



# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Report for 2015





**Plate 1.** Ringing Puffins on Greenholm with Chris Dodd (ranger, behind) and Jodie Crane (RSPB, front), 14th July 2015. © Ciaran Hatsell



**Plate 2.** Orlando Krippner (cook), April 2015. © Chris Dodd



**Plate 3.** Marilyn Jones (childminder) with Freyja Parnaby, April 2015. © David Parnaby



**Plate 4.** Grace, Freyja and Susannah Parnaby (administrator) with Angel and Baby John, April 2015. © David Parnaby



# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY REPORT NO. 67 (2015)

Editor: David Parnaby

Photographic editor: Ian Andrews

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Front cover. Richards Pipit, Stackhoull, 20th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

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A company limited by guarantee.

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Obs, 8th June 2015. © Ian Andrews

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

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### Eric Meek



Plate 5. Eric Meek with Bill Oddie (right), Scotland's Big Nature Festival, Musselburgh, Lothian, 23rd May 2015. © Louise Batchelor

2015 saw the first full year of my tenure as Chair of FIBOT and could I, first of all, thank the other 13 directors for their help and patience in easing me into the post. All have been of assistance during the course of the year but could I just single out one person, Mike Wood our Finance Director, for a special plaudit. Mike undertakes an immense amount of work to ensure that the Observatory continues to run smoothly and I can't thank him enough for all the time and effort he gives us.

David and Susannah Parnaby, our Warden and Administrator, go from strength to strength, and this is especially reflected in the feedback from visitors with 82% rating their stay as 'excellent' and the other 18% as 'very good'. David and Susannah obviously set the tone for other staff and it is very heartening to see that 94% of folk rated the staff as 'very helpful' and the other 6% as 'helpful'. In summary, they can be very proud of the standards that they are setting.

It is sad to have to report the death of Esther Williamson at the age of 91. Esther was the widow of the first warden of FIBO, Kenneth Williamson, and was of Faeroese descent. Her son, Robin, has written a fascinating obituary for this report (see page 12).

The main *raison d'être* of the Observatory is, of course, the island's birds and, elsewhere in this report, you can read of the latest position with regard to the island's breeding seabirds. The continuing downward trend in Kittiwake numbers, as elsewhere in Shetland and Orkney, is a major cause for concern while Arctic Terns and Arctic Skuas are also in trouble. 2015 was the first year of a three-year national project to re-count all of the breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland and the work done on Fair Isle this summer will contribute to this.

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“Two separate funds are now available to assist young people to come to Fair Isle. Why not make use of one of them to visit this wonderful island?”

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Migrants continue to amaze! Nowhere else in Britain can such a plethora of rare and uncommon species be encountered. The recording of a Great White Egret brought the island list up to 385, an amazing total for such a tiny speck of land. David lists the species elsewhere but just imagine waking up one morning and finding a 'flock' of five Glossy Ibises feeding outside your bedroom window!



Plate 6. Patrick Styles with Snipe chick, JHMF grant recipient, Obs, 14th August 2015. © Lee Gregory

I noted in the 2014 report that, at last, the wealth of data contained in the Observatory's Logs was being analysed. Dr. Will Miles, a former assistant warden at FIBO, is currently employed at Aberdeen University to carry out this analysis under the supervision of one of our directors, Prof. Jane Reid. The work is going well with a detailed paper on the phenology of migration through the isle having been submitted to a prestigious journal with work on the second phase of the project, looking at changes in warbler assemblages, just beginning. Will has also given a whole series of talks to various bodies highlighting the work and raising the profile of the island even further.

We continue in our attempts to raise Fair Isle's profile in other ways too, and at every opportunity. We manned a stand at the Scotland's Big Nature Festival at Musselburgh in May (thanks especially to Louise Batchelor for all her efforts there) and the British Bird Fair at Rutland Water in August (with thanks to director, Ian Cowgill and his wife Lynne on their first year of being in charge there). At Rutland, for the first time, we shared our stand with the Shetland Amenity Trust, run by

previous FIBO warden, Paul Harvey, a venture that proved very successful.

In these digital times, however, the major way in which we can bring the island and the Observatory to people's attention is via the internet. Ian Andrews has put in an enormous amount of time and effort into improving our website and, together with David and Susannah, has made it into one of the best of its kind. It is improving all the time, so look out for further innovations in the coming year.

The website is also the main way in which we attract young birders to come and visit the island. The costs of transport and accommodation can often seem so daunting to the younger generation that they are discouraged from visiting but, over the years, many of them have been able to utilise the John Harrison Memorial Fund to subsidise their costs and now we also have the Simon Aspinall Bursary Fund to help such folk too. We look forward to bringing many more youngsters to the island in the coming years using these much appreciated sources of funding.

## WARDEN'S REPORT

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### David Parnaby



Plate 7. David Parnaby stretching to get Glossy Ibis on the kitchen window list, Obs, 2nd October 2015. © Susannah Parnaby

It seems a long time ago that Susannah, Grace and I made the move to Fair Isle as so much has happened since we arrived here and yet, in other ways, the time has flown by - this was our fifth year of running FIBO. Grace is now in her second year of school and Freyja started nursery in the autumn. Both of our girls love life on Fair Isle, which is understandable given the fantastic school, many friends (there may not be many children on the island, but age is no barrier to friendship), beautiful surroundings and fabulous wildlife experiences (there are probably not many six-year olds who have watched Killer Whales from their lounge!). Susannah and I also feel very settled here and we must thank the Fair Isle community for that, as their support and friendship has been wonderful and it's amazing what problems can be solved by a well-timed cup of tea! The islanders' accepting nature towards visitors also helps to make birding Fair Isle the enjoyable experience that it is - a fine example of this was the Lanceolated Warbler at Kenaby, which everyone was able to enjoy thanks to Ian allowing all the Obs staff and guests into his garden.

The remoteness of Fair Isle means that a pragmatic approach often needs to be taken to deal with situations, and the ability of islanders (particularly Kenny Stout and Deryk Shaw) to react at all hours to broken boilers, leaky pipes and the like is massively appreciated, with their help being called upon several times during the year. Thanks are also due to the FIBOT directors who give their own time to helping the Obs. All are worthy of thanks, but in particular Dave Okill's constant readiness to help transport things and send in supplies from Shetland is hugely useful, whilst the number of hours Mike Wood spends helping with the financial side of the Obs is also appreciated by Susannah and I. Obs volunteers come in all sorts of guises and my thanks are also due to regular Fair Isle visitor Barry Nightingale, who chanced upon a draft copy of a FIBO annual report a few years ago, declared his love for proof-reading, and has been doing that job for us ever since.

From a personal point of view, 2015 was not without its ups and downs. I enjoyed a fine trip to Nepal with my Dad in the early part of the year (the Tigers may have eluded us, but Sloth Bear, Leopard and a host of great birds more than made up for it). Sadly, just before that, my Grandpa Doughty passed away. He maintained his cheeky sense of humour throughout his life as well as his love of birds (with which he encouraged me) and his passion for golf (in which he tried to encourage me, but as I went and fetched his ball the first time we went round a course together, I think he realised I was never going to be a natural). Happier times included Freyja's christening on the island in August, an event presided over by John Best, who coped admirably with several weather-related changes of plan as we attempted to get everyone where they needed to be, and spending Christmas touring our families throughout England.



As in previous years, both Susannah's and my parents came to visit during the year and their help was again invaluable (as well as lots of fun!).

The memories of the year are always hugely influenced by the FIBO staff team and we were lucky this year to be joined by the familiar faces of Ciaran Hatsell as Senior Assistant Warden and Chris Dodd as Ranger (a post partially funded by SNH), with Lee Gregory coming in as Assistant Warden. It was a very hard-working team, not just in finding birds, ringing and monitoring, but also in helping with visitors. The feedback received from guests was again very positive and, whilst the 'new' building undoubtedly helps, it is the helpfulness of the staff, warm welcome, friendly atmosphere and, of course, the good food that people repeatedly comment on. Susannah details the domestic team in the Administrator's Report, but I would like to add my thanks for all their work.

We were joined by several excellent volunteers (again detailed by Susannah) during the year, several of whom benefitted from a JHMF grant and we're pleased that, from 2016, the Simon Aspinall Bursary Fund will also be available to youngsters wanting to get a flavour of life at the Obs.

Although 2015 couldn't compete with the previous year in terms of number of species, or mega rarities, there was nonetheless quite a roll call of birds. In numerical terms at least, the Great White Egret was the highlight of the year, being a first for Fair Isle (species number 386 for the island list). The usual impressive list of rarities included Siberian Thrush, Siberian Rubythroat, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, two Lanceolated Warblers, Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Booted Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Tawny Pipit, Rustic Bunting, Aquatic Warbler, Pallid Harrier, Red-flanked Bluetail, Thrush Nightingale, Arctic Warbler, two Citrine Wagtails, two Blyth's Reed Warblers, 'Western Subalpine Warbler', Glossy Ibises (a remarkable flock of five on the wader scrape), seven Olive-backed Pipits, Ortolan Bunting, Radde's Warbler, Dusky Warbler, three Greenish Warblers, two Short-toed Larks, Firecrest, two Cranes, Goshawk, Rough-legged Buzzard, Honey-buzzard, three Hobbies, Sabine's Gull, Pectoral Sandpiper, 51

Long-tailed Skuas, 17 Pomarine Skuas, two Rose-coloured Starlings, eight Little Buntings, 20 Barred Warblers, 11 Wrynecks, 11 Red-backed Shrikes, five Great Grey Shrikes, 13 Bluethroats, seven Richard's Pipits, two Golden Orioles, seven Red-breasted Flycatchers, 13 Icterine Warblers, eight Marsh Warblers, ten Common Rosefinches, Nightingale, four Dotterels, seven 'Grey-headed Wagtails', five 'Blue-headed Wagtails', six Hawfinches, four Turtle Doves, Buzzard, Osprey, Marsh Harrier, three 'Tundra Bean Geese', two 'Kumlien's Gulls', Waxwing and not forgetting the Mute Swan, Brent Goose and Little Grebe - the latter three all good Fair Isle birds.

In addition there were record counts of Yellow-browed Warbler (a total of 207 and a peak of 76), Sparrowhawk (a peak count of ten during a remarkable period of raptor passage in mid-September), Short-eared Owl (38), as well as memorable counts of Goldcrest (339), Fieldfare (4,983), Blackbird (1,009) and Redwing (3,250) amongst others. All this was despite a poor spring for migration and large periods of westerly winds in the peak autumn weeks. Whether it's seeing rarities, finding your own good birds or exceptional birding in large falls, Fair Isle still maintains an unrivalled position in British birding.

There's no doubt that a lot of hard work is put into finding the birds on Fair Isle (field testing monitoring tags revealed that the wardening team walks up to ten miles per day on census alone, with the daily total of miles accrued during monitoring, trap rounds etc often doubling that), but we all know that sometimes a bit of luck is needed as well. Ciaran's entertaining write-up of finding a Siberian Rubythroat is a prime example, and also introduces the concept of 'Zen birding'. Another moment of birding karma occurred in the spring when the wardening team's attempts to rescue a sheep stuck in a ditch on Landberg resulted in a Rough-legged Buzzard being seen as it drifted high overhead!

Compared to some that have gone before, 2015 was a reasonable year for seabirds. Although not all species fared well, there may just be a few glimmers of relief for this beleaguered group of



birds, for which Fair Isle is so important. There were some signs of hope in the island's quest for Marine Protected Area status as well, with further progress hopefully to follow in 2016.

The RSPB returned to the island in the summer for tracking seabirds, with Fair Isle veteran Jess Walkup returning to the island to work under the supervision of Jodie Crane, and their findings are summarised elsewhere in this report. Other research included work on the Fair Isle *Euphrasia* and lichens, both of which are likely to result in further studies in the future. The long-term Starling research project continued, with Jane Reid visiting to read colour-ring combinations in the early spring and Peter Evans visiting for further monitoring and trapping, whilst several hundred young Starlings were also caught in the traps and colour-ringed by the wardening team.

Starlings were the main focus of the new Crow Trap (the Axell Trap, or 'Okill Trap' as it should probably now be known, thanks to Dave's work overseeing its construction), the building of which was carried out in the spring by the wardening team. With no major structural damage to the traps over the winter, more of the wardening team's time could be spent improving the habitat around the Obs, and the area of the Obs plantation was considerably extended by fencing large areas to the east and west of the current enclosure. A smart new

stile and boardwalk were also added to one of the new fenced areas and a section of *Rosa* that was to be removed from Barkland was dug up by the assistant wardens and transplanted to the new area, where a lot of it seemed to take well. Hopefully these new areas of cover, as they grow in the coming years, will add to the attractiveness of the Obs' surroundings for migrants, drawing in and holding more birds.

Fair Isle must have one of the better recorded populations in the United Kingdom in terms of television coverage and 2015 was no exception. In addition to a Channel 5 documentary that focussed on Tommy Hyndman at the Haa, a camera crew filming for a forthcoming BBC documentary about the island made several visits during the year and the island featured on various news programmes when news of the Community Development Plan was released. There was also lots of publicity around the migration project and a paper published in PLOS ONE about Puffin declines on Fair Isle, whilst the record year list of 2014 hit the national press in March resulting in several newspaper articles and radio interviews. Despite so much exposure, and Facebook and blogs also bringing Fair Isle to a wide audience, Fair Isle still retains its own particular wildness. I reckon I must have walked North census over 250 times by now, but still every time I marvel at the beauty of the island and how lucky we are to be here.



**Plate 8.** The 2015 wardening team (left to right: David Parnaby, Ciaran Hatsell, Lee Gregory and Chris Dodd), 1st May 2015. © Marilyn Jones

### Susannah Parnaby

Writing shortly after the season ends, and the cold and stormy nights draw in, bringing back suppressed memories of the early spring, it seems appropriate to christen the 2015 season the 'Year of the Boiler' in remembrance of the somewhat inauspicious start to the new season. With ongoing work on staff bathrooms already delayed by weather and materials, assistant warden Ciaran and ranger Chris returned in late March in time for the boiler system, which had struggled on since the early part of the year, to fail completely, followed shortly after by a burst pipe in the downstairs toilets, leaving them to mercy of lukewarm showers in the downstairs bathrooms and us all to don as many jumpers as we could find. With a bit of luck, and Kenny and Deryk on hand to rescue us, the pipe was soon repaired, but the boiler was to prove more problematic. A small leak that rapidly developed into something much bigger meant constant work to keep the system pressurised and provide some hot water and heating before the boiler could finally be replaced in mid-May. We are very grateful to our understanding guests, a very stoic kitchen and domestic team who kept things running despite the difficulties and to Deryk and Kenny for all their efforts to keep the machinery going for as long as it did.

Despite the cold and wet start to the spring, there was a lot happening both at the Obs and around the island. In late April Will and Calum from SG Access arrived to carry out the annual inspection of the rope access system to the seabird colonies, only to find themselves diverted for an afternoon to create a new access route for the hill sheep off the beach at Wirvie; blocked by landslips following last August's record rainfall, this was causing problems as lambing approached. Shetland Amenity Trust and TRAC Engineering also began work on the South Lighthouse, which now has a smart new coat of paint and a fully repaired compound wall after the extensive

damage caused in the winter storms of early 2013, whilst MetroTile replaced the peeling tiles on the Observatory roof. May also saw the arrival of Shaun and Rachel (who met through working at the Obs in 2014) to take up residence at Barkland croft, accompanied by a BBC film crew making a documentary on Fair Isle life to be screened in winter 2016.

At the Observatory the domestic team was running flat out, with May an exceptionally busy month. Two newcomers, in the form of caddie lambs Angel and Baby John, were installed in the Warden's garden, keeping us on our toes quite literally as lambs and children quite regularly became tangled up underfoot on walks down to the beach. A favourite memory of 2015 is definitely the sight of two kids and two little lambs vying to see who could run the fastest along the North Haven beach.

