Single Dyke" type of trap was built over the wall which runs eastwards to Vaasetter from the Gilsetter field. It was christened the "Joint Schools" in honour of the boys of the Joint Schools Exhibition whose enthusiastic labours completed it just in time

for the big Wheatear rush of August 27th-28th, when it accounted for 51 of the birds caught. It played a big part in the 1956 trapping, and in August the two masters who had led the Expedition helped us to convert it to a "Double-Dyke."

Another casualty of the winter storms was the trap in the little glen of Vaadal, the weight of snow accumulating on the roof causing this to collapse. A new trap was made in a more approachable situation lower down the glen, the roof-netting being supported by steel cables expertly spliced by Mr. Tom Henderson. The last bird caught in the ruins of the old trap was a Cormorant (our first!), and almost the first bird to be missed in the new one was a Pink-footed Goose! Its record since has been convincing proof that the new "Vaadal" is a distinct improvement on the old.

With wire-netting salvaged from the old trap, two new "ditch" Traps were made, one (which has since proved highly efficient) a two-way trap of new experimental design. A third ditch-trap christened "The Bluethroat" in honour of its first captive, was built on Vaasetter in autumn 1956, Mr. H. E. Axell, the Warden of Dungeness Bird Observatory, left us a useful memento of his visit in the form of a "Crow Trap" close to the Observatory buildings. Strangely enough, one of its early captures was a young Rook, the first "crow" we have ringed on the island. The Mill Trap which had never been a success, was demolished in 1956 to provide spars and netting for enlarging the "Joint Schools."

### R i n g i n g

The seasons' totals were 2,478 birds of 82 species in 1955, and 3,313 birds of 81 species in 1956. That of 1955 was better than was expected in view of the uselessness of the Double Dyke and Vaadal traps in the spring, and the 1956 total was more than 1,000 better than our average over the past 7 years.

TABLE 1

Totals of Birds Ringed at Fair Isle

<u>Season</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Number of Species</u>
1948	288	38
1949	1,505	63
1950	2,366	74
1951	2,236	77
1952	1,933	74
1953	2,552	80
1954	2,367	75
1955	2,478	82
1956	3,313	81

Grand Total 19,038 birds of 140 different species.

1955 The top scorers were Wheatear 761, Rock Pipit 222, Starling 198, Meadow Pipit 187, Blackbird 180, Arctic Skua 101, Redwing 98 and Twite 73. Novelties were the Thick-billed Warbler, Red-footed Falcon, Melodious Warbler, Lesser Grey Shrikes, Rook, Cormorant, Bar-tailed Godwit and Black-headed Gull. Other rare birds included Greenish Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Reed Warblers, Siberian Chiffchaff, Turtle Dove and ♂ Northern Bullfinch. For the second year in succession, 8 Barred Warblers were ringed and, as already mentioned, 21 Greenland Redpolls resulted from the autumn invasion of this species.

1956. Wheatears again scored heavily with 896 followed by Meadow Pipit 366, Rock Pipit 344, Starling 341, Redwing 333, Blackbird 151, Redstart 142, Arctic Skua 91, Willow Warbler 87 and Twite 85. Novelties were Wigeon, Red-breasted Merganser, Little Stint, Semipalmated Sandpiper, House Martin, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Aquatic Warbler and the Steppe Shrike. This year we caught only a single Barred Warbler and only 2 Greenland Redpolls. Better than usual were 43 Garden Warblers and 30 each of Whinchat and Pied Flycatcher; and perhaps 11 Merlins, 9 Bluethroats and 2 Yellow-browed Warblers are worthy of mention.

## Recoveries

An adult ♂ Cuckoo trapped late on May 6th 1955 was at Bergen in Norway on May 8th, having made a North-Sea crossing of 280 miles during a fine spell of anticyclonic weather.

Six of a party of 11 Northern Dunlins were caught with the "Yeoman" technique at Easter Lothar Water on August 13th 1955, and one was recovered a month later 1,050 miles south in the Gironde..

A ♂ Swallow which we took at its roost at North Haven on July 6th 1953, was re-captured, for the second year running, at a nest at Reay, near Thurso, Caithness, by Mr. James Gunn.

