

# Fair Isle Bird Observatory

## REPORT

1961



*PETER E. DAVIS*

*Warden*

---

PRICE 5/-

# Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

---

## Trustees

Dr James W. Campbell; Dr John Berry; Mr A. G. S. Bryson; Dr F. Fraser Darling; Mr James Fisher; Col. W. M. Logan Home; Cmdr. Sir G. Hughes-Onslow, R.N.; Mr G. T. Kay; Professor M. F. M. Meiklejohn; Col. R. Meinertzhagen; Mr E. M. Nicholson; Mr Peter Scott; Dr A. C. Stephen; Sir A. Landsborough Thomson; Professor V. C. Wynne-Edwards.

*Chairman* :— Sir Arthur B. Duncan.

*Hon. Secretary* :—Mr George Waterston, 21 Regent Terr., Edinburgh 7.

*Hon. Treasurer* :—Mr Ian R. Pitman, 48 Castle Street, Edinburgh 2.

---

*Warden* :—Mr Peter E. Davis, The Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland.  
(Tel. : Fair Isle 8).

---

*Solicitors* :—J. & F. Anderson, W.S., 48 Castle Street, Edinburgh 2.

*Auditors* :—Lindsay, Jamieson and Haldane, C.A., 24 St Andrew Square, Edinburgh.

*Bankers* :—The Bank of Scotland, 64 George Street, Edinburgh, 2.

---

**ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION — “Friend of Fair Isle” — ONE GUINEA.**

*Please support by Donation or Legacy—*

## THE FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY ENDOWMENT FUND.

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 Protection in general.

Capital subscribed to the Fund will be held as a permanent Endowment 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.

GEORGE WATERSTON,  
*Hon. Secretary.*

21 Regent Terrace, EDINBURGH 7.

*FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST***Annual Report for 1961****FOREWORD**

I AM glad to say we have been able to produce our Annual Report a bit more promptly this year. You will see from its pages that the Bird Observatory continues to provide visitors to the island not only with opportunities of seeing some of our rarer British birds, but also of learning all the modern techniques employed at Bird Observatories for trapping, examining, weighing and ringing. Under the expert tuition of Peter Davis and his Assistant Warden, young bird-watchers can learn all the correct methods of handling and ringing live birds and thus qualify for a B.T.O. Ringing Permit.

The scientific importance of the work at Fair Isle continues to justify itself and it is a remarkable fact that details of some thirty-four rare birds were submitted to the British Bird Rarity Records Committee.

To maintain the high standard set by the Bird Observatory we still require many more annual subscribers—"Friends of Fair Isle." If you know of anyone who might be interested in making an annual subscription, or a donation, or possibly leaving us a legacy—do please use your persuasive powers.

I cannot close this brief Foreword without mentioning our great indebtedness to the Staff at the Hostel for their excellent work during the year: to Peter and Angela Davis, Gordon Barnes (Assistant Warden), and Miss Pat Adams (Cook/Caterer). Their unfailing cheerfulness under all conditions makes a visit to Fair Isle such a real pleasure.

And now—out with your cheque book and send us your guinea subscription!

ARTHUR B. DUNCAN,  
*Chairman.*

## FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST

### TREASURER'S REPORT

The overall picture is much the same as that in last year's accounts and shows a good profit for the year, part of which has been utilised in writing down the value of *Furniture and Fittings* from £485 to £300. I will take the accounts in the order they appear.

#### 1. *Hostel Account.*

The hostel has had another very good year which is reflected in the increase in board and booking fees, and in the profit of £216 carried to the Trust Revenue account. This profit was achieved in spite of the fact that we have this year for the first time charged against the hostel a figure of £101 for *Repairs and Renewals*. In previous years this item has been entered as a direct charge against Trust revenue, but it was pointed out by the Auditors that the greater part of the goods and work concerned was for the needs of the hostel and should be charged against Hostel profits. This has accordingly been done, and the comparative figures for 1960 similarly adjusted for easier reference.

Angela and Peter Davis have once more done a marvellous job and I cannot leave the subject of the Hostel without thanking them once more for the trouble they take in saving us work by good book-keeping, and for their excellent management, which has resulted in yet another profitable year.

#### 2. *Trust Revenue Account.*

There is little here to comment on. Revenue has remained much the same, except that legacies and donations were down by £200 and Hostel profits correspondingly up. On the debit side everything is much in line with 1960 with the exception of the further writing down of furniture to which I have already referred.

#### 3. *Balance Sheet.*

The Balance Sheet presents a far more healthy picture than ever before. On the Assets side of the Sheet it is difficult to put a true value on the first two, and possibly even three, items. All three have been written down in the past, but who is to say what value, if any, would attach to the

buildings, or even the furniture, in the event of Fair Isle being evacuated? We hope this will not happen, but it remains a future possibility, and my own view is that we should continue to write these values down out of profits, if any, at least for another year or two. The Savings Bonds will be worth face value in 1970, and we continue to hold them in this fund rather than Endowment as a buffer against future possible losses. The debit balance due to Messrs. J. & F. Anderson, which has been gradually reducing, is now wiped out and a small credit balance achieved. There is £213 in the Hostel account, as cash is always required at the beginning of the year for purchase of foodstuffs and equipment. The Helena Howden Trust position is not material to the Balance Sheet, since the Fair Isle Trustees merely have power to expend money for certain specified purposes, and to draw on the Howden Trust accordingly. This item has been left in this year solely to show last year's debit figure but will be omitted in future years.

I think we can congratulate ourselves on having cleaned up the Balance Sheet as a result of recent years' profits and that we can hope for better things to come, *but I again remind you that although the immediate future of the Bird Observatory Trust depends on the subscriptions of Friends of Fair Isle, the ultimate future depends on a substantial increase in the Endowment Fund by donation or legacy.*

A short statement of the present Endowment fund position follows the Balance Sheet.