Seabird researchers Jodie Crane, Jess Walkup and Marianna Chimienti, who spent the spring and summer with us, were joined in July by Zetty Deraman and Germano Foru from the University of Plymouth as part of an interesting research project investigating Storm Petrel foraging behaviour at sea. A diverse and international team of ornithological volunteers including Suzanne Rex, Jan Lewenstein, Augustin Clessin and David Haigh also arrived, followed by Patrick Styles and Tom Gale in August, several of whom benefitted from JHMF grants. We'd very much like to thank all our volunteers this year for their hard work and enthusiasm. It's been good to see so much habitat work undertaken this year, with volunteers tackling the muddy depths of the Obs wader scrape, Utra Scrape and Easter Lothar Water to improve the quality of foraging habitats for passage waders and putting in a lot of work on fencing. Regulars this year will have noted the changes around the Observatory in particular, with new enclosed areas alongside the original

plantation area already yielding dividends in terms of greater movement (and visibility) of migrants between habitat patches.

The island also saw substantial progress in terms of ongoing plans to develop a sustainable future for the isle community, with the official launch of the community development plan in Lerwick in June, picked up by a wide range of media outlets over the following weeks. At the time of writing, two staff have been appointed by the newly-created Fair Isle Development Company to begin to put into action the priorities identified in the development plan, and it is hoped that next year will see a number of new projects underway on the isle.

Often a slightly quieter period at the Observatory, August is traditionally the time for full-season staff to fit in a well-earned break before the autumn, so with a number of the team away the surprise arrival of Swedes Maya Sundsten and Sophie Pousette, who decamped from a tall ship passing through to join the domestic team for part of the autumn, was very welcome. Having planned Freya's christening for late August, when there would be more time to enjoy the company of family and friends, a poor run of weather meant a stressful few days as family attempted to reach the isle, culminating in a lovely but impromptu Friday evening service with close family and friends, some of whom had arrived only hours before, before the earlier than planned departure of the minister the following day. Of such things is island life made.

As August moved into September and on into October it was good to slip into the familiar routine of autumn birding, welcoming both old friends and new faces. The Raeburn drilling team, arriving in mid-September for a prolonged stay to dig new boreholes for the isle's water supply, soon became part of Obs life, particularly with shared personal links to a wardening team with strong Farne Islands' connections. A BTO birdrace in late September was a good opportunity to witness 'Zen birding' in action as the most relaxed team came in ahead of those who pounded up and down the isle for hours, though the autumn

wasn't without its fraught moments as some of the best birds were picked up in the rapidly fading light of late-autumn afternoons.

As in every season the running of the Observatory and the Guesthouse is dependent upon the hard work and support of a wide range of people. We would like to thank this year's staff: Orlando Krippner (cook) for his fantastic food and steady running of the kitchen through some exceedingly interesting times, assistant cooks Caron Walsh and Rachel Challoner and domestic assistant Helen Hayes for their hard work, Terri Bowley and Kharis Leggate who gave up their time to rejoin this season's housekeeping team, Alice McPherson, Alice Best and Maya Sundsten who were flexible enough to move between assistant cook and housekeeping roles where needed, our lovely childminder Marilyn Jones who kept the whole family going, assistant wardens Ciaran Hatsell and Lee Gregory and ranger Chris Dodd for being a very professional team and great company. We would also like to thank domestic volunteers Judith Anthony, Helen Chilton and Sophie Pousette for all the hard work they put in keeping the Obs clean and tidy and the researchers and ornithological volunteers who willingly joined in with a whole range of tasks. A huge thank you is also due to the many islanders who helped us out over the season - we really couldn't do it without you all, but in particular Deryk and Kenny for keeping things running, fixing things that broke and generally coming to our rescue, Hollie and Raven Shaw, Hannah Best, Amy Stout and Sue Hutchison for help with cleaning and cooking where needed and Iain for his land-management skills. We are also very grateful to the Observatory directors for their hard work behind the scenes and for being on the other end of the phone when needed. Finally, we would like to thank everyone who came and stayed with us this year - it was great to have you all here, we hope you enjoyed your time and that you'll come back and visit in the future.



## THE NTS ON FAIR ISLE IN 2015

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### Alexander Bennett

General Manager, Countryside and Islands North

In the Trust's 60th year of ownership it is particularly pleasing that we are able to welcome the plan *'Securing Fair Isle's Future: A Plan of Action'* developed by the Fair Islanders to secure their future and setting their vision for the isle. This will involve working in partnership with the Trust and many other key organisations that act as stakeholders in the management of Fair Isle. The Trust has responded and, in supporting the plan, set out its own vision and desire to work closely to develop a partnership with the isle for the development of some key infrastructure projects such as housing, growth in the population, sea and air transport, communications and the protection of the surrounding marine environment. The plan recommended the appointment of a dedicated Development Officer and we welcome Olivia Hamilton to that role. Olivia will move to the isle in 2016 and we are sure she will rapidly understand and get to grips with the needs of the isle and how we can work together to achieve our joint vision. We look forward to working closely with her and the islanders to achieve that vision.

It is always nice to welcome new Fair Islanders, and Rachel Challoner and Shaun Milner, having met as employees in the kitchen of FIBO, decided to settle on the isle, which they did in May 2015, took up residence at the vacant Barkland Croft house. They have been faced with many challenges in their first year on the isle, but who said that living on a remote island was going to be easy!

Also, the Trust finally got the go ahead to refurbish Midway Croft house and re-let the croft. The croft and house have lain empty for a few years after Jimmy Stout moved to Shetland to see out his twilight years. The work will be undertaken during the summer and autumn of 2016 and, with a following wind and sufficient interest, we hope to have a new family move in soon after.

Sadly, but not unexpectedly, Brian and Mary Wilson from Houll decided that they would move south to retire on Orkney where their son Alan has carved out a successful career as a vet. Brian's partnership with John Best formed Northmen, the builders, many years ago and played a key role for many years in getting the Trust's housing programme and other island projects delivered. The Trust is grateful to them for their dedication and hard work which was very ably inscribed by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) in 1991 as "their work in adverse condition was *meritorious*" when they awarded the Trust and Northmen for the restoration of the Auld Haa as the best restoration of the year back in 1991.

Key to making any community work well, but particularly one so remote, is a sound infrastructure and Fair Isle has embarked on developing a number of projects that will make life that little bit easier so that the islanders can simply switch the light on or get superfast access to the world-wide web or good quality fresh water - things that the mainland takes very much for granted. The development of the new Unified Low Carbon Electricity Storage & Generation Scheme to replace the existing wind turbines is now well underway, alongside a new water supply project through the sinking of new artesian wells on the hill, and the installation of superfast fibre broadband, which will give virtually instant access to the rest of the world. Many areas on the UK mainland don't even have these facilities, but when living so remotely, these facilities will help make day-to-day life that little bit easier. Also, and not wishing to sit back too much, we are looking to the future of the air and ferry services to ensure that these two key methods of accessing the island are secured for the future. The world of compliance, bureaucracy and health and safety descends increasingly every year and Fair Isle is not immune, so we have to pay particular



Plate 9. The southern crofts, including the Auld Haa (renovated in 1991), 29th September 2015. © Ian Andrews

attention to ensure that the air and ferry services fully comply with current legislation and regulations, and that is no mean feat. We are fortunate in that Shetland Islands Council and the Civil Aviation Authority are extremely helpful and give us huge support to make sure we do comply. Let's hope that that continues for many years to come.

After more than 20 years, the Scottish Government, through Marine Scotland, is moving to designate the Fair Isle marine environment as a Demonstration and Research Marine Protection Area. It has been a long and difficult struggle for the Fair Islanders to make their case and to be listened to, but thanks to the dedication of Nick Riddiford and the Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative (FIMETI) team on Fair Isle it may now be just round the corner. The marine environment supports the Fair Isle seabird populations and provides some fishing activity, albeit now mainly recreational fishing, without which the importance of Fair Isle birding and research would not be such a draw for visitors to the isle. We wait with baited breath for the outcome and future designation.

Finally, Fair Isle is again in the media spotlight: Channel 5's Ben Fogle interviewed Tommy Hyndman of the Auld Haa for '*A New Life in the Wild*' and currently BBC Scotland is filming a documentary series about a year in the life of Fair Isle, to go out in the autumn of 2016. If that doesn't bring some keen interest in settling on the isle, what will?

As always Fair Isle is not standing still and it is gratifying that the islanders have come together to develop a strong plan for their future. That grit and determination is in itself what makes Fair Isle special, so that is why the Trust stands by these plans and wants to be their key partner for the future.



the National Trust  
for Scotland  
a place for everyone

# Esther Williamson

20th July 1923–18th June 2015

Robin Williamson



Plate 10. Esther Williamson, Sandavagur, Faeroe Islands, July 2013. © Robin Williamson

My mother Esther Williamson, widow of Kenneth Williamson the first Director of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory between 1948 and 1957, died on 18th June 2015 at Tunbridge Wells hospital, Kent. She was just over a month short of what would have been her 92nd birthday. Her health had been failing for some years, and she suffered a stroke in December 2014 from which she never fully recovered.

Esther was born on 20th July 1923 at Tórshavn, Faeroe Islands, the youngest of seven children of Niels and Hansina Rein. Both her parents remained a profound influence on her in later life, especially her mother. The Faeroese language, derived from Old Norse, was her native tongue, but like all Scandinavian children then and now her education focused very much on other languages, and she became fluent in Danish and then English. Along with her

linguistic flair went a strong musical talent, and playing the piano was for her a constant source of enjoyment for nearly all of her life.

Esther was completing her education in Denmark when that country was occupied, and she was summoned home by her father. The war came to the Faeroes in 1940 with the arrival of British troops, where despite the fact of the occupation the British generally got on well with the inhabitants: and it was not long before Esther was being courted by an army sergeant who had developed a consuming interest in the islands, their wildlife, history and culture. The Scottish author Eric Linklater wrote in his foreword to Ken's book *The Atlantic Islands*: "it would be an excellent thing for Scotland if every man in the regiment married and brought home with him a Faeroe wife". That is precisely what my father did - and Esther helped him as he toured the islands researching material for his book, acting as his guide and interpreter.

Esther and Ken married on 14th March 1944 and came to live in York initially, but soon went back to island life when the National Trust for Scotland acquired Fair Isle, and Ken was appointed to the new Bird Observatory there. While he did the ornithological work and carried out the research that would later make his career, Esther did everything else. She organised supplies (no mean feat when there were only two sailings a week from the mainland of Shetland, depending on the weather); she planned and supervised the maintenance of the buildings (Nissen huts in those days); with two young Faeroese helpers she cooked and cleaned for everyone who visited (there were many); in addition to which she brought up my sister Hervør who was born in January 1945.



They lived on Fair Isle in the summer, coming south to Edinburgh each winter (where I was born in 1955). Then in 1957, after a summer on St Kilda (see his book *St Kilda Summer* which he co-wrote with Morton Boyd), Ken got a job with the British Trust for Ornithology which occupied him for the rest of his life. At first we lived in Oxford, then moved with the Trust to Tring in Hertfordshire. When I was old enough, Esther decided to take up the work she had started when still single in the Faeroes, and joined the school dental service. She worked hard at that and maintained our household while Ken worked by day for the BTO, and by night lecturing for the Workers' Educational Association, writing books and papers, and preparing for broadcasts. Esther always used to say that her chief contribution to the world of ornithology was to allow my father to get on with his work uninterrupted!

She also accompanied Ken on several cruises run by the National Trust for Scotland on which he was one of the guest lecturers. She would occasionally be persuaded to lecture herself, about her early life as an islander, and some of those who have written to me since her death remember her talks on board. Though nervous about the sea (a fear no doubt born of the many losses suffered by the Faeroese people during the war while their ships delivered fish to allied ports throughout the Battle of the Atlantic), some of her happiest times were spent afloat; she also loved cruising the Mediterranean for pleasure.

In June 1977 my father died suddenly of a heart attack, a traumatic event which Esther faced with characteristic pluck. She learned to drive and carried on working for the school dental service until she was 65. As a dental nurse she was (in the words of her last boss) "a highly respected professional colleague", efficient and popular with the children. After her retirement she continued to put her caring instincts to good use as a Macmillan carer. When that finished she spent time as a volunteer visiting at the local hospital. From the early 1980s until the tragically early death of her daughter, my sister, Hervør in July 1998, the two of them lived in Mentmore,

Buckinghamshire, where they were both active members of a vibrant village community.

After Hervør died, Esther, aged 75, decided to move back to Scotland. She established herself in Strontian, Argyll, by the shores of Loch Sunart, where again she participated enthusiastically in the many village activities. While she never quite got over Hervør's death, she was reasonably happy there, entertaining old friends, making new ones, and looking after her Shetland collies.

Not long after her 80th birthday she developed bowel cancer, and while the skill of the surgeons in Fort William completely cured her, recuperating from the operation was a long process. Soon afterwards, in August 2006, she moved south once more, this time to Sevenoaks in Kent to be nearer to my wife Jane and me.

Nature-lover as she was, after the splendour of the West Highlands, Esther found it difficult to re-adjust to the tamer landscape of South East England. Also, the dementia which was to cloud her last years had begun to take hold. Nevertheless she made for herself a very pleasant home in a garden flat, where she lived independently for nearly seven years before going into Gloucester House Nursing Home in

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"While Ken did the ornithological work and carried out the research that would later make his career, Esther did everything else."

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**Plate 11.** (l-r): Willie Stout (Houll), James Anderson (Setter), Willa Wishart (Obs 'maid'), Ken Williamson, Esther Williamson, George Stout (Upper Stoneybrek), Alec Stout (Upper Stoneybrek), Mary Wishart (Obs 'maid'), old Obs, early 1950s. © FIBO Archives

Sevenoaks, where she received dedicated and devoted care and medical attention for the last two years of her life.

She was able to travel once more when she came with Jane and me to the Faeroe Islands to celebrate her 90th birthday. The airport there was fog-bound so the flight was delayed by nearly 24 hours. But the time was not wasted. Esther met and made friends with a Faeroese journalist and biographer, who interviewed and photographed her for his paper. The result was a centre-page spread covering her life in both Scotland and England, and Ken's life and work, with a fine selection of photographs both past and contemporary. The celebrations were well attended by five generations of our family, and Esther was able to see her childhood home in Tórshavn once more - now converted into classrooms for the university.

Esther's life was a long and useful one, spanning nine eventful decades and three countries - the Faeroes, Scotland and England. While her best years were spent at Ken's side, supporting him and his work, she was also a devoted parent and friend to many. Her abiding interest was in people, what they were doing and what was happening to them. To Fair Isle and its Observatory she contributed a boundless energy and a determination to succeed in a new venture; to be able to return in 1998 for the 50th anniversary celebrations gave her great pleasure. The funeral service for her at St John the Baptist's church in Sevenoaks and her cremation in Tunbridge Wells were dignified occasions but also a celebration of her life. Her ashes are now interred with Ken in Tring cemetery. May they both rest in peace.

*Robin Williamson MBE*

# ORNITHOLOGICAL MONTHLY SUMMARY

David Parnaby

The year opened with westerly winds and spells of wet weather, which would be the dominant conditions for January. A selection of interesting species lingered from 2014, including Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, three 'Tundra Bean Geese', two Barnacle Geese, Grey Heron and decent numbers of Robins and Water Rails. A Great Northern Diver passed Meoneess on 3rd and there were occasional sightings of Iceland and Glaucous Gulls early in the month, with a 'Mealy Redpoll' on 4th. Westerly winds topped gale force on 9th and brought an impressive count of nine Glaucous Gulls, along with an Iceland Gull and a second-winter 'Kumlien's Gull' (which may have been last year's bird returning), with seven Glaucous and two Iceland Gulls the following day. More exceptionally strong westerly winds brought a rare winter sighting of Shoveler on 15th, with the first Long-tailed Duck of the year seen the following day. The wind switched to the south-east on 20th and brought a Little Auk, 'blue' Fulmar and a few stragglers including Golden Plover that may have been fleeing freezing conditions on the UK mainland, whilst Guillemots also made the first of regular winter visits to the cliffs. With winds remaining in the south or south-east from 21st, there were regular sightings of white-winged gulls and arrivals included a slight increase in thrush numbers, Lapwing (21st), an unseasonal Brambling (22nd) and a Great Northern Diver (23rd). The winds switched to the north-west toward the end of the month, with the continued heavy showers bringing snow at times. Fieldfare numbers rose again, but there was little else new as a generally quiet month came to an end.