Foreign Meadow Pipit recoveries were increased to 11 by reports of migrating birds from SW. France, Spain and Morocco.

Five Wheatears, ringed during the 1955 season were reported at various stages of their autumn migration, though strangely none belonged to the late August rush when so many birds were ringed. They were from Nethybridge, Inverness-shire (August 25th, - 175 miles in four days); Stone, Staffordshire (September 3rd - 460 miles); Vera de Moncaya, Zaragoza, Spain (September 24th, - 1,280 miles); Azuaga, Badajoz, Spain (October 9th, - 1,530 miles); and Campillos, Malaga, Spain (early October, - 1,650 miles). Of the greater number ringed in 1956, only two were recovered on autumn migration, one at Landes, France, on August 28th - our earliest foreign recovery so far, - and the other at Beachy Head Lighthouse, Sussex, during fog early in September 10th. An interesting return from a spring migrant, on board a trawler in the Faeroes area, has already been mentioned.

The only bird of the great September rush of 1956 so far reported was a Whinchat which was found injured at Petersfield in Hampshire on October 10th. It is our first Whinchat recovery out of 99 ringed.

Among several Blackbird recoveries is one from

Hammar Ogndal in Nord-Trondelag, Norway: this, at 520 miles NE. of Fair Isle, is the farthest distant of any of our 17 Norwegian records.

A ♀ Snow Bunting caught in one of the new Ditch Traps on October 31st 1955 was re-trapped on several occasions in January and February 1956 out of a large wintering flock of over 500 birds at Spurn Bird Observatory in Yorkshire, some 415 miles farther south.

An Iceland Redwing which passed through Fair Isle on October 16th, 1955, was found dead at Tralee, Co. Kerry, on November 15th, 1956.

A drift-migrant ♂ Merlin of the Continental race caught on August 28th, 1956, and shot at Halen, Limburg, Belgium, about October 20th, had re-crossed the North Sea to an area within the normal wintering-range of its race.

All 4 of the autumn migrant Sparrow-hawks ringed in 1955 have now been recovered, one at St. Jean-sur-Mayenne, Laval, France, 800 miles south on December 26th; two others in winter in Scotland; and the fourth at the North Sea island of Heligoland on its spring migration north. They bring our Sparrow-hawk returns to over 30%.

A Starling, mist-netted in mid-September, 1956, had been first ringed on Christmas Day of 1943, and another 8-year-old and a 7-year old were re-captured during the season. Other Starlings were reported from Orkney and Aberdeenshire, the last at the height of the breeding-season. For other recoveries, see the Bulletin, 3: 94-96, 114-116, 133, and 145-148.



Table 2.

Recoveries of Birds Ringed at Fair Isle

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark	Germany	Holland	Belgium	France	Portugal	Spain	Angola	Faeroe Is.	Newfoundland	England/Wales	Ireland	Scotland	Orkney	Shetland	Fair Isle	Total rec'd	Total Ringed	Approx. percentage.
Shag													1						1	69	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
Teal													1			1			1	2	50
Sparrowhawk				1	1		2						1		3				8	30	26 $\frac{1}{2}$
Kestrel								1											1	4	25
Merlin					2		1								3		1		7	64	11
Corncrake															1				1	6	16 $\frac{3}{4}$
Water Rail																1			1	55	2
Oystercatcher							2						1	2	3	1			9	189	4 $\frac{3}{4}$
Woodcock															2				2	25	8
Snipe													1						1	19	5
Dunlin							1												1	20	5
L.B.B. Gull							1												1	42	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
Herring Gull															1			1	2	78	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
Glaucous Gull											1								1	2	50
B.H. Gull																1			1	30	3 $\frac{1}{4}$
Kittiwake												1							1	10	10
Bonxie										1								1	2	116	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
Arctic Skua		2			2			1	1	1			1			1		11	20	465	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
Puffin													1					1	2	285	1 $\frac{1}{2}$
Tystie													1					1	2	45	4
Cuckoo	1																		1	16	6 $\frac{1}{4}$
Long-eared Owl	1																		1	11	10
Skylark															1				1	112	1
Swallow															1				1	17	6
Song Thrush			2				1		2				1						6	117	5 $\frac{1}{2}$
Redwing		1			2	1		1						1					6	958	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
Blackbird	19	3	5	1									2	9	9	1	2		51	2456	2
Wheatear							2	2	4		1		2		1		1	13	30	3761	
Whinchat													1						1	99	1
Blackcap																1			1	100	1

Table 2. (contd.)