The Helena Howden fund is held by the Bank of Scotland as Trustee to the order of the Fair Isle Trustees, who can draw upon both capital and income for the purpose of establishing or helping to establish a bird sanctuary (or sanctuaries) in Scotland. To date the capital has not been drawn on since no suitable project has arisen, but income has been used, in conjunction with other bodies, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, for various minor projects such as the erection of notice boards, the destruction of rats on various islands in the Forth and elsewhere, and a grant has now been offered toward the establishment of the Isle of Handa as a permanent Sanctuary. The capital in the Fund has a market value of over £9,000 and the Fair Isle Trustees would be interested in supporting any genuine project which was aimed at establishing a Scottish Sanctuary.

YEAR TO 31st DECEMBER, 1961.

**1.—Hostel Revenue Account**

1960	<i>Expenditure</i>	1961
£90 0 0	Stores at 1st January ...	£93 0 0
612 11 11	Food Stuffs, Supplies, etc. ...	745 11 9
36 17 6	Telephone ...	17 19 10
184 6 3	Wages and National Insurance	235 12 7
59 8 2	Sundry Payments ...	21 17 2
70 5 9	Bird Ringing and Trap Repairs	113 12 9
68 10 0	Insurance of Huts ...	60 18 9
116 2 5	Fuel ...	109 13 10
109 0 4	Repairs and Renewals ...	101 4 5
<hr/>		<hr/>
£1347 2 4		£1499 11 1
18 18 2	Profit for Year ...	216 7 5
<hr/>		<hr/>
£1366 0 6		£1715 18 6

1960	<i>Income</i>	1961
£1195 7 10	Board and Booking Fees	£1627 3 0
32 3 8	Miscellaneous Receipts ...	13 15 6
45 9 0	Donations towards Repairs to Traps damaged by Winter Gales	0 0 0
93 0 0	Stores ...	75 0 0
<hr/>		<hr/>
£1366 0 6		£1715 18 6

**2.—Trust Revenue Account**

1960	<i>Expenditure</i>	1961
£521 9 0	Wages and National Insurance	£621 19 10
6 6 0	Rents, Rates and Taxes, and Insurance	8 15 0
172 0 1	Printing, Stationery, etc. ...	113 14 2
33 3 10	Interest Paid ...	30 0 7
156 4 0	Travelling Expenses—Hostel ...	76 4 8
0 0 0	Travelling Expenses, J. & F. Anderson	78 9 0
8 8 0	Repairs and Renewals ...	9 17 2
0 0 0	Amount written off Furniture, Furnishings etc. ...	185 0 0
79 1 6	Expenses of Administration ...	98 8 0
<hr/>		<hr/>
£976 12 5		£1222 8 5
399 4 7	Profit carried to Balance Sheet	257 15 5
<hr/>		<hr/>
£1375 17 0		£1480 3 10

1960	<i>Income</i>			1961
£467 4 1	Subscriptions	...	...	£539 8 8
337 15 3	Income Tax Recovered	...	...	371 5 4
11 16 0	Interest on Savings Bonds	...	...	11 16 0
130 3 6	Income from Endowment Fund	...	...	141 6 5
310 0 0	Legacy Received	...	...	200 0 0
100 0 0	Donation Received	...	...	0 0 0
18 18 2	Profit on Hostel for 1961	...	...	216 7 5
<u>£1375 17 0</u>				<u>£1480 3 10</u>

**Balance Sheet as at 31st December, 1961.**

1960	<i>Liabilities</i>			1961
£1066 15 3	Capital Account—Balance per last Balance Sheet	...	...	£1465 19 10
399 4 7	Profit from Trust Revenue Account	...	...	257 15 5
122 9 6	Miss Helena Howden's Trust	...	...	0 0 0
8 6 11	Sundry Creditors	...	...	0 0 0
279 15 10	Balance due to Messrs J. & F. Anderson, W.S.	...	...	0 0 0
<u>£1876 12 1</u>				<u>£1723 15 3</u>

1960	<i>Assets</i>			1961
£200 0 0	Buildings, Traps, etc. written down	£200 0 0		£200 0 0
485 0 0	Furniture, Furnishings etc. at Fair Isle, as written down	300 0 0		300 0 0
150 0 0	Scientific Equipment, as do.	150 0 0		150 0 0
619 1 3	Investment—£642, 3% Savings Bonds, 1960/70. (Market Value at 31/12/61—£514)	...	619 1 3	619 1 3
	Consumable Stores—			
	Food Stuffs	£10 0 0		
	Live Stock	40 0 0		
	Fuel	25 0 0		
93 0 0	Cash in Bank—		75 0 0	75 0 0
	Trust Account	£30 7 5		
	Hostel Account	213 5 3		
		£243 12 8		
	Cash in Hand	61 5 9		
329 10 10			304 18 5	304 18 5
0 0 0	Balance in hands of Messrs. J. & F. Anderson, W.S. at 31st December, 1961	...		74 15 7
<u>£1876 12 1</u>				<u>£1723 15 3</u>

9th FEBRUARY, 1962. Examined and found correct.  
(Sgd.) LINDSAY, JAMIESON & HALDANE, C.A.

## Fair Isle Endowment Fund.

(Trustees, Bank of Scotland)

*Property and Investments held as at 30th June, 1961*

		Market Value at 31st Dec., 1961.
1. 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh at cost ... ..	£3050 0 0	
2. £4300 3% Savings Bonds, 1960/70	3659 9 0	£3440 0 0
3. £70, Whitbread & Co., 'A' Ordinary Stock ... ..	313 11 0	490 0 0
TOTAL	£7023 0 0	

*Note:* The Regent Terrace property is the Headquarters of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Scottish Office), and the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust. As such it is non revenue producing, but all expenses and outgoings are borne by the first named body to whom it is leased. The annual income from the Fund is paid to the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trustees. The Capital is held in perpetuity.