## January

Species Recorded: **56**  
Year List at end of month: **56**  
Birds Ringed: **2**  
Species Ringed: **2**

**Plate 12.** Great Black-backed, Herring and Glaucous Gulls, Ditfield, 9th January 2015.  
© David Parnaby







**Plate 13.** Obs and Sheep Rock, 3rd February 2015. © David Parnaby

## February

Species Recorded: **57**  
 Year List at end of month: **66**  
 Birds Ringed: **2**  
 Species Ringed: **1**

### February

Cold weather at the start of the month brought snow on the night of 2nd, which was deep enough for sledging on 3rd, but had a limited effect on birds, with four Pink-footed Geese arriving on 1st and at least two Iceland and one Glaucous Gull present. Twite numbers built up, with small numbers returning to the Obs feeders from 2nd. Lingering birds included Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, 'Mealy Redpoll', a few Water Rails and a selection of thrushes, most of which lingered throughout the month. A spell of gale force south-easterly winds around mid-month brought a second Grey Heron and the first Ringed Plover of the year (13th) and an unusually early Hen Harrier on 14th. Some milder weather then saw a little bit of movement including early records of Woodpigeon (16th), Lesser Black-backed Gull and four Chaffinches (from 17th). A spell of unproductive, cold north-westerly winds was followed by a couple of more spring-like days that saw a Mistle Thrush and the first Meadow Pipits of the year on 25th, whilst a pair of Peregrines displaying over North Haven greeted the Good Shepherd returning from its annual refit the same day. Although the occasional Iceland and Glaucous Gull had been seen throughout the month some blustery south-westerly days toward the end of the month brought a few more, including a peak of three Glaucous Gulls on 27th.

A very windy and wet start to the month continued the general theme of the winter and both Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were present irregularly throughout the first week, whilst singing Wren and the presence of frogspawn in Golden Water gave false promise that spring was on its way. A Pied Wagtail returned on the 9th and some of the breeding species began to build up in numbers, then from mid-month a few more migrants started to appear, with Goldcrest and a pair of Stonechats on 13th, with a few Woodcocks flushed during the following day's Sheep Hill. Another Stonechat arrived on 15th and the return of Ciaran and Chris on 17th signalled the first real flush of migrants. Skylark numbers rose rapidly (to over 200), the first Grey Wagtail (17th), Black Redstart (18th) and Chiffchaff (19th) of the year appeared and a small influx of Stonechats brought a peak count of seven on 19th, with Reed Bunting, Mistle Thrush and up to 17 Robins also noted. The long-staying Buzzard was also affected by the need to migrate and was last seen on 19th. The next burst of activity occurred on 25th, when east-south-east winds and rain brought the first Greenfinch, another Stonechat and small numbers of thrushes and other migrants. With the wind continuing from the south-east the following day, the first full census of the year took place and produced impressive counts of 76 Blackbirds and 56 Goldcrests along with smaller numbers of other migrants including the year's first Rook. Things quietened down somewhat with more westerlies kicking in, although Fair Isle's earliest ever Goldfinch arrived on 27th. The 28th was a day that included two gales (a south-easterly one in the morning followed in the afternoon by a south-westerly after a brief lull), which brought four Iceland Gulls. An early start on a much calmer day on 29th saw the team undertake the first Tystie count of the season, with the year's first Puffins also recorded, but the month ended with cold winds, initially from the north, and frequent wintry showers and blizzard-like conditions.

With April opening to a coating of snow across the island, it was no surprise that migration remained slow, with a Jackdaw (1st) and 15 migrant Hooded Crows (2nd) some of the only species on the move. The first large arrival of Puffins on 2nd also brought the first returning Great Skua of the year. Easterly winds on 3rd brought some visible migration and the year's first Dunnoek. A Black Redstart was found the following day, when winds had switched to the west, and two 'Greenland White-fronted Geese' arrived in the evening. Light south-west winds on 6th brought a small fall, including an arrival of 274 Meadow Pipits, 30 Redwings, Water Rail, Grey Wagtail and Siskin, whilst very poor weather on 7th brought the first Wheatear and Linnets of the year. An early start for a Black Guillemot survey on a calm 8th brought the first rarity of the year, a Mute Swan, which eventually

## March

Species Recorded: **71**  
Year List at end of month: **81**  
Birds Ringed: **63**  
Species Ringed: **9**

## April

Species Recorded: **109**  
Year List at end of month: **118**  
Birds Ringed: **221**  
Species Ringed: **27**

settled on Da Water (and would remain there for the rest of the month), having first gone on a couple of laps of the island, and there were also three Shelducks. Another good day on 9th brought a small amount of migration, including the first Swallow, Collared Dove and 'White Wagtail' of the year, along with 91 Redwings (mostly of Icelandic stock). Southerly winds overnight brought a few new birds on 11th, although nothing particularly dramatic, then continued westerly winds on 12th saw the arrival of a Shoveler and 82 Golden Plovers, but very little else. A very calm morning on 13th was enlivened by Ciaran flushing a magnificent Goshawk during morning trap round, which reappeared over the Obs a couple of hours later before being watched heading to Shetland. There was also a Ring Ouzel, two each of Shoveler and Pintail and a notable increase in Meadow Pipits (520) and Skylarks (332). More strongish south-westerly winds brought the year's first Willow Warbler (14th) and Whimbrels (16th) but little else. Migrants increased on 17th in calm conditions, with Goldfinch, Knot and 101 Wheatears and another beautiful day on 18th saw a good count of 194 Black Guillemots, along with Greenshank and two Blackcaps (both new for the year) and another small increase in migrants, including 11 Goldcrests. A cool easterly breeze on 19th didn't deliver much passerine movement, although Black-tailed Godwit and Common Sandpiper both made their first appearance of the year, but the highlight was a very smart Slavonian Grebe in full breeding dress in South Harbour (which relocated to North Haven the following day where it remained until 23rd). Light winds on 20th saw a few more birds on the move including a Gadwall and three Tree Sparrows, with the following day also seeing a couple of additions to the year list in the form of House Martin and Whooper Swan, along with the arrival of Lee for the rest of the season. A Sand Martin was the pick of the bunch on 22nd, whilst the next day Gadwall had increased to three and Tree Sparrows to five. There was also a group of three Killer Whales that put on a decent show as they headed up the east coast, with all the Obs staff (except the Warden who was stuck in the fire engine waiting for an incoming plane!) managing good views. As the end of the month approached, it was clear that the westerly winds that had caused a very slow spring were set to continue and there'd be no repeat of the fantastic birding of late April 2014, with an increase in Gadwalls to five the highlight of 24th. Shetland was shining white in the distance on 25th as it was carpeted in snow, showing that temperatures were still rather low, but despite the weather, the day went on to produce some decent birds, with the first Brent Goose (a pale-bellied bird) since 2010 seen in the Havens just after breakfast, whilst Tree Pipit, Grasshopper Warbler, Kestrel and Arctic Skua also turned up for the first time in 2015 and a Goldfinch was also seen. A smart male Lapland Bunting around the Havens and Obs on 26th was



the best bird of the day, with other birds likely to have come from the same direction including several 'Greenland Wheatears' and a fluffy white Common Redpoll, which may well have been an Icelandic bird. A calmer spell on the evening of 28th saw an interesting couple of hours, as birds dropped in including a nice female Hawfinch at the Obs, the first Short-eared Owl of the year and an increase in other migrants including 13 Chiffchaffs, five Bramblings and a couple of Ring Ouzels. Despite that promise, and the easterly wind continuing for another day, there was little new on 29th, although Goldcrest, two Tree Pipits and a small increase in *alba* wagtails were noted, as was the first Red-throated Diver of the year. Cold, northerly winds brought the month to an end, with Lapland Bunting and three each of House Martin and Jackdaw the highlights, although the Brent Goose that had appeared briefly on a few occasions over the preceding days eventually showed well enough to have its darvic rings noted, showing it had been ringed in Iceland the previous spring.

**Plate 14.** Da Voar Redd Up (left to right): Jess Walkup, Jodie Crane, Helen Hayes, Terri Bowley, Marilyn Jones, Lee Gregory, Chris Dodd, Mr French, Ciaran Hatsell, Grace and Freyja Parnaby, Joy French, David and Susannah Parnaby, The Havens, 2nd May 2015. © David Parnaby



## May

Species Recorded: **153**  
Year List at end of month: **176**  
Birds Ringed: **254**  
Species Ringed: **47**

April had been mostly rather disappointing, with westerly winds dominating, very few migrants on the move and a lack of rarities that meant the top three birds for the year so far were Goshawk, Mute Swan and Brent Goose. Surely May could deliver something better...

The first Razorbill egg of the year was noted on 1st, but the month opened quietly for migrants, due to the cool north-easterly winds. A slight shift to a more east-south-east direction on 3rd delivered the goods though, with the first Wryneck, Whitethroat, Redstarts (three), Whinchats (two) and Yellow and 'Blue-headed Wagtails' of the year amongst the highlights, along with increases in some of the other migrant counts. With promising conditions continuing on 4th it was no surprise there was a scatter of new migrants, including the first Lesser Whitethroat and Jack Snipe of the year, but these were overshadowed first by a northbound Osprey then a Tawny Pipit found scurrying along the road near Schoolton. The year list continued to grow on 5th, with Long-eared Owl, Cuckoo, Garden Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Pied Flycatcher and Green Sandpiper all appearing for the first time and counts including 35 Chiffchaffs, 17 Willow Warblers and 16 White Wagtails, with Wryneck and two Iceland Gulls also present. Although the 6th didn't produce the rarity that it felt like it should, Quail, Wryneck, Hen Harrier and three Gadwalls were amongst the highlights, the first Swift of the year was noted and counts included 55 Swallows, 27 Willow Warblers, 25 Blackcaps, 23 Tree Pipits, six Whinchats and 12 Reed Buntings. West-south-west gales on 7th unexpectedly brought the first Turtle Dove and Spotted Flycatcher of the year and a more expected 'North-western Redpoll'. The 8th saw light southerly winds, a good 'drifty' day, which produced Rough-legged Buzzard, Hen Harrier, Peregrine and Long-eared Owl all heading high north-east from the island, and light corvid passage. The first Arctic Tern and Common Crossbill of the year were recorded, whilst a Puffin count in the evening also provided the first Short-toed Lark of the year. South-east winds at first on 9th produced a 'Grey-headed Wagtail' and a second Turtle Dove, with the Short-toed Lark being relocated near Barkland. South-east winds increased on 10th and, alongside the lingering birds, there were Wryneck, Hawfinch, Stonechat, nine Tree Sparrows, Short-eared Owl and the first Common Terns of the year. There were two Hawfinches the next day then Iceland Gull and three Sanderlings (the first of the year) on 12th during westerly winds.

A north-west force four to six wind on 13th saw a seawatch from South Light that will go down in Fair Isle folklore, with 40 Long-tailed Skuas and 13 Pomarine Skuas passing in three hours (see article on page 153). The 14th saw a light north-easterly that produced two stately Common Cranes, Wood Sandpiper, four

Lesser Whitethroats and Grey Wagtails amongst others. The first Shag chicks and Guillemot, Oystercatcher and Meadow Pipit eggs were all found, with 6,666 Puffins counted around the island in the evening. The census, trap rounds and Puffin count saw one 'tagged' assistant warden rack-up 25 miles of walking during the day, no wonder the team get through so many home bakes! The Cranes were still present on 15th, when the charts showed very localised south-easterlies (coming from the north-east of Scotland) that still produced a cracking male Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler at the Obs (that went on to linger down the island to 25th), a male Bluethroat at Barkland, Long-eared Owl, Crossbill and a scatter of other migrants, whilst the Tree Sparrow count increased to 24. On 16th there were two Short-toed Larks, probably including one seen earlier in the month, whilst the Tawny Pipit also reappeared having not been seen since 6th. Westerly winds on 17th surprisingly produced a Golden Oriole, with a *rostrata* Common Redpoll more expected, whilst a decent selection of lingering birds included the Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Tawny Pipit (which remained to 19th), two Short-toed Larks (with one remaining to 22nd), Bluethroat and Hawfinch, and the first Bonxie egg was found. A calm day on 18th saw the arrival of the first cruise ship of a successful season, along with four Dotterels and two Lesser Redpolls, both new for the year. A north-east wind the following day caused a postponement of the year's second cruise ship, but produced a superb Long-tailed

**Plate 15.** Short-toed Lark, Skadan, 16th May 2015. © Lee Gregory







Plate 16. Rustic Bunting, Utra, 19th May 2015. © Lee Gregory

Skua in the Parks and a flighty Rustic Bunting around Utra. Westerly-based winds on 20th–22nd produced a quiet spell (and cancelled planes for a couple of days), with arrivals including Turtle Dove, ‘Grey-headed Wagtail’ and Long-eared Owl, whilst light southerlies on 23rd brought a Marsh Harrier and two Barnacle Geese. More westerly winds from 24th–28th again slowed things up at what can be a very exciting time of year, with just a few commoner migrants sneaking through, the first Tufted Duck of the year (27th), Iceland Gull from 25th and a Snow Bunting lingering on Buness. Lighter winds on 29th saw a Bluethroat arrive, with just a few migrants, although 256 Wheatears included several ‘Greenland’ birds. A north-westerly wind backing southerly later on 30th brought a Hobby, Ring Ouzel and Short-eared Owl, there were two Risso’s Dolphins and a forecast for south-east winds the next day - at last! Although the slightly better conditions brought few migrants, the first Great White Egret for Fair Isle was adequate compensation on the last day of the month, although even that wasn’t really enough to dispel the feeling that May had been hard work at times, despite the healthy-enough list of species recorded.

Blustery south-westerlies kicked off the month, but they quickly calmed to a more pleasant and more promising south-easterly by the afternoon of 1st, which saw the first Marsh Warbler, Common Rosefinch and Red-backed Shrike of the year arrive. With the winds continuing from the south-east on 2nd there were more birds, with two Icterine Warblers the highlight of a small arrival that also included 11 Spotted Flycatchers, seven Whitethroats and four Garden Warblers (all highest counts of the spring so far), four Crossbills and a Stonechat. Although the wind had switched to the south-west the following day the arrival of two Greenish Warblers, Bluethroat, Marsh Warbler, Grasshopper Warbler, 14 Garden Warblers, 15 Willow Warblers, Woodcock and Short-eared Owl perhaps hinted that birds had arrived late on the previous day. A selection of birds lingered the following day, although new highlights were limited to a new Icterine Warbler, Quail and Glaucous Gull. A fresh south-easterly continued through 5th bringing an impressive day's birding that saw Hobby, a new Red-backed Shrike (to join the lingering bird), a new Marsh Warbler (with one also still at Chalet), two Quails (including one still at Chalet), Hawfinch, 'Grey-headed Wagtail', Cuckoo, 22 Willow Warblers, eight Whitethroats, nine Sedge Warblers, Reed Warbler, 25 Spotted Flycatchers (taking advantage of an arrival of Silver Y moths!) along with the two each of Greenish and Icterine Warblers that were lingering. A fresh south-south-west wind on 6th saw two Red-backed Shrikes (one of which was a new arrival), a new Marsh Warbler, the first Stock Dove of the year and Black Redstart, whilst a productive Good Shepherd trip produced seven Manx Shearwaters, three Storm Petrels and a Minke Whale. On 7th there were few new birds, although Yellow Wagtail and Redstart had just arrived. A calm day on 8th saw seabird work become the priority, although typically there were also birds on the move, with Blyth's Reed Warbler, Red-backed Shrike and Icterine Warbler amongst the new arrivals, but a clear-out was noted on 9th as monitoring work was again the priority. Cold, westerly winds and low cloud on 10th saw a Lesser Redpoll arrive (but no flights from Tingwall) and the first 'Fair Isle Wren' fledglings take to the wing, whilst a Common Rosefinch was seen in better conditions on 11th. The 12th saw the arrival of most of the FIBOT directors for their Annual General Meeting, but there were few new birds, with a similar situation on 13th (when the first Bonxie chick was seen) and 14th (although two Blackcaps arrived). A Black Redstart was trapped in the Vaadal on 15th, south-easterlies on 16th brought a few common migrants before westerlies saw highlights limited to Common Rosefinch, 'Mealy Redpoll' (both 18th), Red-backed Shrike and Goosander (19th). A Whooper Swan in light south-easterlies on 20th was notably unseasonable, although there were few other arrivals. Midsummer's day was largely fog-bound, although a Hobby was found when it cleared in the evening, a Canada Goose was the

## June

Species Recorded: **114**

Year List at end of month: **171**

Birds Ringed: **524**

Species Ringed: **42**



**Plate 17.** Blyth's Reed Warbler, trapped Gully, 8th June 2015. © Lee Gregory

**Plate 18.** Nightingale, trapped Gully, 30th June 2015. © Lee Gregory



first of the year and there were six Common Crossbills. Also of interest were Curlew flocks totalling 29 birds, representing an early sign of autumn, fledged House Sparrow chicks and alarm-calling Redshanks at Da Water, which indicated a rare breeding attempt had taken place. The continued easterly-based winds on 22nd saw a cool day, but brought a Golden Oriole that roamed the crofts until 30th June along with another Marsh Warbler, and the first Wheatear chicks fledged. The 23rd saw the first Arctic Skua chick hatch in what would prove to be a relatively decent season for the species compared to most recent years, whilst Eider chicks were also seen for the first time and Hooded Crow chicks fledged. A new Reed Warbler was trapped on 24th and was a precursor to a very late fall on 25th, in which a very calm morning gave way to south-easterly winds and nine migrants were trapped on the morning trap round, one of the best of the spring! They included a Marsh Warbler and Willow Warbler, whilst counts of nine Chiffchaffs, four each of Spotted Flycatchers and Blackcaps and a Redwing all involved further arrivals, and a Quail was singing at Kenaby. The day was also the first in some time to be calm enough to allow the west coast to be surveyed, showing mixed results for the breeding seabirds. The 26th saw south-easterlies, low cloud and rain that limited birding and, although it was drier on 27th, the planes were cancelled by low cloud, but Red-backed Shrike, Swift and Lesser Redpoll were all new migrants. South-easterly winds continued to the end of the month and, after the first Storm Petrel ringing of the year in the Havens that saw seven caught in the early hours of the morning of 30th, trap rounds produced Nightingale and 'Western Subalpine Warbler'. Other arrivals included Yellow Wagtail and a Marsh Warbler that was first heard singing at 02:00 hrs and was trapped in the evening. Although the spring may not have been a classic for migrants, it was at least persistent!