Recoveries of Birds Ringed at Fair Isle

	Norway	Holland	Belgium	France	Spain	Morocco	Italy	U.S.S.R.	North Sea	England/Wales	Ireland	Scotland	Orkney	Shetland	Fair Isle	Total rec'd	Total ringed	Approx. percentage.
Meadow Pipit		1	1	3	5	1										4	15	1104
Rock Pipit											3	1	1			9	13	1204
Grey Wagtail													1				1	4
White Wagtail									1								1	25
Starling	2							1	1	1	2	6	4		24	41	2179	1
Twite								1				1			4	6	808	
Crossbill							1									1	114	1
Snow Bunting										1						1	38	21
Greenland Redpoll														1		1	35	21

FAIR ISLE recoveries and re-captures are included only if there is a lapse of 3 years between marking and recovery. The Newfoundland KITTIWAKE was ringed by James Wilson in 1939. BLACK-HEADED GULLS were ringed at Spiggie-Brow Marsh, Dunrossness, with F. I. rings. GREENLAND REDPOLL ringed on Foula by C. K. Mylne.

E c t o p a r a s i t e s

Mallophaga. Feather-lice were collected from 22 host-species in 1955 and a smaller collection was also made in 1956. They were identified by Miss Theresa Clay, to whom we are grateful for this service, and the material is now in the British Museum of Natural History. An undescribed species belonging to the genus Colpocephalum was taken from the Red-footed Falcon.

Fleas. The collection of bird-fleas during the two years again added materially to the existing knowledge of

the habits and host-distribution of the three commoner species. A summary of the 1955 records appeared in the Bulletin, 3: 103-105, and Mr. G. Stansfield will report on those collected in 1956. Again, our best thanks are due to the Hon. Miriam Rothschild for identification of the 1955 material.

Flat-flies. Study of the Hippoboscoid fly Ornithomya fringillina, which has been a feature of the work at Fair Isle during the past 5 years, was continued. Mr. Gordon Corbet, who has had a leading part in this research, was again on the island for this purpose for a fortnight in July 1955. Flat-flies were collected from 15 migrants, and included two specimens of O. avicularia from Redwing and Blackbird in mid-October, and a single example of Lynchia falcinelli from a Tree Pipit on May 14th. This is a little-known African species and seems not to have been recorded in Europe before. According to Dr. Bequaert of Harvard University, who identified the specimen, it has been found on shrikes in Tunis.

In 1955, we concentrated on making a complete collection of the flies infesting young Starlings, in order to gain more data concerning the phoresy of mites and Mallophaga and their seasonal incidence on the flies. Mr. Corbet has made a parallel study of the results of a similar examination of Starlings trapped by Mr. Robert Spencer and his helpers at an Essex Sewage-farm, and some important regional differences have been revealed. During his stay on the island, 161 flies were colour-marked and released with a view to determining their efficiency in finding a new host: 7 of them were recovered from birds trapped on the day of release, the shortest period recorded being 1 hour 20 minutes for a fly which attached itself to a Twite. A full report on the season's work in this field is given by Mr. Corbet in Bulletin, 3: 97-100.

## Entomological

A mercury vapour Moth Trap was used in the late summer and early autumn of 1955 in an attempt to find some correlation between bird and insect drift-movements. A few migrant moths, particularly the Silver Y, Plusia gamma, were captured, but the results were rather disappointing, due largely to the fact that the type of weather which results in good falls of birds effectively prevents the moths from flying! Some correlation was obtained, nevertheless, especially with a combined bird-insect movement on August 24th - 25th extending from Great Saltee in the Irish Sea northwards to Canna in the Hebrides, and ultimately to Fair Isle, and a note on this interesting period appears in the Bulletin, 3: 106-108. Among the local moths captured were specimens of the beautiful dark form, var edda of the Autumnal Rustic, Amathes glareosa, along with typical examples of this species, and only a few intermediates. The dark Shetland variety of the Northern Rustic, Ammogratis lucerneae, also occurred abundantly. Mr. David Hardy, a member of the Joint Schools Expedition in 1955, was energetic in this field and returned to make further observations in 1956.