---

## WARDEN'S REPORT FOR 1961

In 1961 the observatory was functioning from 15th February until the end of the year. It was an outstandingly successful season for visitors, no less than 189 people stayed in the Hostel, for a total of 254 weeks. This is 35 people and 55 weeks more than in 1960. The totals were inflated by the five-week stay of a party of Royal Engineers, and also by boat-delays in the abnormally windy autumn but even without these windfalls the 1959 record would have been handsomely beaten. The year's visitors included three from Sweden, two from Germany, and one from the U.S.A.

The staff was unchanged from 1960. Pat Adams coped admirably with the increased burden on the catering side; my wife continued to be responsible for the domestic and secretarial work; and Gordon Barnes worked well as Assistant Warden. He left us in early October to take up the tenancy of the vacant croft at Vaasetter, where we wish him every success. His place was taken by Shaun White in October and by Michael Jones in November. Peter Slater assisted with routine bookwork and field-work in August and September.



### *Island Events*

The death of James Anderson, the young tenant of Vaasetter, who was drowned when his lobster-boat capsized below the North Light on 4th August, came as a great shock to us all. Mercifully the other two men in the boat managed to save themselves, after an incredible ascent of the north side of the Niz. Anderson's body was recovered by a German trawler two days later.

There was a plague of medical emergencies during the year, five of which required the removal of the patient to Lerwick, and the Lerwick lifeboat was twice called to the isle. Fortunately all those involved have made good recoveries.

The island's economy continued to be reasonably prosperous. The croft of Schooltown was rebuilt by the National Trust, and this gave well-paid work to six of the men between May and December. Only one boat fished the lobsters, except in the month before the fatal accident, when two were engaged in this work. The catch was fairly good.

The *Meteor* called twice, with the Islands Cruise on 6th May, and with the Commonwealth Cruise on 25th May. The passengers were not able to land on the second occasion, but a party of islanders went on board. This also happened when the National Trust's first weekend cruise to the Scottish Islands in the *Dunera* called on 24th September. The island knitters had orders which kept them busy all the year, and the weavers easily disposed of what they had made in the winter.

### *Acknowledgments*

The islanders were, as usual, both tolerant and co-operative, and we are grateful to them for many kindnesses.

I should also like to acknowledge, with thanks, the following gifts to the observatory: a bicycle from Miss J. Newton, donations to the library from R. Clive, P. J. Sellar, and J. Young, and mist-net poles from R. H. Dennis.

We continued to enjoy the loan of a collection of bird-skins from the Royal Scottish Museum; these were in frequent use both for comparison with trapped birds and for instructional purposes.

### *Non-Ornithological Work*

Several botanists stayed on the isle during the summer and four or five new flowering plants were added to those

already listed in the files. Two workers collected lichens, a group not hitherto studied on the island.

Bernard Nau again collected beetles in late August and September, and the results of his collections and those of earlier workers are being collated by B. L. Sage.

## *Ornithology*

The main work of the observatory continued to be the counting and trapping of passage migrants. The population-study of the Arctic Skua occupied most of my time in June, and took priority in July also, but we found time to ring more seabirds than in any previous year. Many visitors were given instruction in ringing methods, and several were able to gain enough experience to qualify for permits. Many more were able to improve their standard of field observation, and to gain experience of rare and difficult species, by taking part in our work; and of course the observatory gains greatly from the presence of so many enthusiastic helpers.

The results were made freely available to the Migration Research Officer and to other students of particular aspects or species. Details of some 34 rare birds were submitted to the Rarity Records Committee.

We explored the possibility of examining migrant birds for traces of radioactivity, but it transpired that the necessary equipment would be far beyond our means. However, Mr L. Salmon of the A.E.R.E. Harwell offered to examine any faeces or corpses of eastern birds likely to have been contaminated by the Russian tests, and we have already made use of this service.

The late Lt. Col. H. G. Brownlow made a detailed statistical analysis of the measurements of birds trapped at Fair Isle, and for the first time we can easily compare our data with good samples from live birds rather than with the often inadequate series from shrunken museum skins. This analysis has been published in the *Bulletin*.

## *Breeding Birds*

**ARCTIC SKUA.** The results of the study of this species in 1961 have already appeared in the *Bulletin*. The colony increased by two pairs to sixty-seven pairs. Only two of the breeders remained unringed, and all the chicks were marked. A further eight birds ringed as chicks on the isle, returned to the colony as breeders, bringing the total of such recaptures to forty-six. There has been a tendency for these

young birds to breed for the first time at a more mature age than they did when the colony was smaller; the 1961 additions included two six-year-olds (the only previous six-year-old to join was in 1960) but no three-year-olds have joined since 1959, though this was the commonest age-group in the early years of the colony.

The birds had a good breeding-season, the success-rate being 66.4% (81 young reared from 122 eggs), rather higher than the average for the previous thirteen years. Losses were from a variety of causes including infertility and breakage of eggs, disease, predation, and heavy rain; but no one of these factors predominated.

Average clutch-size was markedly lower than in most previous years, perhaps as a response to the poor food-supply in 1959 and 1960. Five experienced breeders laid fewer eggs than they had done in earlier years.

Mr Peter O'Donald of Cambridge University was unable to return to the island during the summer, but was engaged in writing up his work on skua genetics.

The loss of colour rings and the difficulty of retrapping experienced birds, together with the unmanageable size of the colony (it has more than doubled in size since colour-marking began), mean that we cannot aim at complete coverage in 1962. However, the results are now considered to be sufficiently complete for publication.

**BONXIE.** The colony remained stable at twenty pairs, but there were many changes in the matings, and several very late nests were inevitably unsuccessful. There was again some interference with the eggs and young, and the breeding-success figure was one of the lowest on record; only twelve young were reared from 35 eggs.