South-easterlies continued into July, with Blackcap and Grey Heron arriving on the first day of the month. A smart Rose-coloured Starling touched down in the Obs garden on 2nd, when there were also 12 Siskins (which included some juveniles, thereby finally signalling an end to spring migration!), a *flava* wagtail and an arrival of Lepidoptera. The first Guillemot chicks fledged on 3rd and highlights on 4th were a Thistle Ermine moth and a juvenile Grey Heron. The 5th saw the all-day Guillemot feed-watch just survive the encroaching fog. A busy day of seabird monitoring on 6th was only interrupted by a round-up of the hill sheep, although a Redshank chick was seen at Da Water, proving a rare breeding occurrence. Twenty Siskins on 7th was an unusually large summer count, then things were quite quiet until 15th, when a Honey-buzzard and Marsh Warbler were found and the year's first Leach's Petrels were recorded on an overnight ringing session. Occasional Lesser and Common Redpolls had been seen earlier in the month, and counts of Common increased to 11 by 18th during an unusual mid-summer arrival, with the same date seeing the first Green Sandpiper and Greenshank of the autumn. A freshening south-easterly wind on 20th saw a Common Rosefinch appear, with an Icterine Warbler arriving the next day. The first Arctic Skua chick of the year fledged on 21st, with the first Bonxie chick following suit the following day. The first autumn Spotted Flycatcher arrived on 26th, whilst a Long-eared Owl seen in the small hours of the morning at the Obs after a petrel-ringing session was an interesting record. The Common Redpoll arrival continued through to the end of the month, three Ruffs on 30th July were the first of the year and July ended with a surprise when a Sabine's Gull flew across the middle of the island on 31st.

Although autumn census began on 1st, the best bird was a Rose-coloured Starling photographed by visitors near North Raeva, which was seen again on 4th. A spell of south-easterly wind brought a Spotted Redshank, the first Fieldfare and Kestrel of the autumn, and 80 Purple Sandpipers on 3rd then the first Garden Warbler of the autumn and 553 Common Gulls on 4th. A Little Stint, two Spotted Redshanks and a Cuckoo (5th), juvenile Willow Warbler (6th) and Reed Warbler (7th) continued the generally slow start with few new birds. With south-west winds continuing, Sooty Shearwater, two Black-tailed Godwits and ten Ruffs on 9th preceded some reasonable wader passage, whilst the first Sparrowhawk and 'White Wagtail' of the autumn arrived on 11th. The 13th saw the last big seabird monitoring session, which took up most of the team's day, although there was time to see an impressive Basking Shark at North Light. The seabird monitoring work was finished just in time, with strong south-east winds and rain on 14th bringing difficult birding

## July

Species Recorded: **80**  
Year List at end of month: **176**  
Birds Ringed: **1,422**  
Species Ringed: **38**

## August

Species Recorded: **115**  
Year List at end of month: **187**  
Birds Ringed: **717**  
Species Ringed: **45**



**Plate 19.** Aquatic Warbler, Meadow Burn,  
15th August 2015. © Lee Gregory

conditions, although a late foray to the crofts produced a Barred Warbler and a few other migrants, surely a promising sign for the next day... Sure enough, despite the north-west rain and drizzle, a stonking Aquatic Warbler was found in Meadow Burn, with other birds including two Barred Warblers, and the first Pied Flycatcher, Grasshopper Warbler and two Tree Pipits of the autumn. An impressive day concluded with a party at the Obs that ended with a show of the aurora and perseid meteors. There were few new migrants on 16th, although fledged Swallows provided a highlight, whilst few new birds were noted on 17th, although 226 Storm Petrels were trapped in the early hours of the morning. The 18th brought moderate south-easterly winds and, despite the rain hampering efforts slightly, a good range of birds were noted with the first Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Spotted Flycatchers, *flava* wagtails and Redstart of the autumn all logged, along with Icterine Warbler, two Barred Warblers and increases including 552 Common Gulls, 19 Willow Warblers and 18 Garden Warblers. With the south-easterly gusting to 40mph on 19th, more birds came in and the species list at the end of the day was a rather healthy one, with Booted Warbler (discovered late in the day at Leogh), a showy Thrush Nightingale at Setter, Greenish Warbler at the Obs, four Wrynecks, two Red-backed Shrikes, two Icterine Warblers, two Barred Warblers and two 'Grey-headed Wagtails' (with one other *flava* wagtail) the highlights. There were also the first Black Redstarts, Whitethroats, Sand Martins and Shelducks of the autumn and high counts including 56 Willow Warblers, 20 Whinchats, 17 Common Sandpipers, 14 Greenshanks and nine Pied Flycatchers. A number of migrants remained the following day, but heavy rain and then thick fog scuppered most birding (and the planes). The 21st eventually saw the weather clear later in the day, which allowed planes in and therefore Freyja's christening to take place, whilst a scatter of birds included five Icterine Warblers and the first Wood Warbler of the autumn. Things were rather quiet on

22nd in terms of new arrivals, whilst the 23rd saw a Red-backed Shrike arrive amongst a scatter of new migrants, whilst the 176 Silver Y moths and 39 Painted Ladies were minimum counts of what was clearly a large Lepidoptera arrival. The 24th brought the warmest day of the year at 16° Celsius, whilst the gusty easterly wind saw a good tally of scarce migrants with four Icterine Warblers and two each of Wrynecks, Red-backed Shrikes and Barred Warblers, whilst some high counts of migrants included 68 Willow Warblers, 41 Whinchats, 34 Garden Warblers, five each of Whitethroats, Lesser Whitethroats and Spotted Flycatchers and a Sedge Warbler (finally bringing the tally of this species level with that of Aquatic Warbler for the autumn!). Light north-easterly winds on 25th brought plenty more birds, with Barred Warblers increasing to six, Icterine Warblers to five and Red-backed Shrikes to three, whilst high counts of migrants included 90 Willow Warblers, 37 Garden Warblers, 26 Whitethroats and 17 Reed Warblers. More migrants the next day included a Water Rail, Wood Warbler, 93 Willow Warblers and nine Redstarts. The 27th was quieter, although Cuckoo, Song Thrush, 15 Kestrels and 75 Ringed Plovers were notable. Another pleasant day on 28th saw the first Corncrake of the year (although the discovery later in the autumn of the remains of a bird in heavy wing moult suggested at least one must have been present before this), the first Goldcrest of the autumn, 14 Reed Warblers, 43 'White Wagtails' (along with 35 other *alba* wagtails) and a high count of 287 Rock Pipits. There were few new birds on 29th, although 259 Wheatears was a good count and a juvenile Moorhen was an early record. The 30th saw the first Bar-tailed Godwit for the year, two Pintails, 80 'White Wagtails' and 625 Meadow Pipits in light south-westerly winds. As the winds came more north-westerly the next day, there were more birds on the move, with 729 Meadow Pipits and 101 'White Wagtails' (with 38 other *alba* wagtails), with a Common Rosefinch tagging along with the movement, although less expected were 44 Swifts.

Plate 20. Thrush Nightingale, Setter, 19th August 2015. © Lee Gregory







Plate 21. Yellow-browed Warblers, Lower Leogh, 30th September 2015. © Ian Andrews

## September

Species Recorded: **138**

Year List at end of month: **196**

Birds Ringed: **314**

Species Ringed: **47**

And so, after a decent August, hopes were high for September, and the month began well with a wandering Citrine Wagtail that eventually settled around the Walli Burn until 8th. Other new migrants included Hawfinch, Barred Warbler, Merlin and Wood Warbler, whilst the Icterine Warbler and Common Rosefinch remained at the Obs. The next few days were quiet, with some unfavourable winds producing few new birds, although Meadow Pipits had increased to 810 by 4th and there were sightings of Risso's Dolphins in what was a good year for the species. On 6th the gusty north-westerlies finally delivered, when a Pectoral Sandpiper was located amongst increasing numbers of waders and an Iceland Gull also appeared. A Slavonian Grebe, the first Snow Bunting of the autumn and a Storm Petrel off South Light were the highlights of new birds from 7th, with the wind dropping enough to allow Storm Petrel ringing that evening, when 37 birds were caught. The winds finally dropped on 8th and the results were instant, with an Arctic Warbler the highlight and a showy Corncrake at Schoolton. Calm seas that day also provided perfect conditions for several cetacean sightings, including eight Killer Whales off North Light, along with a Basking Shark just north of the isle. Although the winds had turned southeasterly from the afternoon of 8th, and remained that way, the 9th began unpromisingly, with no birds caught in the first two trap rounds or in three hours of having the mist-nets open at the

Obs. However, during the course of the day it became apparent there had been an arrival of migrants, with the highlights being ten Yellow-browed Warblers (the earliest ever arrival and the precursor to an amazing autumn for this species), Red-backed Shrike and Common Rosefinch. A few new migrants in similarly promising conditions on 10th included the first Lapland Bunting of the autumn and increases of some species including ten Pied Flycatchers. Further small increases in common migrants on 11th also brought two Barred Warblers and the first Jack Snipe of the autumn. The promising conditions on 12th brought a large arrival of raptors, with a Pallid Harrier seen briefly near dusk joining two Hen Harriers, a record-breaking ten Sparrowhawks, 11 Kestrels and two Merlins. There were also a couple of interesting grey and white wagtails; a 'Yellow Wagtail' presumably of one of the eastern races that was never pinned down well enough to establish its subspecies with certainty. The other was a confiding Citrine Wagtail on the cliff tops at Guidicum. A Wryneck was found amongst a small arrival of passerine migrants. The following day saw increasing counts of three Hen Harriers and 13 Kestrels, whilst the Pallid Harrier became more obliging (and remained to 21st) and was seen roosting in Boini Mire with its

Plate 22. Pallid Harrier, 17th September 2015. © Lee Gregory





commoner cousins. A very wet day on 14th produced an adult Pomarine Skua over the island, whilst continuing south-east winds and drier conditions on 15th produced fewer birds than hoped, with the first Shoveler and Robin of the autumn noted. A *Convolvulus* Hawk-moth was probably the best migrant of 16th, whilst light north-west winds on 17th brought ten Yellow-browed Warblers, two Barred Warblers and 28 Willow Warblers. Smaller numbers of migrants in similar conditions on 18th included a Red-breasted Flycatcher and a Common Rosefinch. Typically, given the continued north-west wind, the first Pink-footed Geese were recorded on 19th, whilst the calm conditions enabled four cetacean species to be seen, including seven Killer Whales, along with a Basking Shark. A slight south-easterly on 20th hadn't blown from very far, but brought a Blyth's Reed Warbler and winds of a similar strength and direction on 21st brought an amazing 53 Yellow-browed Warblers (more than double the total of all other warblers present on the island!), three Common Rosefinches, Corncrake and the first Ring Ouzel and 26 Redwings of the autumn. A Wryneck, a couple of Barred Warblers and a Pomarine Skua were the highlights of 22nd, but winds then turned to the west and things quietened down somewhat for new arrivals for a couple of days. With moderate south-westerly winds on 25th a Corncrake was a bit of a surprise, as was the reappearance of a Lesser Redpoll that had been ringed on the island in mid-July, but 197 Pink-footed Geese were more expected. After a quiet 26th, the 27th started with little to report in light south-easterlies, but as the winds became more south-westerly, more birds were found, with a Lanceolated Warbler in

Plate 23. Lanceolated Warbler, Suka Mire, 27th September 2015. © Steve Arlow



Suka Mire the highlight, and a Little Bunting and a new Barred Warbler also recorded. A light south-south-west wind on 28th saw some good conditions for the care of the hill sheep, whilst the wind increased from the south-east in the afternoon and brought a clear arrival of birds. Although an Olive-backed Pipit, three Bluthroats and a Corncrake arrived, along with the first small arrival of thrushes and first Chaffinches and Bramblings of the autumn, the star of the day was Yellow-browed Warbler, with a remarkable total of 76 logged, another record count for the island. The always hoped-for 'Warden's birthday lifer' failed to materialise on 29th, although there were a couple of Little Buntings and a lovely show of Risso's Dolphins, but the Migratory Locust caught at the School was the most unusual arrival of the day (and arguably the most unexpected of the entire autumn). The month ended with more disappointing south-westerly winds that produced 529 Pink-footed Geese moving south, but little else in the way of new birds.

September had been tough going at times, and October opened with a strong south-west wind that delivered the first two Whooper Swans of the autumn and 418 Barnacle Geese, and there were also two Killer Whales off Buness. With winds continuing from the west on 2nd there were few new birds on census, although Whooper Swans increased to 13 and Pink-footed Geese to 359 and there were five Killer Whales. There was nothing therefore to prepare people for the remarkable sight of five Glossy Ibises dropping onto the Obs wader scrape at lunchtime! The flock dispersed around the island, but at least three remained to 15th (during which time, one of them landed in the Obs garden just outside the Warden's flat window!). More westerly winds produced a Pomarine Skua and, surprisingly, Turtle Dove on 3rd, then conditions improved on 4th and winds became south-easterly later in the day, with the instant effect of more migrants including Bluethroat, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Common Rosefinch, Barred Warbler, three 'Siberian Chiffchaffs', three Goldfinches and an increase in Yellow-browed Warblers to 16. The south-easterlies increased in strength on 5th and brought a fantastic array of migrants, with the sheltered west cliffs being full of birds. Highlights were five Richard's Pipits, Olive-backed Pipit, five Yellow-browed Warblers, two Red-breasted Flycatchers, Little Bunting and Glaucous Gull. Star bird was a male Siberian Thrush seen briefly on the west cliffs, but sadly vanishing amongst the large numbers of migrants. High counts on the day included 2,236 Redwings, 109 Goldcrests, 78 Song Thrushes, 63 Fieldfares, 19 Blackcaps, 23 Bramblings, 15 Jack Snipes and an impressive 932 Barnacle Geese. South-easterly gales and rain on 6th hampered any meaningful birding and a Long-eared Owl on 7th was the best new bird of another rain and wind spoiled day.