## SUB - STATIONS

Foula. Mr. C. K. Mylne again kept a record of the spring migration at Foula, 45 miles NW. of Fair Isle. Unfortunately, he was obliged to give up his post as Missionary and School Teacher there for health reasons and in consequence the autumn passage was only partially covered. The most interesting spring migrants were a Woodchat Shrike on May 28th and a Nightjar on June 10th 1955.

The feature of the autumn was the big invasion of Greenland Redpolls, and one ringed by Mr. Mylne on September 16th 1955 was caught at the lighted window of a house at Uyeasound, Unst, 50 miles NE., on the

night of October 12th. There was a party of 10 Lapland Buntings on September 16th and other rarities including a Barred Warbler, Scarlet Grosbeak and Red-breasted Flycatcher. Mr. Mylne made a brief return to the isle in August 1956, when a Lesser Grey Shrike was seen, and accounts of the observations there over the two years are contained in the Bulletin, 3: 9-10, 62-64 (1955) and 157-158 (1956.)

Spiggie. In the spring of 1955, Mr. Tom Henderson agreed to maintain, with the help of visitors to his hotel (many of whom are "passage-migrants" en route to and from Fair Isle) a "Migration Schedule" and "Log" similar to the records kept at the Bird Observatories. These records proved most interesting and valuable for comparison with our own. In the spring of that year, the most exciting migrants all fell in the late May and early June period - an Osprey, Stone Curlew, two Golden Orioles, Woodlark and ♂ Scarlet Grosbeak. Two Black-tailed Godwits and two Ruffs, all in full breeding-dress, came with the Curlew invasion at the beginning of July, and the best birds of autumn were an American Stint, Calidris minutilla, at the Pool of Virkie on August 15th, and a Harlequin ♀, Histrionicus histrionicus, at the same place in mid-October.

In the early autumn of 1956, Mr. and Mrs. L. S. V. Venables, on a return visit to Shetland, kept us well informed of ornithological happenings there, and in both seasons much useful information came from Mr. G. T. Kay and Mr. John Peterson of Lerwick. Mr. Magnus Sinclair has continued to send in notes from the northermost isle, Unst. Records are given in detail in the Bulletin.

During 1956, a close liaison was kept with Mr. Ivor McLean, a meteorologist on the staff of the Marine Branch of the Meteorological Office, and a paper is in preparation analysing his observations made from the weather-ships.

## P u b l i c a t i o n s

The Bulletin. Volume 2 of the Bulletin was completed with the issue of No.7 in May 1955. The first two issues of volume 3 were published in January and May 1956, whilst No. 3 was delayed until February 1957. Owing to the high cost of production, it is no longer possible to issue the Bulletin as often as before.

The Bulletin continues to range widely over the Bird Observatory field and has given detailed reports of events at many points other than Fair Isle and in the Shetland area. Among these places are Great Saltee (SE Ireland), Blaavandshuk (Denmark), Portland Bill (Dorset), Coll (Inner Hebrides), St. Kilda, and the Butt of Lewis (Outer Hebrides). It is issued gratis to all "Friends of Fair Isle," and as an exchange to the British Bird Observatories and many libraries and scientific institutions in this country, Europe, North America and Australasia. Complete sets of volume 2 are still available, and also a number of reprints of papers dealing with the Trust's work at Fair Isle.

Papers and Notes. The following notes and papers dealing with bird-migration problems, rare vagrants at Fair Isle, and other aspects of the work of the Observatory have appeared in scientific journals in 1955-56:

BUTTERFIELD, Alec. and K. WILLIAMSON

"The passage of Black Terns through Britain in Autumn 1954." Brit. Birds, 48: 300-307, and 49: 190-192.

HARDY, David

"The Lepidoptera of Fair Isle."  
Entomologist, 89: 261-269.