**OTHER BREEDERS.** The seabirds in general had a fairly good season, as may be judged from the ringing totals. In a summer of poor weather, the success of the passerines varied greatly; the Rock Pipit and the Twite apparently fared badly, on the other hand the Meadow Pipit had a very good season, and the populations of both this species and of the Skylark continued their increase of recent years. The Meadow Pipit must now rival the Wheatear (which had an indifferent year) as our commonest small bird. Bad weather and other demands on our time prevented a complete census of singing Wrens, but the indications were that the population was low despite a very mild winter in 1960-61.

The pair of Peregrines again bred, in an accessible site at Gunnawark; they reared one chick. Three pairs of Corn-crakes nested, two of Ringed Plovers, and four of Ravens. Lapwings increased from about ten to about sixteen pairs,

and Snipe from one or two to about eight pairs. At least three pairs of Tree Sparrows bred, the first since 1936.

### *Migration*

The spring migration in 1961 was one of the poorest on record. There was a promising start in February, with several very early Stonechats between 17th and 25th, and a few migrant thrushes late in the month, but March can only be described as pitiful (only thirty birds were ringed in the whole month), and May also was very disappointing, with only two little falls of continental birds. The trouble was, of course, persistently westerly winds, often cold and strong.

April was better, bringing one very large fall of Song Thrushes and Robins in south-east wind on the 5th. This Song Thrush arrival was in fact the largest we have recorded; over 800 were seen on the 6th. Other species in this fall included the first Ring Ouzels and Wheatears, a few Wood Pigeons, Fieldfares, and Redwings; and, on the 6th, Mistle Thrush, several Stonechats, Chaffinches, and Bramblings, and a small number of Blackbirds. Most of the spring Blackbirds must have passed further south during late March, for there were no significant falls of the species this spring. The main mass of the Song Thrushes and Robins arrived after midday on the 5th, and since they had in all probability been airborne since the previous night, the movement is more likely to have been an instance of lateral drift rather than of downwind-directed flight.

There were few falls of any size in the rest of April, but frequent small arrivals of north-western species such as Wheatears and Meadow Pipits, and more Lapland Buntings than usual, reflecting the invasion of the previous autumn. The first of these arrived on the 17th, and there were up to six daily until the 29th. We also saw a few geese, Grey Lags, Pinkfeet, Whitefronts, and Barnacles, during these two weeks.

April also gave us some very early records of summer migrants. Chiffchaff and Blackcap were present by the 7th—the latter was ten days earlier than any previous record. The first Willow Warbler, trapped on the 11th, was our second-earliest notice. A Grasshopper Warbler on 16th was our earliest-ever by five days, and Common Sandpiper on 23rd had only been equalled once before. Corncrake, Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail on 27th were all unusually early, and a Wryneck on this day was our first in April, as was a Quail on 30th.

The rarer birds in April included an immature Golden

Eagle on the 7th and 8th, Great Grey Shrike trapped 8th, Northern Bullfinch 16th, a Shorelark 20th to 30th, and a male Red-headed Bunting 20th-21st.

The only interesting falls in May were small arrivals of Whinchats, Redstarts, Willow Warblers, Pied Flycatchers, and Tree Pipits between 3rd and 8th, with odd Wrynecks, Wood Warbler, and Ortolans; and a similar trickle bringing chiefly the two Whitethroats, Willow Warblers, and Spotted Flycatchers, with Turtle Dove, Wryneck, Icterine Warbler, and several Red-backed Shrikes, between 29th and 31st. The falls came in the only spells of easterly weather during the month. A Bluethroat and an Ortolan were seen on the 18th, but almost the only other migrants in May were small numbers of hirundines, Greenland Wheatears, and the commoner waders. The only rarities were single Collared Doves on 12th and 24th and a vne adult White-billed Diver on 14th.

A few warblers and flycatchers passed at intervals throughout the month of June. A Nightjar occurred on the 2nd, and a late Bluethroat on the 5th. Another male Red-headed Bunting, from 5th-7th, was obviously a recent escape from the condition of its flight-feathers and tail. Another Wood Warbler was seen on 18th, and a probable Marsh Warbler on the 21st.

July was extremely quiet, with very small numbers of the usual waders, and these mostly in the last week of the month. In early August, also, most of the migrants were waders; they included Green Sandpipers and Greenshanks, Spotted Redshank (8th), and the first autumn records of the Red-necked Phalarope at Fair Isle; an adult was trapped on the 2nd and a juvenile on the 16th. The wind was "inexorably west" for most of the month and continental birds very scarce. A few Willow Warblers came between the 8th and the 11th, and again, with other warblers, Whinchats, and Pied Flycatchers, on 18th-19th and 31st. A Greenish Warbler was taken on the 19th, Barred Warbler 20th, Stonechat (a very rare autumn migrant) 24th, and a Red-backed Shrike seen 25th. The north-western species were quite well represented. White Wagtails were moving from the beginning of the month; they peaked at forty 25th and fifty 31st. Iceland Wheatears and Meadow Pipits were arriving almost daily in the last ten days of the month; the best days were the 25th and 31st. Another feature of late August was the number of Sooty Shearwaters to be seen from the isle, in earlier years nearly all the records have been made on the crossing to Shetland. Up to four were seen on most days from the 21st, and there were more in mid-September.

September opened with a mixed bag of north-western and continental birds. Wheatears and Meadow Pipits increased on 1st and 2nd, and there were 40 to 60 Golden Plovers on these two days. A juvenile Rose-coloured Starling, the first Lapland Bunting, and a Grey Plover were also seen on the 1st, Turtle Dove and several Garden and Willow Warblers on the 2nd. On the 3rd there was a Water Rail and three or four Lapland Buntings. By the 4th the wind had backed east of south and during the late morning we had a respectable fall of European birds; over 140 Common Gulls, 30 to 40 each of Willow Warbler and Pied Flycatcher, and Wryneck, Bluethroat, Icterine, four Barred Warblers, a probable Greenish Warbler, several Goldcrests, three Scarlet Grosbeaks, Ortolan and Little Bunting; also the first of an astonishing run of Siberian vagrants, the fourth Yellow-headed or Citrine Wagtail for Fair Isle and Britain. Late in the afternoon the wind veered south again, and over seventy White Wagtails came in. Most of the commoner species were much reduced on the 5th, though the rarer ones stayed for some days. From this time there was very little movement for over a week, though the first Snow Bunting was present on the 8th and perhaps the oddest "migrant" of the year was a very large domestic goose shot in flight on this day!