## October

Species Recorded: **136**

Year List at end of month: **210**

Birds Ringed: **1,004**

Species Ringed: **48**





**Plate 24.** Richard's Pipits, School Brae, 14th October 2015. © *Ciaran Hatsell*

The 8th saw calmer north-west winds and sunshine, which allowed the first planes for three days and saw more good birding, with a Paddyfield Warbler at Da Water the highlight and other good records including Olive-backed Pipit and Bluethroat, whilst counts of 147 Blackcaps, 12 Ring Ouzels, 387 Song Thrushes, 74 Robins, eight Goldfinches and seven 'Siberian Chiffchaffs' were all notable. The day ended with a display of aurora and the soundtrack of Redwings departing the island, so it was no surprise that, as the 9th dawned, it became clear there had been a clear-out of many migrants. The 10th saw 11 Short-eared Owls, 108 Goldcrests and the first Rook of the autumn, but the south-east wind failed to deliver many new migrants. The continued moderate south-easterly brought a great fall on 11th, highlights being a Red-flanked Bluetail and Dusky Warbler, found within 20 minutes of each other near dusk in a small west coast geo, Firecrest and Little Bunting, whilst high counts included 339 Goldcrests, 2,660 Redwings, 407 Song Thrushes, 30 Bramblings and 21 Jack Snipes. The wind went southerly then north-north-westerly on 12th, with a Lanceolated Warbler found late in the day at Kenaby, causing the second consecutive evening of a race-against-time twitch. Several other good birds lingered, whilst Olive-backed Pipit, Bluethroat and Corncrake were all new, Little Buntings increased to three and the Redwing count climbed to 2,822. The 13th started calm and warm, with Olive-backed Pipit

and Bluethroat counts both doubling to two, two Red-breasted Flycatchers arriving, a good number of scarcities still present and increases in some common migrants, with eight Killer Whales also seen. A moderate southerly wind on 14th brought a fantastic Radde's Warbler, Richard's Pipits increased to six, Little Buntings to four and a great selection of scarcities remained. The 15th was quiet for new arrivals, but an Oortolan on 16th was the first since 2013 and would go on to linger into November and become the latest ever Fair Isle record. The light south-westerlies on 17th brought an unexpected fall, with new Olive-backed Pipit and Red-breasted Flycatcher joining lingering individuals of each and counts including 3,250 Redwings, 174 Blackbirds, 87 Fieldfares and 50 Chiffchaffs (including 15 *tristis* birds), whilst there was also Glaucous Gull and Slavonian Grebe. Although migrant numbers decreased on a pleasant 18th, there were arrivals of Little Bunting and Great Grey Shrike, an adult Glaucous Gull to join yesterday's juvenile, Iceland Gull and the first Greenfinch of the autumn. The decent weather continued on 19th, and a busy morning of Redwings and Blackbirds in the traps suggested a few new birds were around. There were some decent numbers of migrants, although a Velvet Scoter, Olive-backed Pipit and a new Bluethroat were vying for bird of the day

Plate 25. Firecrest, Field Ditch, 13rd October 2015. © Lee Gregory



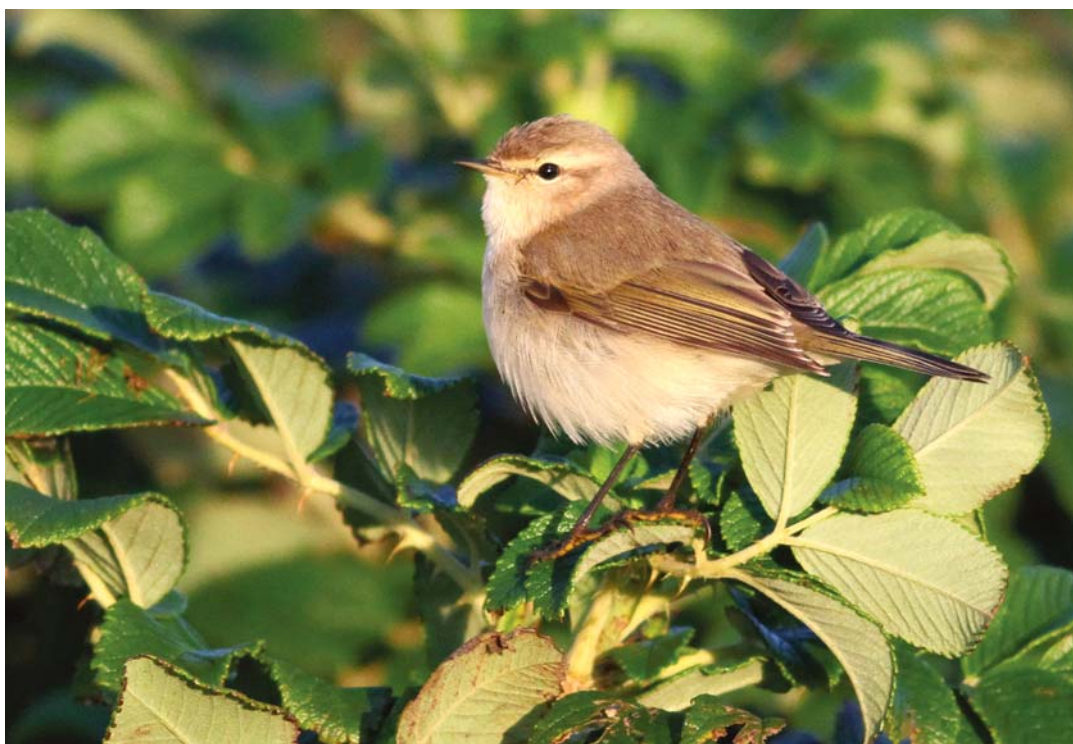


Plate 26. 'Siberian Chiffchaff', School, 4th October 2015. © Ian Andrews

until a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler was found in the Wirvie Burn, to the delight of all the Obs staff and guests. Although the wind had switched to the south-west the following day, the unpromising conditions brought a Little Grebe to Easter Lother Water, which attracted a minor twitch (it was the first island record for seven years). The dabchick was quickly forgotten though when Ciaran followed up his Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler of the previous day with a female Siberian Rubythroat on the Hill Dyke. It was already half-past four when the bird was found and it initially proved mobile and elusive, but eventually everyone was able to get views as it pinged around the dykes and ditches. With the weather becoming an increasingly strong south-westerly there were few new arrivals over the next few days, although Short-eared Owls increased to 17 on 21st, there were four 'Greenland White-fronted Geese' on 22nd and Whooper Swans increased to 28 on 25th. The 26th saw an increase in Redwings and Fieldfares, some goose passage and a Little Auk in North Haven, then south-easterlies on 27th brought fewer birds than expected, but there was some hope of more to come as the easterlies were forecast to continue. And indeed they did; south-east force four to six, low cloud and showers, and a heap of birds on 28th included 2,169 Fieldfares, 330 Blackbirds, 100 Robins, 85 Bramblings, 28 Woodcocks and 19 Short-eared Owls, all highest counts of the autumn to date, whilst 1,752 Redwings, 146 Song Thrushes, 33 Goldcrests, three Long-



eared Owls and three Hen Harriers all adding some volume to the amount of birds on the island. The south-easterly increased on 29th and brought two Great Grey Shrikes, a new Richard's Pipit, two Little Auks and some increasing counts including 38 Short-eared Owls (a new island record), 55 Woodcocks and 881 Blackbirds. The wind eased slightly on 30th and there were a few more birds including an increase in Blackbirds to 966, which included a Norwegian-ringed individual, whilst a German-ringed Robin was caught by a Great Grey Shrike at the Obs. A good selection of species were present but it was feeling increasingly like the end of the season, especially as the plane eventually made it in and the last of the Obs guests departed. The month ended with a moderate south-westerly wind, Glaucous Gull and Little Auk arriving and lingering birds including the Ortolan, Richard's Pipit, Velvet Scoter, Long-eared Owl and 'Siberian Chiffchaff', with a Halloween party at the Obs that saw the staff look rather impressive in an array of home-made costumes.

**Plate 27.** 'Greenland White-fronted Geese', Chatham's Land, 13th November 2015.  
© David Parnaby



The first couple of days of the month saw end-of-season jobs and a sheep cull taking up most of the time, with a few lingering birds being recorded. A Yellowhammer on 3rd was the first of the year and there was also a new Olive-backed Pipit. The 4th saw the last of the domestic team leave the island and birds including 243 Snow Buntings, a Goosander and a Little Auk. A south-east wind on 5th November meant that the day was memorable for more than just the firework display at South Light, with a large fall

## November

Species Recorded: **103**  
Year List at end of month: **213**  
Birds Ringed: **447**  
Species Ringed: **28**

keeping everyone busy. Highlights included two Great Grey Shrikes, Hawfinch and the only Great Spotted Woodpecker of the year, and counts of 4,983 Fieldfares, 1,521 Redwings, 1,009 Blackbirds, 265 Snow Buntings, 103 Goldcrests, ten Chiffchaffs and ten Short-eared Owls, with many birds noted being attracted to the lighthouses. The 6th saw low cloud and a southerly wind and, despite there being generally fewer birds, there were still some decent finds, including the first Waxwing of the year, Yellow-browed Warbler and Gadwall, whilst counts of 27 Short-eared and four Long-eared Owls were impressive. A similar set of birds on 7th was joined by an Iceland Gull, then arrivals on 8th included Lapland Bunting, Hen Harrier, five Little Auks and a Leach's Petrel off Bunness. By 9th the winds had increased from the south-west and arrivals had started to dry up, so it was not a bad time for the assistant wardens and ranger to leave for their winter adventures. A Hen Harrier appeared on 12th then the 70mph south-westerly gusts on 13th brought eight 'Greenland White-fronted Geese'. Overnight south-east winds saw the 16th witness a thrush fall, with 600 Fieldfares and 200 Blackbirds counted, along with 69 Woodcocks, although these were in a small area of the island, so the overall total present would have been many more. A similar situation the following day saw a count of 84 Woodcocks in just a small part of the north of the island, then Blackbirds heading south as the day came to an end, seemingly signalling the end of autumn passage. There were still a few new birds before the month ended, including a Slavonian Grebe on 22nd, Goldfinch from 22nd, that was joined by two others later in the month and a 'Kumlien's Gull' which, along with two Iceland Gulls on 28th, ushered in the winter birding.

## December

Species Recorded: **59**  
Year List at end of month: **213**  
Birds Ringed: **10**  
Species Ringed: **7**

The month began with calm conditions (enabling the Good Shepherd to sail for the first time for a couple of weeks) and the generally mild weather was possibly responsible for a number of birds lingering unusually late into the year. These included the latest ever records of Goldfinch (to the end of the year) and Greenshank (to 6th) and lingering Sparrowhawk, Long-eared Owl and Oystercatcher (the latter to the end of the month). There were also a few Skylarks and a couple of Meadow Pipits, whilst a scatter of Water Rails, two Merlins and three Barnacle Geese also added a bit of interest. A 'blue' Fulmar passed on 1st and there was a late Hen Harrier on 3rd, before a spell of cooler weather included wintry showers and south-westerly gales. These brought some more winter fare, with Iceland and Glaucous Gull, Little Auk and a late Slavonian Grebe all noted. With strong south-easterly winds on 8th there were a few rather late arrivals, with Waxwing, Chaffinch and a couple of Woodcocks recorded. There were also two juvenile Iceland Gulls on 8th, one of which remained to 12th and it was



joined by an adult (along with a Glaucous Gull) on 10th. There were then light south-west winds to the middle of the month, with frost noted on 14th, then increasing south-east winds brought some heavy rain. There was little more movement noted for the rest of the month, although three Whooper Swans went south on 12th (with three lingering birds still present), the same day that 40 Snow Buntings were noted. A dead Little Auk was in the South Haven on 13th, when lots of Guillemots were also present and high counts around this time included 394 Greylag Geese and four Water Rails. Two 'Mealy Redpolls' arrived on 14th and lingered to at least the 27th, but the last fortnight of the year saw only a few species of note recorded including Long-eared Owl (a presumed lingering bird), Jack Snipe and Iceland Gull and Glaucous Gull, with Guillemots noted on their nesting ledges from 27th.

**Plate 28.** Iceland Gull with Herring Gulls and Eiders, South Harbour, 10th December 2015. © David Parnaby



# SYSTEMATIC LIST 2015

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David Parnaby

**Notes**

The species order is taken from the 'British List' published by the BOU in February 2016. Species names are from the BOU 'vernacular name' list.

**Status Categories**

Vagrant	ten records or fewer in the past 20 years
Rare	11–40 records in the past 20 years
Scarce	averaging ten records or fewer per annum
Regular	averaging 11–40 records per annum
Frequent	averaging 41–500 records per annum
Common	averaging more than 500 records per annum

**Breeding Categories**

Small numbers	on average, less than 100 pairs per annum
Moderate numbers	on average, 101–1,000 pairs per annum
Large numbers	on average, more than 1,000 pairs per annum

**Abbreviations used in the text**

AON	Apparently Occupied Nest
AOS	Apparently Occupied Site
AOT	Apparently Occupied Territory
n/c	No count
Obs	Fair Isle Bird Observatory

*\*Indicates record(s) requiring assessment by the relevant records committee*



Plate 29. Whooper Swan, The Havens, 24th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Mute Swan

*Cygnus olor*

*Vagrant; nine previous records (of 12 individuals), three records in December, two in July and October and singles in January and March*

One was seen in flight as it toured the island on 8th April, before settling on Da Water where it lingered until 30th April. Although still a major rarity on the island, this was the sixth record since the turn of the millennium, during which time the population on Shetland has consolidated, so it is possible that this is where at least some of our birds may have originated.

## Whooper Swan

*Cygnus cygnus*

*Frequent autumn migrant, scarce in spring and winter*

A spring migrant was present from 21st–28th April (often lingering on Da Water in the company of the Mute Swan), whilst an unseasonal bird was on Da Water on 20th–26th June. Although there have been six previous June records, only two (in 1955 and 1986) have actually arrived in this month. Autumn passage saw two arrive on 1st October, with 13 the next day, three on 4th and six on 12th. Thirteen on 17th October included the first juveniles of the autumn and began a series of daily records until the end of the year. Peaks during this time included 28 on 25th October and an impressive arrival of 60 on 4th November, with 62 present the following day. Numbers dropped away after that, with six lingering to the end of the month, although eight were present on 30th as two others moved through. Three remained late into December, with three other adults moving south on 12th and another bird on 18th, bringing the total number of birds recorded in the latter half of the year to around 147.

## Bean Goose

*Anser fabalis*

*Rare autumn and winter migrant, approximately 37 previous records of at least 208 individuals, with significant arrivals in 2011 and 2014. Most records of Bean Geese have not been assigned to subspecies, but recent records suggest A.f.rossicus often occurs in autumn influxes and as an occasional winter visitor and spring migrant, whereas A.f.fabalis is perhaps a rare visitor, usually as an autumn migrant, with occasional winter records.*

**‘Tundra Bean Goose’** *A.f.rossicus*

Three birds lingered from the large influx recorded late in 2014 and remained in the south of the island until 16th January.

## Pink-footed Goose

*Anser brachyrhynchus*

*Common autumn migrant, with smaller numbers in spring and winter*

The first of the year were four on 1st February, with a single from 22nd February to 3rd March the only other record from the first winter period. Spring passage saw one from 9th April, eight pass north on 11th April, a second bird join the lingering individual from 19th and a third on 22nd April, with two remaining until 8th May. The last of the spring was present on 14th–23rd May. There were eight on 19th September (a day earlier than the first autumn migrants of 2014), then daily records from 25th September to 18th November. During this time, there were notable arrivals of 197 on 25th and 529

on 30th September, 359 on 2nd and 158 on 11th October. Later birds were present from 25th November, with a maximum of four on 30th November, which went on to remain well into December.

White-fronted Goose

Anser albifrons

Scarce autumn migrant, occasional in spring and winter

**‘Greenland White-fronted Goose’**  
*A.a.flavirostris*

Two were seen coming in off the sea from the south-east on 3rd April and were still present the following day. Four White-fronted Geese that arrived in a severe westerly gale on 22nd October were thought to probably belong to this subspecies, then eight (including one juvenile) were at Barkland on 13th November, with five on 15th November probably new birds given the large movement noted through other parts of the Northern Isles at the time.