CORBET, Gordon

"The phoresy of Mallophaga on a population of *Ornithomya fringillina* Curtis (Dipt., Hippoboscidae)."

Ent. Monthly Mag., xcii, 207-211.

"The life-history and host relations of a Hippoboscid fly *Ornithomya fringillina* Curtis."

Jour. Animal Ecology, 25: 403-420.

RICHMOND, W. K. and K. WILLIAMSON

"American birds in Scotland - drift or assisted passage?"

A discussion in Scot. Nat., 66: 197-204.

RUSK, Dr. Maeve, and Miss I. M. N. RYAN

"Harlequin Duck in Shetland."

Brit. Birds, 49: 36-37.

THOM, Mrs. Agnes M.

"Birds of a trans-Atlantic crossing in late spring, 1954." Brit. Birds, 49: 80-84.

WILLIAMSON, Kenneth

"Migrational drift." Acta Cong. Internat.

Ornithologici, (1954), pp.179-186.

"A synoptic study of the 1953 Crossbill irruption."

Scot. Nat., 66: 155-169.

"The Yellow-headed Wagtails on Fair Isle: a new British bird."

Brit. Birds, 48: 26-29, plates II and 8.

"Arctic Warbler trapped at Fair Isle."

Brit. Birds, 48: 132-133.

"Bird Migration," Agriculture, 62: 278-282.

"Migrational drift and the Yellow Wagtail Complex."

Brit. Birds, 48: 382-403.

"Short-toed Lark at Fair Isle."

Brit. Birds, 48: 512-513.

"Nomenclature and Northern Chiffchaffs."

Brit. Birds, 48: 551-552.

Article on BIRD OBSERVATORIES in Encyclopedia of British Birds (ed. L. Koch), London.

"Unusual Yellow Wagtail in Shetland."

Brit. Birds, 49: 45-46.

"Birds and Lepidoptera in anticyclonic airstreams."

Entomol. Record, 68: 95-97.

"Melodious Warbler and Lesser Grey Shrikes at Fair Isle." Brit. Birds, 49: 94-96.

- "A useful field-character of the Icterine Warbler."  
Brit. Birds, 49: 119-120.
- "The Guillemots of Ailsa Craig."  
Brit. Birds, 49: 187-188.
- Article on DISTRACTION DISPLAYS in The Ornithologists' Guide (British Ornithologists' Union, 1956), London.
- "The interpretation of variation among the Yellow Wagtails."  
Brit. Birds, 49: 505-508.
- "The autumn immigration of the Greenland Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea rostrata* (Coues) into Scotland."  
Dansk Orn. Foren. Tidsskr., 50: 125-133.
- "The Bonxies of Fair Isle." Bird Notes.
- WILLIAMSON, K., and H. A. CRAW  
"The calls of Short-toed Larks at Fair Isle."  
Brit. Birds, 48: 457-458.
- WILLIAMSON, K., and Peter DAVIS  
"The autumn 1953 invasion of Lapland Buntings and its source."  
Brit. Birds, 49: 6-25.
- WILLIAMSON, K., and I. J. FERGUSON-LEES  
"Plumage and structural characters in the Yellow-headed Wagtail." Brit. Birds 48: 358-362.
- WILLIAMSON, K., and Arne NORREVANG  
"Dansk Brevdue (*Columba livia domestica* L.) pa Fair Isle."  
Dansk Orn. Foren. Tidsskr., 50: 160-161.
- WILLIAMSON, K., and C. Eric PALMAR  
"The Aberdeenshire record of a White-throated Sparrow." Brit. Birds, 48: 189-190
- WILLIAMSON, K., and Valerie M. THOM  
"Hudsonian Whimbrel at Fair Isle."  
Brit. Birds, 48: 379-381.
- "Red-footed Falcon at Fair Isle."  
Brit. Birds, 48: 542-543.
- "Greenish Warbler at Fair Isle."  
Brit. Birds, 49: 42-43.



WILLIAMSON, K., Valerie M. THOM, I. J. FERGUSON-LEES & H. E. AXELL.

"Thick-billed Warbler at Fair Isle: a new British Bird."  
British Birds, 49: 89-93.