A few continentals, including another Little Bunting, came in with a backing wind at midday on the 13th. Lapland Buntings increased to twenty-six by the 15th. A notable passage of Common/Arctic Terns occurred on the 14th and 15th, with a Sandwich Tern on the second day, and several Sooty Shearwaters and numbers of Common Gulls were also going by. The 16th brought a south-westerly hurricane of over 100 m.p.h. and our only American bird of the year, a Pectoral Sandpiper, the first to be recorded on the isle; it was caught on the 17th. The passing of this hurricane, on the 17th, left us with a considerable number of waders including over 150 Lapwings, 70 Golden Plovers. 50 Turnstones, 50 Redshanks, and smaller numbers of Ringed Plovers, Curlews, Bar-tailed Godwits, Dunlins, Ruffs; and also, most surprisingly, about fifteen Swallows. Next day, in moderate southerly wind, at least sixty Swallows, a dozen House Martins, and a steady trickle of Meadow Pipits and Twites came south from Shetland to the North Light and across the island. Presumably the hirundines had been carried far to the north by the hurricane, for such numbers are quite exceptional at Fair Isle in the autumn.

South-east wind resumed on the 19th, and continental migrants were coming into the isle from mid-morning throughout the day, and still arriving at dusk. They included

small numbers of most of the commoner thrushes, the small chats (including a Stonechat) and the *Sylvia* warblers, with over twenty Chaffinches, 4 Siskins, Pied and Red-breasted Flycatcher, and Red-backed Shrike. On the morning of the 20th the wind had gone westerly and the arrival ended, but we found over 300 Chaffinches, over forty Siskins, 85 Lapwings, a Bluethroat, several Robins, Pied Flycatchers, and Hedge Sparrows, a Barred Warbler, a few Mealy Redpolls, Bramblings, and Reed Buntings. An almost-certain Honey Buzzard flew over in the evening. This Chaffinch movement was over two weeks earlier than any other big autumn passage in our records, and Kenneth Williamson has suggested that it was more probably an irruptive movement in a year of very high population, than a normal migration. The arrival ties in with the start of an unusual Siskin irruption and it is likely that the exceptional numbers of Hedge Sparrows this autumn (in some years there are none) and the protracted if unspectacular falls of Mealy Redpolls were also of an irruptive nature.

On 21st September most of the soft-billed birds had passed on. The Chaffinches decreased on the 22nd, when there was just one outstanding new bird, the first Scottish Bonelli's Warbler. The wind remained south-west from 22nd to 27th, with few new arrivals, but the Siskins increased to over seventy on the 23rd, and there were about fifteen Hedge Sparrows. The 24th was another one-bird day, when the River Warbler was added to the British avifauna. Many of the finches left on the 25th, when over 1000 Meadow Pipits passed south during the morning, and a fairly large fall of Greenland Wheateaters occurred. Two interesting birds on the 25th were Grasshopper and Arctic Warblers, both trapped. Over 80 Snow Buntings were seen on the 27th. From 28th to 30th we had another S to SSE gale, the aftermath of another hurricane. As in the one ten days earlier, waders increased considerably and there was a strong passage of terns, chiefly on the 29th. A Dotterel was seen on this day, Grey Plover and Wood Sandpiper on the 30th, when a few night-migrants included another Red-breasted Flycatcher.

October was perhaps the most exciting month for both quantity and variety of migrant birds, since the observatory began. It was the first migration-month in which we trapped over 1000 birds. During the first eight days the wind was persistently south-east, fresh or strong, and this was the best period for common birds. The movements began on the 1st with about 250 Redwings, 50 Song Thrushes, 120 Siskins and 120 Chaffinches, and over 200 Common Gulls together with a wide selection of other small birds—Stonechat, three Reed Warblers, two Yellow-browed Warblers, two Red-breasted

Flycatchers, two Mealy and a Lesser Redpoll, two Little Buntings, and others. There was also a diurnal passage of about 500 Skylarks, with Meadow Pipits, Starlings, and Twites. The Chaffinches increased to over 300 on the 2nd, and we saw about 25 Dunlins, two Little Stints, four Stonechats, and a Lanceolated Warbler. The latter earned the title of most elusive bird of the year, but was finally captured eleven days later. The rush was resumed on the 3rd. This time there were over 300 Redwings, 250 Song Thrushes, 75 Goldcrests and smaller numbers of Robins, Redstarts, and Pied Flycatchers. Several Blackbirds and Ring Ouzels also came, a new Yellow-browed Warbler, and the island's third Blue Tit. Redwings increased again on the 4th and though the other totals were much the same, it is likely that there was an overnight change of population. Dunlins increased to thirty-five, there were two Bluethroats, more Blackcaps and Garden Warblers, and two Red-breasted Flycatchers. The arrival grew stronger on the 5th, with the influx of over 500 Robins during the day: a dozen Chiffchaffs and as many Jack Snipe, Bramblings, and Reed Buntings appeared, and the common thrushes increased a little. A Great Grey Shrike was seen. There were few changes on the 6th except for a few more Blackbirds and Chiffchaffs, a Black Redstart, two new Reed Warblers, and a late Scarlet Grosbeak, but on the 7th Redwings numbered over 500 and Blackbirds and Snow Buntings over 100, and there were several Continental Wrens and two Great Grey Shrikes. Nearly all the common migrants increased on the 8th: Redwings now totalled over 1000, Blackbirds and Chaffinches 200, Siskins 120 and Bramblings 80. Some Song Thrushes and Robins replaced others which had left and there were more Starlings about. Dunlins increased to over sixty, a phenomenal score at Fair Isle, particularly in October. There were more Redstarts, Tree Pipits, three Bluethroats, a Turtle Dove and a Richard's Pipit. On the 9th we saw over 2000 Redwings, over 200 Song Thrushes, over 250 Blackbirds, and other newcomers included some 20 Fieldfares, two Shorelarks, several Swallows, and another Yellow-browed Warbler.