Plate 30. ‘Greenland White-fronted Geese’, over Upper Stoneybrek, 13th November 2015. © David Parnaby

Greylag Goose

Anser anser

Common spring and autumn migrant

**Table 1.** Maximum monthly counts of Greylag Goose on Fair Isle 2015

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
86	152	96	99	15	10	2	2	6	420	453	394

Numbers in the first winter period were relatively low and there was no visible spring passage. Sightings throughout June to September involved occasional sightings of small numbers, presumably wandering birds from the breeding populations in Shetland or Orkney. Autumn passage began from 2nd October, with larger counts in the month including 280 on 12th and 420 on 27th. There were generally 240–280 in November, although some very late passage saw the peak count for the year on 30th. This was probably responsible for the much larger numbers that went on to winter on the island.

Greater Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

Rare visitor; 31 previous records of 78 individuals, mostly spring (predominantly May and June, with three records in April and singles in March and July), four winter records and one in October. Most thought to be of feral European stock, but a B.c.parvipes in May 2001 and one arriving with Pink-footed Geese (October 1997) were possibly transatlantic vagrants.

One at Stackhoull on 21st June was the only record of the year and was an entirely typical arrival, fitting in with the theory that most Fair Isle records involve British birds that have overshot on their moult migration to the Beaully Firth.



## Barnacle Goose

*Branta leucopsis*

### *Frequent autumn migrant, occasional in spring and winter*

Two birds that overwintered from 2014 remained until 1st February, with the only spring record involving two on 23rd May, increasing to three the following day, all of which remained until 30th May. A good autumn passage began with 34 on 29th September, just one the next day, but 418 on 1st October. There were none on the 2nd, six on 3rd, 48 on 4th and an incredible 932 grounded on 5th, the second highest Fair Isle count beaten only by 985 on 20th October 2005. Numbers rapidly dropped away, with less than 70 remaining until 17th and less than 20 staying to the end of the month. There were up to 11 regularly recorded in November, with three from 21st November that lingered to the end of the year.

## Brent Goose

*Branta bernicla*

*Rare visitor; around 63 records (of at least 235 individuals), although it is possible that some of the early records may not have been correctly identified. There are 40 records (of 85 individuals) in the FIBO period, mostly in autumn (September to November), but several spring (March to June) and winter records. In the FIBO period there have been 25 records of B.b.hrota and ten of B.b.bernicla (plus five that have not been assigned to subspecies), with both subspecies showing largely similar arrival patterns*

### **'Pale-bellied Brent Goose'** *B.b.hrota*

The inexplicable absence of Brent Goose from Fair Isle since 2010 was finally put right, when one was present from 25th April to 4th May. During this time it was usually found between South Haven and Johnny's Peats although occasionally wandered to the south of the island, often feeding in the mouths of small geos. Remarkably, the bird was found to be ringed and the darvics confirmed that it had originally been captured in Iceland on 19th May 2014. It was next seen in Northern Ireland, where it was present at Strangford Lough from 31st October to 2nd November before presumably wintering somewhere in Ireland and then ending up on Fair Isle after being knocked off course by strong westerly winds as it attempted to head back to its Canadian Arctic breeding grounds. After leaving Fair Isle, it was observed at Grutness (Shetland Mainland) on 7th–8th May before presumably continuing north.



Plate 31. 'Pale-bellied Brent Goose', Muckle Uri Geo, 4th May 2015. © Ciaran Hatsell

## Shelduck

*Tadorna tadorna*

### *Scarce spring migrant, rare in autumn*

A subdued spring passage saw three on 8th April, with scattered records of up to two until 18th April possibly involving lingering birds. A flock of nine on 19th and 21st August was the largest ever count for Fair Isle, with three lingering until 30th and one to 31st August.

## Wigeon

*Anas penelope*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant, scarce in winter*

There were up to ten in January, but just singles in February and March. Light spring passage was reflected by up to four in April and up to six in the first three weeks of May. There were up to two from 29th May to 1st June, three on 23rd–25th June with one on 27th June and eight flew past South Light 8th July. Autumn passage saw daily records from 15th August to 9th November. Numbers built up in late September, when there were 42 on 23rd, with 57 by 8th October and a peak of 79 on 18th October. There were still 58 in early November, but numbers dropped away rapidly through the month, with a maximum of 15 in December.

## Gadwall

*Anas strepera*

### *Rare spring and autumn migrant, three winter records; total of 48 records of 71 individuals*

Another good year (which was reflected elsewhere in Shetland) saw a female arrive on Da Water on 20th April that was joined by a pair from 23rd and another pair on 24th, with a male and female lingering to 29th April. Three more (two males and a female) arrived on 6th–7th May, taking the spring total to eight individuals. A male on 5th–7th November was the first record for that month since 1994 and made it a record year for the species.



Plate 32. Mute Swan, Gadwalls (mid-range) and Teal behind, Da Water, 23rd April 2015. © David Parnaby

## Teal

*Anas crecca*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant, scarce in winter*

As usual, there were small numbers in the early winter period, with up to two recorded throughout January and February. Up to seven on Da Water at the end of March probably reflected spring passage and there were birds present throughout April and May, with peak counts of 16 on 14th and 28th April. There were up to three occasionally throughout June. Three on 4th August marked the start of autumn passage, with numbers increasing later in the month, peaking at 27 on 19th. Fluctuating counts in September produced a maximum of 34 on 29th, with numbers rising the following week to a monthly peak of 49 on 7th October. The highest count of the year occurred on 3rd November, when there were 55, but numbers then fell away rapidly and just a handful remained until the end of the year.



Plate 33. Teal, Obs scrape, 24th September 2015.  
© Steve Arlow

## Mallard

*Anas platyrhynchos*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant, semi-domestic and feral birds cloud true status*

The peak count from the first winter period was 22, with little sign of migration noted during the spring. The first incubating bird was discovered at Chalet on 14th May and at least three broods hatched during the summer, two of which went on to fledge chicks. Small numbers of migrants were noted on the move in October and a count of 43 on 30th November was larger than usual.

## Pintail

*Anas acuta*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

A female was off South Raeva and a male was on Golden Water on 13th April, with what may have been the same birds together on Da Water the following day. Autumn passage began as spring passage had ended, with a pair present on Da Water on 30th August, with a female or immature bird then lingering off Hesti Geo until 3rd September and another present on 13th–14th October.

## Shoveler

*Anas clypeata*

### *Scarce and irregular spring and autumn migrant*

A male in Field Ditch then Da Water from 16th January to the end of the month was only the second January arrival (the first being in 1996, although a female overwintered in 2006/07). In spring a male on 13th April was joined by a female the following day, with both remaining until 16th and another pair was present on 4th May. Singles were seen on 15th September and 9th October, completing a decent year for this species, which has been recorded annually since 2003.



## Tufted Duck

*Aythya fuligula*

### *Regular spring migrant, commoner in spring than autumn*

The quietest spring since 1991 saw just a single record, when a male was present on 27th May. Autumn, by contrast, produced a good show, with six individuals: 5th–6th and 21st–22nd July, 21st–27th August, 23rd–27th September (found dead on 28th), 1st–18th October (also found dead) and 24th October.

## Eider

*Somateria mollissima*

### *Resident, breeds in small numbers, with additional birds thought to winter around the island*

The species was present throughout the winter, with rougher weather often producing concentrations in South Harbour or Furse. The highest count of the spring was just 106 (57 males and 49 females) on 17th April (an 11% reduction on the highest count in spring 2014). No count of the breeding population was made, but the Steensi Geo colony held the same number of nests as 2014 (ten incubating females) and the first ducklings were not noted until 23rd June. A post-breeding count of 122 on 28th August (a 10% reduction from the August 2014 count) included just 30 juveniles and was a further example of the decline of this species on Fair Isle. The year ended with occasional concentrations of the species during stormy conditions, although nothing larger than 77 in Furse on 28th October was noted.

## Long-tailed Duck

*Clangula hyemalis*

### *Regular autumn migrant, less common in spring*

There were occasional sightings of up to two in the first two months of the year, with spring singles on 15th–19th and 25th–27th March and 4th and 19th April. After the first of the autumn on 9th October there were regular sightings of one to four until 9th November, with a peak of six on 6th, and occasional later sightings of up to two until 21st November.



Plate 34. Long-tailed Duck, North Haven, 31st October 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Common Scoter

*Melanitta nigra*

*Regular migrant, usually in spring and autumn with smaller numbers occasionally noted in winter*

A male was in North Haven on 20th–26th February, another male was present on 3rd–6th May and the only other record was one that flew south past Ditfield on 8th November, in what was the quietest year for the species on Fair Isle since 2005.

## Velvet Scoter

*Melanitta fusca*

*Rare migrant, mostly in autumn, rare at other times of year; 126 previous records of 177 individuals*

A female found in Furse on 19th October lingered around the island (usually between Wirvie and Ditfield) until at least 29th November.

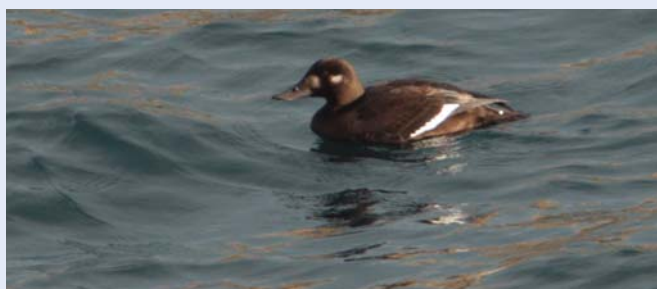


Plate 35. Velvet Scoter, 19th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Goldeneye

*Bucephala clangula*

*Regular migrant, most common in autumn with smaller numbers in winter and spring*

A female was on Golden Water on 1st January, with no further records until October, when there were singles on 8th and 19th and a flock of seven on 30th. November produced a male on 22nd and a female on 24th–26th in a generally quiet year for the species.

## Red-breasted Merganser

*Mergus serrator*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant, has bred once (1934)*

Winter was quiet, with just one on 16th February, and spring produced sightings of up to two on 27th March, five dates in April and 11 dates in May, with two on 5th and three on 22nd June. There were regular sightings of up to three from 3rd September to 27th October, with a late male in South Harbour on 6th–8th December.

## Goosander

*Mergus merganser*

*Rare migrant in winter, spring and late autumn; 93 previous records of 129 individuals*

An eclipse drake on 19th June was the first record in this month since 2005, whilst a redhead in the Gully on 4th–5th November was seen wrestling a 30cm Eel (which eventually escaped!). Although generally scarce, Goosander has been recorded on Fair Isle in every year since 1991, except 2009 and 2010.

## Quail

*Coturnix coturnix*

*Scarce migrant with most in spring and summer and smaller numbers recorded in autumn; has bred (last confirmed attempt in 2003)*

One flushed from the wet area behind North Naaversgill on 6th May was the earliest arrival since 2011. One was at Chalet on 4th–5th June, with another on Utra on 5th; birds at Gilsetter on 7th, Quoy on 8th and Setter on 13th were considered likely to have been one of the two original individuals. A singing bird at Kenaby on 25th June was the last of the year.

## Red-throated Diver

*Gavia stellata*

*Regular migrant, mainly late spring and autumn*

There were nine sightings between 29th April and 31st May, all singles except two on 10th May. From 21st–30th June there were sightings on six dates and four further singles until 13th July. Later autumn passage comprised six singles between 1st September and 20th October, whilst one past South Light on 12th November was the latest record since a December bird in 2002.

## Great Northern Diver

*Gavia immer*

*Scarce autumn migrant, occasional in spring and winter*

There were two January records, on 3rd and 23rd, then spring passage saw nine individuals on seven dates during 13th–31st May and one on 22nd June. A productive autumn passage saw ten individuals on seven dates from 8th September to 1st October, a further three during 20th–30th October, then ten on six dates from 6th–17th November, including the year's peak, of four, on 8th (the highest count since 2011).



Plate 36. 'Blue' Fulmar, 17th October 2015. © Lee Gregory



## Fulmar

*Fulmarus glacialis*

*Resident and common migrant; breeds in large numbers (last count 29,640 AOS in 2011)*

Fair Isle's commonest breeding bird was present throughout the year, with monitoring in the population plots showing an 11% decrease from 2014, although numbers of this species do tend to fluctuate. The first egg was seen on 19th May, with fledglings noted from 26th August. Just over half of the monitored nests fledged a chick, the same as the previous year. As usual, there were a number of sightings of 'blue' Fulmars throughout the year, with birds recorded on 20th January, 4th February (two), 26th April and 13th May in the first half of the year. In the autumn there were two sightings in late August, records of up to two on seven dates in both September (when birds lingered at Ditfield and on the cliffs at Grey Geo) and October, with November sightings on 4th (three), 8th (two) and 25th and one on 1st December.

## Sooty Shearwater

*Puffinus griseus*

*Regular autumn migrant*

After one on 9th August, there were four more singles in August from 22nd, 14 on nine dates in September, and 13 on seven dates in October until 27th; a decent showing in terms of dates recorded, although the peak count was just three.

## Manx Shearwater

*Puffinus puffinus*

*Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring*

After an impressive seven from the Good Shepherd on 6th June, it turned into a quiet year, with further sightings on 25th July, 29th (two) and 31st August and 23rd September.

## Storm Petrel

*Hydrobates pelagicus*

*Common summer migrant, breeds in small numbers*

The first of the year were three seen off the Good Shepherd on 6th June, with sightings of one to six in Fair Isle waters from the Good Shepherd on nine further dates until 8th September. Three birds were retrapped in Kirn o' Skroo on 13th June, but, as expected, most records were from overnight ringing sessions in the Havens. Between 30th June and 8th September, there were just ten sessions (seven of them in July), with poor weather in the peak August period being responsible for the low number. Despite that, there were still 1,145 birds caught: 1,076 newly ringed birds, 48 retraps (birds previously ringed on Fair Isle) and 21 'controls' (birds previously ringed elsewhere), including one bird ringed on the Faeroes. The best night was 16th August (the only session to take place that month), with 226 birds (221 new, four retraps and one control). There were three diurnal records of birds from land, with one off South Light on 7th September, one heading south past Sheep Rock (and 'scoped from a staff bedroom window at the Obs!) on 26th September and one being blown across the airstrip on 2nd October, with the latter record possibly relating to a recently fledged bird given the time of year and unusual circumstances.

## Leach's Petrel

*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

*Scarce migrant, usually summer and early autumn, most recorded during petrel trapping sessions*

A relatively quiet year, with petrel ringing adversely affected by the weather, but some intriguing results from the trapping sessions that did take place. After an unringed bird was trapped on 15th July (when another was also heard), individuals were heard on 16th, 20th, 25th and 27th July. The latter date also saw a bird retrapped that had first been ringed on Fair Isle on 1st August 2012, before being caught twice on the island in 2013 (although not in 2014). Another was caught on 31st July and proved to have been ringed on Fair Isle on 11th August 2013 before being caught again twice in July 2014. The reappearance of birds in consecutive years is an increasingly notable feature of this species in recent years, although there is no suggestion that anything other than non-breeding immatures are involved in these records. On 8th November one flew south close in to Buness, the latest ever Fair Isle record (the only other record for this month was 3rd November 1971) and also only the ninth land-based seawatching record for the island (although there are several other records from the Good Shepherd).



Plate 37. Gannet, North Haven, 24th October 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Gannet

*Morus bassanus*

*Common migrant and breeds in large numbers, seen offshore all year*

As usual, the species was present in varying numbers all year. The first egg was seen on Yellow Head on 9th April and 3,363 AON were counted across the island on 12th June, a 6.3% decrease from 2014, which continued the slow but steady decline noted since 2011. Breeding productivity was again good, with three quarters of monitored nests producing a chick to fledging stage, with the last chick to fledge eventually leaving the Outer Stack on the rather late date of 31st October.

## Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

*Regular migrant, commonest in autumn, with small numbers in winter and spring*

With no winter records, the first of the year was a single on 5th April, then records followed on seven dates in May, peaking at four on 20th. Autumn began with eight on 18th August, then up to six on three further dates in the month. There were records on 11 September dates, peaking at eight on 18th, and one to five were recorded on 14 dates in October until 30th.

## Shag

*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

*Resident, breeds in moderate numbers (last count 204 AON in 2013)*

Breeding began early, with the first egg noted on 4th April, almost a month earlier than in 2014. Encouragingly, the breeding population in the monitoring plots increased for the second consecutive year. The first chicks were seen on 14th May and, although breeding productivity fell by over 12% from 2014, it was still a good year, with over one and a half chicks fledging per monitored nest.