An analytical study by R. K. CORNWALLIS of "The Pattern of Migration in 1954 at the east coast bird observatories" in Brit. Birds, 48: 429-446, makes use of a large number of the season's observations at Fair Isle, and continues an examination begun in 1953. A similar analysis of the 1955 migration is in press.

Recently, the Hon. Miriam ROTHSCILD has published important contributions to the study of bird-fleas in the Transactions of the Royal Entomological Society of London (pp. 296-317), which embody the results of her research on the material collected at Fair Isle.

Among papers in press are one on the botany of Fair Isle by Mr. Noel PRITCHARD (Proceedings of the Botanical Society of Great Britain); "The ecological distribution of the Fair Isle field-mouse in the spring of 1956," by Mr. Jiro KIKKAWA (Oikos); "Migrants at North Atlantic Weather-ships in 1956," by Mr. Ivor McLEAN and the Director (The Marine Observer); and "The annual post-nuptial molt in the Wheatear," by the Director (Bird Banding).

"The Birds and Mammals of Shetland," by L. S. V. and U. M. VENABLES, published by Oliver and Boyd (Edinburgh), contains many incidental references to ornithological events including bird-ringing recoveries, at Fair Isle. This excellent faunistic work on the Shetland region has been reviewed by the Director in the Bulletin, 3: 47-48, and British Birds, 49: 183-186.

The Director was elected a Corresponding Member of the Dansk Ornithologiske Forening at this society's 50th Anniversary meeting in October 1956. He has taken part in several broadcasts during the two years under review, including talks in the Third Programme on March 31st and July 19th 1956 concerning the depopulation problem on the small islands, with special reference to Fair Isle.

## FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

**The Work of the Observatory.**—The purpose of the Bird Observatory is to provide facilities for visitors to carry out scientific research on the island, not only in the sphere of ornithology, but in every aspect of Natural History. Work will be mainly concentrated however on ornithology under the supervision of the Warden.

**The Hostel.**—The Hostel has accommodation for fourteen observers. It is sited at the North Haven, the main landing place, and consists of a group of well constructed timber buildings formerly occupied by the Royal Navy.

**Terms.**—Accommodation is organised on hostel lines, but meals are provided. Visitors look after their own bedrooms and assist with washing dishes after meals. Blankets and pillows are provided; but visitors are asked where possible to bring their own pillow slips, sheets or sleeping bags, towels, and soap.

Charges for board and accommodation are as follows :—

(a) Inclusive of provision of sheets etc. ....	£1 per night
(b) As (a) for persons under 21 years of age or under-graduates ....	17s. per night
(c) Exclusive of sheets and pillow slips ....	18s. per night
(d) As (c) for persons under 21 years of age or under-graduates ....	15s. per night

The above terms include use of bicycles, bird-rings, the library, and laboratory, but do not include hire of motor transport or small boats while staying on the island.

**Catering.**—Breakfast is served at 8.30 a.m.; Lunch at 1 p.m.; and Supper at 6.30 p.m. Facilities for early morning and late evening refreshments are provided in the Hostel Common-Room. Packed lunches may also be made available.

**Bookings.**—The Hostel will be open for visitors between 1st May and 31st October. Priority in bookings is given to *bona fide* naturalists prepared to take part in the scientific work of the Observatory under the leadership of the Warden. We wish to stress however that anyone interested in island life is made warmly welcome. The main migration months are May, September, and October, and visitors not so keenly interested in this are asked to come where possible during the mid-summer months.

Application should be made as follows :—

- (a) If made between 31st October and 30th April: To the Hon. Secretary, Mr George Waterston, 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, 2. (Tel: 34872).
- (b) If made between 1st May and 31st October: To the Warden, Mr Peter Davis, Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland. (Tel: Fair Isle 8).

A deposit of £1 per head per week must be made before final acceptance is given. This is forfeited if the booking is subsequently cancelled and the place remains unfilled; otherwise it is credited to the bill for accommodation.

**Prospectus.**—Giving details of transport to and from Fair Isle, and other information will be sent on application.

**Publications.**—The Trust publishes an *Annual Report* which is sent to all subscribers. *Bulletins* are also published at regular intervals and are obtainable free by subscribers who indicate they wish to have them.