The wind veered SW on 9th October and the supply of continental birds dwindled, but there was a new immigration from the north-west. Wheatears had a late peak of over 100 on the 10th, and eight grey geese passed. On the 11th there were at least forty geese, including 18 Grey Lags and several Whitefronts and Pinkfeet. On the 12th over 200 Iceland Redwings came in, with some 30 Whooper Swans and over 50 Golden Plovers. Some forty swans flew over on the 13th, and nine Long-tailed Ducks passed by. We also found a female Siberian Stonechat (the third for Britain, trapped on the 17th), a Little Bunting, and rediscovered and caught the Lanceolated War-



bler. Although the wind continued west of south, a fall of over 800 Continental Redwings came on the 14th, with over 100 Blackbirds, 120 Robins and 50 Song Thrushes. The event of the day was the discovery and capture of a Dusky Warbler, the second for Britain. Most of these continentals passed on during the 15th and 16th, but the 16th saw another sizeable fall of Iceland Redwings. On the 17th, with the wind veering NW to N there were more waterfowl; a few ducks, a dozen geese (six Grey Lags) and 14 Whoopers. The goose passage continued in a NE to N gale on the 18th, with a total of at least forty-five birds, mostly Grey Lags but including six Pinkfeet. The first Glaucous Gull of autumn was seen. A few more continentals also came in; small numbers of Woodcocks and Fieldfares, Redstart and Black Redstart, another Richard's Pipit (trapped), and a female Dusky Thrush, the first for Scotland, which was eventually trapped on the 19th. The other excitement of the 19th was a party of four Coues's Redpolls, of which two were caught. Another fifteen geese passed, most of them Pinkfeet.

With a strong east to south-east wind on the 20th and 21st, continental birds were passing again. Redwings numbered about 400 on the first day, with some sixty Fieldfares and a few Blackbirds, 25 or more Goldcrests and Siskins, a Northern Bullfinch and a late Common Sandpiper. Redwings, Blackbirds, and also Woodcocks increased further on the 21st, with about 45 Bramblings, a Moorhen, and a Great Tit (which stayed to winter in the isle). Nine more Whoopers passed south. Numbers changed little in stormy weather between the 22nd and 25th, though 23 Whoopers passed on the 22nd, and a Red-necked Grebe was seen on the 25th. This gale was the tail of yet another of the string of hurricanes which devastated parts of the Caribbean area during the autumn, and once again there were signs that sea-birds and waders had been carried far off-course. An Arctic Skua on the 25th and a Manx Shearwater and a Comic Tern on the 26th were all extremely late in these latitudes, and the occurrence of seven phalaropes (three Red-necked, one Grey, and three indeterminate) on the 26th was unprecedented in the Fair Isle records. Kittiwakes were seen in unusual numbers for the time of year, and Redshanks Dunlins, and Common Gulls increased. Two or three late Swallows were also seen. The same wind, though west of south, also brought more Blackbirds (150), a dozen Yellowhammers, three Ring Ouzels, and other European birds, and some 15 Lapland and over 150 Snow Buntings, on the 26th. On the 27th we found a Bluethroat, a very late Northern Willow Warbler, several Goldcrests, five Mealy Redpolls, more Skylarks, about 50 Bramblings, and another Little Bunting. This bunting was present until mid-November. The 28th was a notable

day for north-western birds, with over 300 Iceland Redwings and as many Snow Buntings (these increased further on the 29th), a passage of Cormorants and Goldeneyes, and more geese than the islanders can ever recall. We saw well over 150 in total; most if not all were Grey Lags. Thirteen Whooper Swans passed north. Among the few continental birds, a Greenfinch was seen on the 28th, and a late Pied Flycatcher on the 29th. A dozen Pinkfeet and a few Grey Lags were present on the 31st.

On the 1st and 2nd November there was a small arrival of Iceland Redwings, and over 70 geese, at least thirty of them Grey Lags, were about on the 2nd. Most of these had gone by the 4th. On the 5th, with the wind still westerly, we had a small influx of Woodcocks, Continental Redwings, and Blackbirds, with a few Fieldfares and four Waxwings. Woodcocks were abundant next morning (over 120 were shot in the day) but Blackbirds were scarce until midday, when big parties, with Redwings, came in upwind from the north-east, and nearly eighty were trapped before nightfall. Some 20 Siskins were also seen. On the 7th, in a southerly gale, there were even more Blackbirds (at least 800 seen) and over 100 Fieldfares, but fewer Redwings and hardly any Woodcock. Two Northern Bullfinches and a Blackcap were found. The Blackbird numbers decreased gradually during the next four or five days. On the 8th a Long-eared Owl was seen, and three Rooks, another Blackcap. The rest of the month saw no falls of any size, but there were fifteen more Siskins and another Bullfinch on the 13th, and several Siberian Chiffchaffs between the 14th and 21st. A last Waxwing was present on the 14th, a Black Redstart 17th (seen again on 29th), a Mealy Redpoll from 19th. Late Blackcaps were seen on the 19th, 20th, and 28th. Eleven more Grey Lags passed on the 20th, and a few Woodcocks and thrushes arrived on the 23rd. Snow Buntings were unusually scarce, peaking at 150 6th and 180 15th.