Plate 38. Shag, North Haven, 3rd September 2015. © Lee Gregory



## \*Great White Egret

*Ardea alba*

### *Vagrant; no previous records*

It seemed to be only a matter of time before Fair Isle eventually received a visit from an egret of some sort and it was the largest species on the British List that was the first to finally make it. This stunning, aigrette-sporting adult of the nominate race *A.a.alba*, was found on Da Water early in the morning of 31st May and, although apparently heading off to the north shortly after breakfast, it reappeared and roamed the south of the island, favouring Da Water and Utra, for the rest of the day.

## Grey Heron

*Ardea cinerea*

### *Frequent autumn migrant, less common in winter and spring*

One overwintering bird was present throughout January and February, with a second bird seen on 13th February. In March, there were up to two late in the month, with one or two regularly throughout April, but one on 26th May was the only record for that month. Sightings on 12 dates through July from 1st peaked at four on 26th, and virtually daily sightings in August peaked at 12 on 15th. There were six on 1st September, then up to five for the rest of the month, with similar numbers in October other than a peak of nine on 5th. One lingered until 18th November and a late bird was seen on 27th November.



Plate 39. Grey Heron with Great Skuas, 18th September 2015. © Lee Gregory

## \*Glossy Ibis

*Plegadis falcinellus*

### *Vagrant; one previous record of a bird seen on two dates in May 2014*

One of the more remarkable sights of the year was a flock of five Glossy Ibises that dropped onto the Obs wader scrape on 2nd October, a totally unprecedented Shetland record. After feeding for a while, the flock headed south and dispersed into two small groups. All five were still present until 4th, with a group of three remaining until 15th October. Although the birds were often subject to some serious harassment from the Bonxies when they were in flight, they proved to be remarkably manoeuvrable and were apparently capable of outrunning their pursuers. A dead bird found near Barkland on 14th was presumably one of the original flock of five, and appeared to have died from starvation as there were no obvious signs of predation; its remains were sent to the National Museum of Scotland.



Plate 40. Glossy Ibises, Walli Burn, 11th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Little Grebe

*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

*Rare visitor; 40 previous records, most in autumn (September to November), rarer in spring and winter*

Although previously a relatively regular visitor (with nine in the 1990s and six in the 2000s for example), one on Easter Lother Water on 20th October was the first record since 2008.

## Slavonian Grebe

*Podiceps auritis*

*Scarce autumn migrant, occasional in spring*

A confiding breeding-plumaged bird arrived in South Harbour on 19th April then lingered in North Haven until 23rd April. This is just the seventh to arrive in spring since 1991, all bar one of which (in June 2008) have occurred in April. A decent showing in the autumn produced an adult in North Haven on 7th–17th September, one off Hesti Geo on 23rd September and a single from 12th–18th October, before a very late bird in North Haven on 22nd November and 4th December (only the second December record for the island following one in 2008).

## \*Honey-buzzard

*Pernis apivorus*

*Rare spring and autumn migrant; 54 previous records (57 individuals)*

Recorded for the third year in succession, when one drifted south down the island on 15th July (landing near Midway and on Malcolm's Head) before returning north and being seen over the Obs.

## Marsh Harrier

*Circus aeruginosus*

### *Rare migrant; 46 previous records (36 in spring, ten in autumn)*

A female lingered on the island for a short while on 23rd May. Although there were none in 2014, that was only the third blank year for the species on Fair Isle since 1998.

## Hen Harrier

*Circus cyaneus*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

One on 14th February was the first record in the first two months of the year since 1997. Spring passage was restricted to an immature male that was present from 6th–8th May and which headed high to the north-east on the latter date. Two arrived on 12th September during some impressive raptor passage and the following day there were three (which roosted together along with a Pallid Harrier in Boini Mire), with two remaining until 22nd and one until 26th September. Another occurred on 5th–6th October, with a daily presence then noted from 14th–30th October, including two birds on 18th and 28th. An adult male passed through on 8th November and late ringtails occurred on 12th November and 3rd December, bringing the annual total to a new record of at least 11 individuals.



Plate 41. Hen Harriers arriving at roost, Boini Mire, 12th September 2015. © David Parnaby

## \*Pallid Harrier

*Circus macrourus*

### *Vagrant; four previous records (May 1931, August 2011, September 2011 and September 2014)*

A juvenile first glimpsed at the west end of Meadow Burn on 12th September was relocated at Brecks on 13th and went on to roam the south of the island until 21st September, often giving good views and occasionally being seen to roost in Boini Mire. The bird arrived during an impressive period of raptor passage, which had been preceded by good numbers of birds of prey noted on the move at Utsira, Norway, with strong south-easterly winds obviously encouraging many of them to make the crossing across the North Sea.

## \*Goshawk

*Accipiter gentilis*

### *Vagrant; five previous records, three in spring (April and May) and two in autumn (November)*

Arguably one of the birds of the spring was a magnificent female of this species, which was initially flushed from a freshly killed adult Rabbit at Ditfield on 13th April. Although it then disappeared for a short while, it was relocated later in the morning over the Obs, as it engaged Ravens in an aerial tussle, before eventually drifting high north out to sea later in the day. What was almost certainly the same bird (photographs showed plumage and structural similarities) had been present on North Ronaldsay on 27th–29th March and then Unst on 14th–21st April.



## Sparrowhawk

*Accipiter nisus*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

The male that arrived in 2014, only the third bird to overwinter on Fair Isle, remained until 2nd January, with a female arriving on 3rd which remained throughout February. An immature male appeared on 27th February and was probably the same bird seen on 6th March. Spring passage saw regular sightings from 25th March until 9th May, involving a total of around seven birds and including a peak of three on 4th May. Later spring passage saw three singles logged during 31st May to 2nd June. Autumn passage began with sightings from 11th–29th August, peaking at three on 19th. A female on 10th and male on 11th September preceded a remarkable arrival of ten on 12th September. This was the largest-ever day count for the Isle with five trapped and ringed during the course of the day and eight watched coming into roost at the Plantation that evening. Numbers gradually declined to two by 27th September, although during that time a further 11 were trapped, showing that there was still some turnover. One or two were seen almost daily through October and sightings in early November peaked at three on 4th, with sightings to 16th and a late bird from 29th November to 1st December.

## \*Buzzard

*Buteo buteo*

### *Rare spring and autumn migrant*

The overwintering bird (only the third to do so on Fair Isle, following individuals in 1984/85 and 1994/95) that arrived in October 2014 remained until 19th March, usually being seen between Pund and the Plantation.



Plate 42. Goshawk and Raven, over Obs, 13th April 2015. © David Parnaby



Plate 43. Corncrake, Schoolton, 8th September 2015. © Lee Gregory

## **\*Rough-legged Buzzard**

*Buteo lagopus*

*Vagrant; 45 previous records (48 individuals) with 19 in spring (mostly April and May, although two June records), 28 individuals in autumn (mostly October and November) and one winter record*

One headed high north-east over the Havens and out to sea during the early afternoon of 8th May, having departed North Ronaldsay less than an hour earlier. The first spring record since 2005 of this species, which is going through something of a resurgence; this was the fifth record since 2010.

## **Osprey**

*Pandion haliaetus*

*Scarce migrant; 126 individuals, with 107 in spring (mostly May and June, with four in April) and 19 in autumn (mostly September, but two in October and singles in July, August and November)*

The quietest year for this species since 2010 (although it has still maintained a run of annual occurrences stretching back to 1998) saw just one record; one flew low north over Lower Stoneybrek just after lunch on 4th May.

## **Water Rail**

*Rallus aquaticus*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant, occasionally overwinters*

A decent wintering population involved at least five individuals and these were probably responsible for sightings into April, although records at Golden Water and Wirvie in early April probably involved at least one migrant. It was interesting that a ringed bird was seen at Wirvie on 4th May, presumably the bird ringed there on 11th April which had remained hidden for almost a month. The only other sighting from May was a bird at Pund on 28th. One in Boini Mire on 27th August was the first of the autumn (assuming it wasn't a summering bird) and the next migrants were not until 26th September, with regular sightings throughout the autumn, peaking at four on 30th October. At least half a dozen were present throughout November and, although the two that had taken up residence at the Obs appeared to have moved on, at least five remained down the island through December, making it the fifth consecutive year with overwintering birds present.

## Corncrake

*Crex crex*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant; formerly bred (last suspected in 2002)*

There were no spring records, with seven noted in the autumn; at Kenaby on 28th August, Schoolton on 8th September, near Haa on 21st September, Da Water on 25th September, Gilsetter on 28th September and Upper Stoneybrek on 12th October. The most interesting record however, involved the remains of a bird found near the Chapel on 21st October. Although there was not enough plumage remaining to age the bird, the presence of waxy sheaths at the base of the primaries showed that this individual was undergoing moult and was therefore either an adult that had summered on the island or a Fair Isle reared chick!

## Moorhen

*Gallinula chloropus*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

A quiet year, with a spring bird on 23rd March that was trapped the next day with the same bird then not seen again until it was retrapped in the Vaadal on 13th April (although had it not been ringed, it would presumably have been assumed to have been a new migrant). An early autumn arrival appeared on Da Water on 29th August and records from the same site on six dates in September and 4th October presumably all related to the same elusive individual.

## Crane

*Grus grus*

### *Rare visitor; 25 previous records (21 in spring) of 34 individuals*

Two flew down the island on 14th May and, after a brief rest on Malcolm's Head, started gaining height and circling off South Light. However, after a couple of abortive attempts at leaving, they decided to return to Fair Isle and landed out the back of Pund, where they remained the following day.

**Figure 1. Records of Crane on Fair Isle since 1962.** *Note the change in status since the mid-1990s, with the species now a relatively regular visitor.*

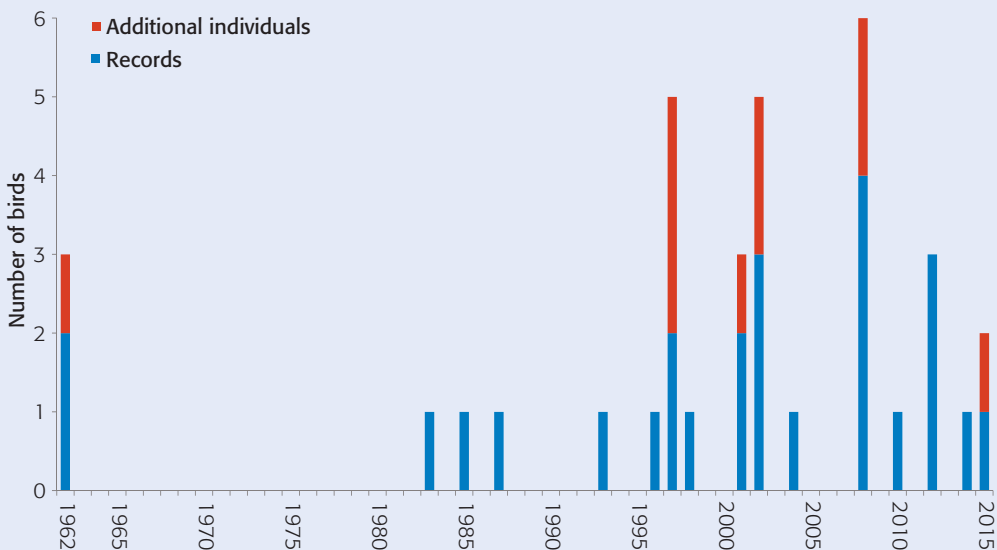




Plate 44. Oystercatcher, Bunness, 24th September 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Oystercatcher

*Haematopus ostralegus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; breeds in small numbers*

The first was one in the Havens on 25th January, 11 days later than the first arrival in 2014. Five on 3rd February were the next, with numbers increasing to 36 later in the month. There were 64 by early March and numbers in April were generally 75–90, although there was a peak of 103 on 11th. Larger numbers in May built to a peak of 172 by the end of the month, which included the usual non-breeding flock of at least 60 at Shirva. It was estimated that 25–35 pairs bred, with eggs seen from 14th May, the first chicks on 7th June and the first fledglings on 8th July, although it was not a particularly productive season. Numbers in early August were around 110–130, with counts generally declining after that until there were 165 on 21st August. Numbers rapidly fell away after this date and a maximum of 11 was recorded in September, two remained to the end of October and, for the first time since 2008, an overwintering bird remained until the end of the year.

## Grey Plover

*Pluvialis squatarola*

### *Rare migrant, mostly in autumn, with fewer in spring and winter*

Single adults on 8th and 19th August and then a lingering juvenile from 16th September to 4th October made it the best autumn showing since 1999.



## Golden Plover

*Pluvialis apricaria*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; has bred (last recorded in 1989)*

There were up to four irregularly in January, with singles on four dates in March. Small numbers in early April increased to 82 on 12th with 43–44 remaining for the next two days, then a regular presence until 2nd June of usually less than ten, with just occasional counts of up to 13. There were six records, of up to three birds, until the end of June. From 14th July there were occasional small numbers, counts increasing from mid-August, with 21 on 15th and again in late August, when there were 28 on 30th. September saw daily records, peaking at a rather low count of 29 on 22nd, whilst there were up to 15 in October and up to five until 9th November, with two on 24th November the only other record.

## Dotterel

*Charadrius morinellus*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant; 102 previous records of 188 individuals*

A relatively quiet year saw just one record, with a trip of four present in the regular location of Vaasetter and Bull's Park during 18th–20th May.



Plate 45. Dotterel, Vaasetter, 18th May 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Ringed Plover

*Charadrius hiaticula*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; breeds in small numbers*

The first was on the relatively early date of 13th February, increasing to 12 on 19th and numbers building up to 20 in March, with a maximum April count of 23, in what was fairly light spring passage. Around 15 pairs held territory across the island, with the first chicks seen on 17th May and the first fledged birds noted from 17th July, with the breeding season appearing to be quite productive. Passage in August saw numbers build up to a maximum of 75 on 27th. Although there were then fewer in early September, migrants again built up mid-month, resulting in a peak of 81 on 10th, with numbers rapidly trailing off until the last three of the month were recorded on 26th September. Light passage in early October brought a maximum of three, with one lingering until 30th October.

## Lapwing

*Vanellus vanellus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; breeds in small numbers*

A single arrived on 21st January, after south-easterly winds, and a few sightings in February peaked at eight. Birds in March, April and May were likely all to be part of the breeding population, with very little sign of spring passage. Display was recorded from 27th March, with a full clutch noted on 28th April and the first chicks seen on 18th May. At least four pairs nested (two pairs around Da Water and Rippack, one in the Parks and one near Gilsetter), although productivity was low and they had all moved on by 22nd July. Autumn passage saw one or two regularly throughout August from 4th, with five on 29th August being the last sighting until 17th September, with numbers gradually building to a peak of 12 on 26th. There were up to four on 11 October dates, a couple in November and one on 8th December.

## Whimbrel

*Numenius phaeopus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; has bred (1973 and 1974)*

Spring passage spanned from 16th April to 23rd June, with a peak of 12 on 3rd May. There were four on 28th June, then from 6th July there were regular sightings through to the last of the year on 31st August, peaking at just nine on 23rd. Very unusually, none were recorded in September.

## Curlew

*Numenius arquata*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; overwinters and breeds in small numbers*

There were small numbers in the early winter period, with a peak of 28 on 30th January. There were no exceptional numbers during the spring and five pairs went on to breed (Parks, Gilsetter, Rippack and two at Pund), with display noted from 26th March and productivity rather poor. Return passage was first noted from 21st June, when a total of 29 passed through and there were occasional low counts moving during July. There were just small numbers in August that started increasing at the end of the month and a maximum of just 22 during September and October, with 15–20 lingering into the winter.

## Black-tailed Godwit

*Limosa limosa*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant, very rare in winter*

One on 19th April was a typical arrival date, with further spring passage restricted to two on 24th–25th May and one on 31st May. Two on 9th August had increased to six by 11th, then another arrival saw four on 23rd, which increased to the year's peak of seven on 26th with just one lingering until 29th August. The last of an average autumn was seen from the Good Shepherd on 8th September.



Plate 46. Black-tailed Godwit, Walli Burn, 31st May 2015. © David Parnaby

Bar-tailed Godwit

*Limosa lapponica*

Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring

Sightings of singles on 30th August, 1st and 6th–10th September probably involved two individuals, a rather poor showing.