Early December had a spell of arctic weather with deep snow between the 3rd and 9th, but there were no large weather-movements except for Snipe, which increased markedly on the 4th and 5th. Thirteen Grey Lags passed south on the 3rd, nine Pinkfeet and several Grey Lags were seen next day, when another Siskin and a Wood Pigeon were also present. Five to six Whoopers were resident from the 7th to the 10th. A fresh SE breeze brought the thaw on the 9th, and on this day or the 10th over 75 Fieldfares, a few Woodcock, Blackbirds, Redwings and four or five Mealy Redpolls came in. At least one of these Redpolls was still present at the end of the year. Many gulls came ashore on the 13th, and a raid on a roost at Bunes after dark resulted in the capture of 53 Great Black-backs and 55 Herring Gulls, one with a Moscow

ring. On the 14th a fine male Northern Bullfinch was trapped, and on the 15th a few more Blackbirds arrived. A solitary Pinkfoot was shot on the 22nd and two more seen on the 29th. On the 23rd and 30th a Snowy Owl was reported (this was seen again in early January). Two late Siskins flew over the 24th.

The record total of 187 species was observed on the island during 1961; seven of these were new to the island.

### *The Traps*

The Joint Schools trap was badly damaged by winter gales and was demolished in August and replaced by a small ditch-trap. An entirely new large single-dyke trap, the Hjon Dyke, was constructed in the same month over the dyke above the gully trap, and it had a successful autumn. The other traps were not substantially altered.

In a season of very unstable weather it was seldom possible to use full-scale mist-nets, but increased use was made of single-panel nets and of larger ones set on short poles. The dazzling technique was used with even greater success than in earlier years, accounting for some 200 birds including Wigeon, Grey Lag, the bulk of our gull and wader catch (including the Pectoral Sandpiper), and a variety of ground-roosting passerines.

### *Ringling*

The year's ringling total was 5656 birds of 111 species, an increase of over 500 birds over the previous record of 1960. Forty-nine of these birds were ringed for us by Magnus Sinclair, in Unst. The leading scores were Puffin 591, Blackbird 547, Meadow Pipit 534, Shag 531, Wheatear 517, Starling 415, Robin 392, Fulmar 257, Redwing 235, Rock Pipit 163, Arctic Skua 105, Song Thrush 99, Twite 96, Herring Gull 71, Great Black-back 63, Chaffinch 61, and Goldcrest 51. Eleven species were ringed by the observatory for the first time: Grey Lag Goose, Peregrine, American Pectoral Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Dusky Thrush, River Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Dusky Warbler, Richard's Pipit, Rose-coloured Starling, and Arctic Redpoll. Other notable captures were Green Sandpiper, Lanceolated Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Greenish, Yellow-browed, and Arctic Warblers, two Northern Bullfinches, two Red-headed Buntings, and Little Bunting. One very distinctive race, the Siberian Stonechat, was ringed for the first time in Britain.

The annual ringing-totals since 1948 are shown below:

SEASON	TOTAL	NO. OF SPECIES
1948	288	38
1949	1505	63
1950	2366	74
1951	2236	77
1952	1933	74
1953	2552	80
1954	2367	75
1955	2478	82
1956	3313	81
1957	2925	87
1958	4579	101
1959	4761	116
1960	5109	112
1961	5656	111
GRAND TOTAL:	42068	181

### Recoveries 1961

Sixty-nine recoveries of birds ringed by the observatory were reported during the year, and four birds ringed elsewhere were found on the island. Full details are being published in the June 1962 issue of the *Bulletin*.

A young *Fulmar* ringed in 1959 was caught off the Murmansk coast of northern Russia in late September 1960. Twenty-two *Shags*, all ringed as young on the island, were reported elsewhere: five in Shetland, six in Orkney, two in Sutherland, three Ross, one Moray, two Aberdeenshire, one in Angus, and two in south-west Norway. A *Merlin* trapped in September 1954 was caught in the Landes (SW France) in late November 1961. One of the 1961 *Oystercatcher* chicks had reached Morcambe Bay by 19th August. Our first recovery from Asia was a *Bar-tailed Godwit* ringed in September 1956 and killed at Noril'sk near the mouth of the Yenesei in north Siberia in June 1960.

A *Bonxie* ringed in Unst by Magnus Sinclair in July 1961 was taken off the west coast of Portugal in early November. Three young *Arctic Skuas* from Fair Isle were reported: a 1956 chick from Foula in July, and two 1961 birds, from the Baltic coast of Germany in August and from western Norway in September. A young *Great Black-back* of 1960 was at Lerwick in July 1961, and *Herring Gull* chicks ringed in 1958 and 1960 were respectively in East Lothian in summer 1960 and at Fraserburgh in August 1961. A young *Lesser Black-back* ringed in 1960 was found shot at Lough Beg in Northern Ireland in September of the same year. Two *Razorbills* and

two *Guillemots*, all ringed as chicks, were killed in western Norway; three of them at the same place, Boknfjorden, between 29th September and 2nd October. A young *Tystie* marked in 1960 was found dead at North Ronaldsay, Orkney, in July, 1961.

A migrant *Song Thrush* ringed on 6th April 1960 was caught near Dunblane, Perthshire, on 28th June 1961. This bird was thought to be of continental origin and the time and place of recovery is therefore most intriguing. An *Iceland Redwing* ringed 12th October 1961 was found near Sogndal in south-west Norway on 2nd November. Ten *Blackbirds* ringed on passage at Fair Isle were recovered. Six of these were presumably, from the date of recovery, in or near their breeding area, three in western Norway, two in south Sweden, and one in Schleswig-Holstein. Two others were recovered in November, in western Norway and at the Outer Dowsing Light-vessel off Norfolk; and two later in the winter in Suffolk and Donegal.

There were six reports of *Wheatears*. Five of these were local-bred; one taken in the Landes in September, two in SW Spain in October, one in N. Morocco in November (our first Wheatear from N. Africa) and the fifth in S. Spain in February. The other recovery was of a Greater Wheatear caught in late September and killed in the Gironde a month later. Three *Robin* recoveries came in: one ringed April 1960 was found at Gorleston, Norfolk, in March 1961; another ringed April 1961 at Staithes, Yorkshire, in November; and one ringed 12th October 1961 was near Chateau Thierry (east of Paris) by 16th November.

Our first recovery of a *Hedge Sparrow* came from a bird ringed on 29th April 1961 and retrapped nineteen days later on Heligoland. Five *Meadow Pipits*, three of them certainly hatched on the island, were reported, one from the Gironde in October and four from SW Portugal between November and January. Two local-born *Starlings*, both over three years old, were found in Orkney, and a presumed immigrant ringed 2nd December 1960 was at Risør in W. Norway in April 1961.

Three of the four "foreigners" found in the isle were gulls: a first-winter Great Black-back found dead in February had been ringed on the Great Ainov Islands in the Barents Sea (N. Russia) the previous June; a young Lesser Black-back from Aith in Shetland reached us two months later; ringing details of the Russian-ringed Herring Gull caught in December are still awaited. The fourth capture was a *Robin*, ringed at Amsterdam in October 1960 and recaptured at Fair Isle on 6th April 1961.

## *Publications*

The *Bulletin* Vol. 4, No.6 appeared on time in June 1961; No. 7 suffered from the usual seasonal delay and was sent out early in 1962. The Annual Report for 1960 was published in November.

The following notes and papers relating to work done on the island were printed during the year:

DAVIS, Peter. Autumn Migration, 1960 (at Fair Isle). *Bird Migration* 1: 249-251.

Lanceolated Warblers at Fair Isle, and the problem of Identification. *Brit. Birds* 54: 142-145.

Red-tailed Shrike at Fair Isle. *Brit. Birds* 54: 209-210.

DELANY, M. J. and P. E. DAVIS. Observations on the Ecology and Life-History of the Fair Isle Field-Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus fridariensis* (Kinnear). *Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond.* 136: 439-452.

MILNE, B. S. Yellow-headed Wagtail at Fair Isle. *Brit. Birds* 54: 125-126.

STANSFIELD G. The Collection of Fleas from Fair Isle in 1956. *Parasitology* 51: 367-371.

WILLIAMSON, Kenneth. Sequence of Post-Nuptial Moulting in the Starling (at Fair Isle). *Bird Migration* 2: 43-45.

A thesis entitled "Fair Isle, An Economy in Transition" by Brian Armitage, was deposited in the library.

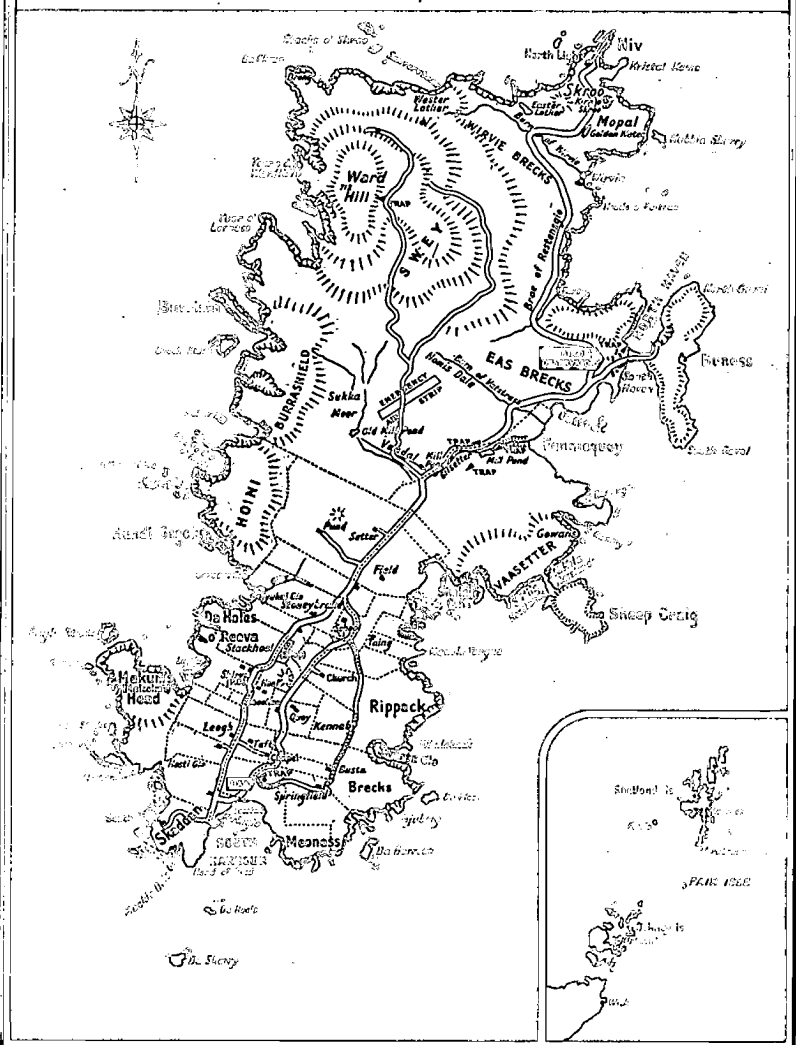
The Warden also contributed a review to *British Birds*, a brief summary of the spring migration, 1961, to *Bird Migration*, an account of the rare birds in autumn 1961 to the *Times Weekly Review*. He also took part in two broadcasts on the B.B.C. Scottish Home Service.

---

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

0 100 yds. 440 yds. 660 yds. 1 mile

Roads == Bird Trap ← Trap Boundaries ....



H.M.S. 12/20/1910

660