Turnstone

*Arenaria interpres*

Common winter, spring and autumn migrant

**Table 2.** Maximum monthly counts of Turnstone on Fair Isle 2015 compared with previous ten-year average

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2005–2014 av.	135	128	128	135	56	13	36	80	110	188	153	127
2015 count	139	110	121	58	73	11	27	89	94	153	146	c200

Sightings generally matched the pattern of recent years, although the autumn counts were slightly lower than usual, whilst a seeming tendency for increasing winter numbers was again noted later in the year, with a peak of an estimated 200 on 26th December.

Knot

*Calidris canutus*

Regular autumn migrant, scarce in spring, rare in winter

The only record in the first half of the year was one from 17th–21st April, making it the quietest spring passage since 2009. Autumn passage began relatively early, with one on 13th July, and numbers built up sporadically to 12 on 21st July. There were then no more until regular sightings from 4th August until the last of the year on 30th September, during which time numbers peaked at ten on 18th August and 5th and 17th September.



Plate 47. Knot, North Haven, 2nd September 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Ruff

*Calidris pugnax*

### *Regular autumn migrant, rare in spring*

The first three of the autumn on Da Water on 30th July were typical in both arrival date and location. There were then virtually daily sightings from 4th August to 22nd September, during which time there were peaks of 12 on 11th August and 13 on 19th and 23rd August, although no more than seven were present in September. The last of the year was seen on 27th September.

## Sanderling

*Calidris alba*

### *Frequent autumn migrant, less common in spring*

Spring records were restricted to three on 12th and 14th May and singles on 19th and 28th May and 2nd June. Autumn passage was slow to get going, with the first not seen until 3rd August, the latest date since 2009. Numbers peaked in mid-month, with the highest count of the year occurring on 11th August when there were 15, then smaller numbers were present regularly until 18th September.

## Dunlin

*Calidris alpina*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; has bred (last suspected in 2007)*

Spring passage saw individuals on 26th and 29th March, 28th April and then daily records from 3rd May to 6th June, with only the period of 15th–18th May producing double-figure counts, with a maximum of 16 on 16th. Records of up to three from mid-June to the end of the month included birds at locations such as South Light and Da Water that were obviously on passage, but records from Swey and Mire of Vatnagaard were more intriguing. One in South Harbour on 15th July was the first obvious autumn migrant, but the continued presence of singing and displaying birds on Swey (including one which 'attacked' a researcher, by flying and running towards them loudly singing!) strongly suggested a breeding attempt was taking place, with a juvenile on Vatnagaard on 24th July possibly being raised on the island. Daily records in August peaked at 50 on 15th, up to 19 were seen almost daily in September and a couple lingering until 14th October, with a late bird on 1st November.

## Purple Sandpiper

*Calidris maritima*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant, also overwinters in smaller numbers*

There were just single-figure counts in the first two months of the year, then 32 on 29th March may have represented the start of spring passage. In April there were regular sightings of up to 12 and passage in early May peaked at 52 on 4th, with smaller numbers present until 4th June. The first of the autumn were 15 on 13th July, with numbers increasing to 54 by 23rd July and 80 on 3rd August, the highest-ever count for this month. After the first week of August, counts dropped to single figures, with monthly peaks later in the year of 40 in September, 28 in October, 22 in November and 14 in December.





Plate 48. Little Stint, Easter Lother Water, 9th August 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Little Stint

*Calidris minuta*

### *Scarce autumn migrant, vagrant in spring*

A juvenile showed well at Easter Lother Water on 5th–11th August, one flew over Mire of Vatnagaard on 15th August and there was a lingering juvenile at Muckle Uri Geo from 21st August to 4th September, which was joined by a second from 25th to 29th August.

## \*Pectoral Sandpiper

*Calidris melanotos*

### *Rare visitor; 33 previous records, most from August to October, but four in spring*

The species appeared for the sixth consecutive year, with a confiding juvenile present at Muckle Uri Geo, Skadan and Utra on 6th–7th September, closely mirroring the 2014 occurrence (a juvenile at Muckle Uri Geo from 3rd–6th September).



Plate 49. Pectoral Sandpiper, Skadan, 6th September 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Common Sandpiper

*Actitis hypoleucos*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

One on 19th April was the earliest arrival since 2004, followed by three more records during April. There were then regular sightings from 4th–28th May, with higher counts of four on 8th and five on 22nd. After one on 27th July there were scattered records in early August, with stronger passage later in the month building up to a peak of 17 on 19th, with up to ten to the end of the month. There were almost daily sightings in September up to 17th, all of one or two apart from four on 15th, with no later records.

## Green Sandpiper

*Tringa ochropus*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

Spring passage was quiet and late, with singles on six dates from 5th to 19th May. Up to two were recorded during 18th–25th July, then in August there were regularly up to three seen, with a peak of four on 23rd–24th and singles were present on five dates in September until 12th.

## Spotted Redshank

*Tringa erythropus*

### *Rare autumn migrant, vagrant in spring; 105 records of 119 individuals*

The first since 2013 was found in unusual circumstances on 3rd August as it flew alongside the NorthLink ferry that was passing close to the south-west of Fair Isle at the time! What was probably the same bird was then over Schoolton on 5th August.

## Greenshank

*Tringa nebularia*

### *Regular autumn migrant, scarce in spring*

Spring sightings consisted of birds on 18th and 28th April and 6th–8th and 23rd May, a reasonable showing. After early singles on 18th and 23rd–24th July there were regular sightings throughout August, with south-easterly winds on 19th bringing an impressive 14, the highest ever Fair Isle count. Up to seven remained throughout the rest of the month, with sightings throughout September all thought to relate to a single bird, which went on to remain until at least 6th December to therefore become the latest-ever record for Fair Isle (breaking the previous record of 16th November 2001).

## Wood Sandpiper

*Tringa glareola*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

A single, mobile bird was probably responsible for sightings on 14th and 16th May, making it the quietest year for this species since 2007.

## Redshank

*Tringa totanus*

### *Common migrant in winter, spring and autumn migrant; has bred (1993 and 1994)*

There were around 30 present throughout the first winter period and early part of the spring, with numbers declining from April, although 25 on 25th April involved passage birds. Up to eight were recorded regularly in May, although by the latter half of the month, most records were of two or three summering birds. Late June saw the first return passage, with eight in Muckle Uri Geo on 28th, and at around the same time the summering pair at Da Water had become very vocal, with a well-grown chick seen in Boini Mire on 6th July, providing proof of only the third breeding attempt for the island (with the first two breeding records presumably involving the same pair in consecutive years). Migrant numbers started to build up towards the end of the month, with a peak of 27 on 17th and 22nd July. Numbers gradually increased through August, peaking at 54 on 27th and there were up to 38 in September and 48 in October, with 20–30 remaining on the island until the end of the year.

## Jack Snipe

*Lymnocyptes minimus*

### *Frequent autumn migrant, less common in winter and spring*

A single on 4th May was the only record from the first half of the year. The first autumn migrant was on the typical date of 11th September, and then, after records on 15th and 17th, there were virtually daily sightings from 20th September until early November. During this time there were peaks of ten on 29th September, 15 on 5th October and 21 on 11th October, with just single figures from 14th October onwards, although eight on 28th October showed there were still small numbers arriving. There were two on 15th November and the only other record was of one on 17th December, although small numbers could easily winter undetected.

## Woodcock

*Scolopax rusticola*

### *Frequent late-autumn migrant, smaller numbers in spring and winter*

Small numbers were present throughout the early part of the year, whilst eight on 14th March (during Sheep Hill) and four on 26th March may have represented some spring passage, of which the only other example was one on 10th May. After an early autumn migrant on 29th September there were none until two on 8th October. From then there were single-figure counts on every census until 28th October when 28 arrived, with 55 counted the following day and 35 still on 30th. Small numbers in early November increased to 32 on 5th and 33 the following day, with regular records throughout the month. Once the assistant wardens have departed and census comes to a halt, it is very difficult to get accurate numbers for this species, but counts during 17th–18th November of 69 and 84 showed a very large arrival must have taken place, especially as these were largely just the birds present around the traps, Wirvie and a small area of north; there were probably hundreds actually present on the island at that time. Small numbers remained until the end of the year.



Plate 50. Woodcock, Wirvie Burn, 12th October 2015. © Lee Gregory



## Snipe

*Gallinago gallinago*

*Common spring and autumn migrant, some overwinter; breeds in small numbers*

Present throughout January to March, although there were no counts made, and in April there was a maximum of 41 recorded. Light passage was noted in early May, with ten seen coming in off the sea on 3rd, although there were no particularly high counts. The breeding population was estimated at 15–20 pairs, with several fledged youngsters seen across the island. Counts in August were generally between ten and 25, although migrants boosted numbers to 74 on 18th and 40 on 23rd. Passage was noted in mid-September, peaking at 57 on 10th and 54 were present on 23rd September. Counts in October were generally larger and peaked at 86 on 8th, with 84 also on 30th. November started with counts in the region of 30–50 with small numbers present throughout the winter.



Plate 51. Snipe, Obs, 25th July 2015. © David Parnaby

## Pomarine Skua

*Stercorarius pomarinus*

*Rare spring and autumn migrant; at least 92 previous records of (104 individuals), most May–June and September–October*

The previous highest day count of Pomarine Skua on Fair Isle was just five, with the previous highest count in spring being two, so when the conditions finally came right for a spring skua passage, it was with some delight that 13 were logged heading north past the island in three hours on 13th May. It was also a very good autumn for the species, with September records of an adult over Gilsetter on 14th, a juvenile over Hesswalls on 22nd and an adult off Buness on 29th, with another adult off there on 3rd October.

## Arctic Skua

*Stercorarius parasiticus*

*Frequent passage migrant, breeds in small numbers*

After the first two arrived on 25th April, the same date as 2014, numbers were slow to build up. Copulation was noted from 20th May, with the first egg found on 23rd May (eight days earlier than the previous year) and 37 pairs settled down onto territories, an increase of over 23% from 2014. The first chick was seen on 23rd June and the first fledgling took flight on 21st July. Ten chicks fledged in total, which, although it represented a decrease in productivity of almost 43% from 2014, was still the third best year for fledging success since 2003. Birds were still present until 3rd September, with later individuals seen offshore on 2nd, 4th and 7th October.



## Long-tailed Skua

*Stercorarius longicaudus*

*Rare migrant; 49 previous records of 66 individuals, almost evenly divided between spring (May–June) and autumn (July–October) records*

Strong north-westerly winds in the spring brought some very large numbers of this species to the coasts of Shetland, and Fair Isle cashed in when 40 went north past South Light on 13th May (on the same day as 13 Pomarine Skuas passed). This totally eclipsed the previous best spring count of the species, which had been just two, and were the first for the Isle since 2009. Despite other attempts, there were no further seawatching records, but a superb adult graced the Parks and airstrip area for several hours on 19th May after initially having been seen flying low over Setter.



Plate 52. Long-tailed Skua, Parks, 19th May 2015. © Tommy Hyndman

## Great Skua

*Stercorarius skua*

*Frequent passage migrant, breeds in moderate numbers*

The first bird returned on 2nd April (three days earlier than 2014), with numbers slow to build up. After last year's remarkable increase to 424 AOT, numbers declined by almost 56% to just 188 AOT, the lowest population level since 2005. The first egg was seen on 17th May, a fortnight later than in 2014, with chicks noted from 13th June and the first fledgling taking to the air on 22nd July (although some chicks didn't fledge until mid-September). Despite the fall in breeding numbers, productivity was the highest since 2006, with 0.9 chicks fledging per AOT. There were at least 80 still present in late September and 18 at the end of October, with the last seen on 12th November.



Plate 53. Great Skua, Parks, 19th May 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Puffin

*Fratercula arctica*

### *Common summer visitor, breeds in large numbers, rare in winter*

Four on 29th March were the first of the year and the first birds were seen ashore on 3rd April when large numbers were present around the island. Numbers fluctuated for a while, but they were present throughout and many were ashore by 16th April, with copulation noted from 29th April. Whole-island counts on 8th and 14th May produced 6,122 and 6,666 respectively, a 37.7% decrease from the last count in 2012, although it remains a very difficult species to accurately monitor on Fair Isle. Chicks were first detected on 8th June and fledging was recorded from 19th July. Puffin productivity at the monitored plots fell by almost 18% to 0.64 chicks fledged per egg laid, with heavy rain in the breeding season possibly contributing to some of the losses. From mid-August, numbers present on the island began to decline rapidly, although one was seen bringing in fish to a nest on 23rd August. There were four sightings of singles from 1st–30th September, whilst an interesting record during this time was a freshly dead chick on 11th, which had presumably been abandoned by its parents and had been predated when it left the nest.

## Black Guillemot

*Cephus grylle*

### *Resident, breeds in moderate numbers*

The only auk species to remain in Fair Isle waters all year round was noted moulted into breeding plumage from 11th February. Three counts of birds in breeding plumage on the east coast monitoring plots in early spring produced a maximum of 194 on 18th April, a decrease of just two birds from 2014, suggesting that the apparent slow recovery noted since the population crashed in 1998 is still being maintained. Attempts to get an idea of the whole-island population were hampered by westerly winds and swell throughout the spring. The first fledgling was recorded on 12th August, a day later than 2014, but a lack of accessible nest sites prevents productivity monitoring for this species.



Plate 54. Black Guillemot, North Haven, 28th August 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Razorbill

*Alca torda*

### *Common summer visitor, breeds in large numbers*

The first sighting of the year was on 3rd March, when birds returned en masse and there were then regular sightings from 18th, although it was early April before birds returned to the cliffs and were around on a daily basis. The first egg was noted in Dog Geo on 1st May, a day earlier than 2014, and there was positive news for the population as, although the numbers in the plot fell by 11% from the previous year, the whole-island count showed an increase of 41.2% since 2010 to 1,930 individuals. Birds carrying fish (indicating that chicks had hatched) were recorded from 1st June and the first birds fledged on 25th June, with an impressive 0.7 chicks fledging per egg laid. Although birds were present throughout July, by 4th August they were all gone bar one. Sightings offshore on nine dates in September included a maximum of 34, with birds seen on three dates in October until 18th.

## Little Auk

*Alle alle*

### *Regular late autumn migrant and winter visitor in smaller numbers*

The only sighting in the first half of the year was one heading east off South Light on 20th January. Stormy conditions in the late autumn brought a flurry of sightings, with one in North Haven on 26th October followed by two (including one that flew down the road at Chalet) on 29th and another in the Havens on 31st October. South Light produced one on 4th, five on 8th and three on 9th November, whilst one was found dead at Golden Water on 6th and one was picked up 'wrecked' at Nether Taft on 12th November. Later sightings included singles past South Light on 28th November and 4th December and a freshly dead bird in South Haven on 13th December.



Plate 55. David Parnaby with Little Auk, Obs, 12th November 2015. © Susannah Parnaby

## Guillemot

*Uria aalge*

### *Common passage migrant, breeds in large numbers*

Very small numbers were present in the first half of January, but by 18th birds had returned in large numbers and were present irregularly on the breeding ledges during the rest of the month and into February. By early April, birds were established at the breeding colonies and copulation was noted from 9th May with the first eggs seen at Easter Lothar on 14th May. Although the population plots showed a slight decline from 2014, it was encouraging that a whole-island count produced a 7.3% increase from 2010 to 20,924 individuals. Chicks were seen from 4th June, with fledged birds noted jumping from 3rd July and productivity increasing slightly from 2014 to 0.59 chicks per AIA. The whole population departed in the first few days of August, with just small numbers (usually less than 35) seen regularly throughout the autumn on seawatches. A larger movement was noted on 9th November and again in early December, with good numbers of birds offshore in mid-December and birds returning to the cliffs on 27th December.

## Common Tern

*Sterna hirundo*

*Regular summer visitor, formerly bred in small numbers (until 2005, with one pair in 2012 and 2014)*

Two arrived near South Light on 10th May and were presumably the pair that remained in the area and attempted nesting near Shalstane in late June. The only other sighting in the first half of the year involved a third bird present on 22nd June. With the breeding attempt having failed by early July, the only other sightings were one past Bunness on 25th July and sightings on three dates from 20th–26th August peaking at five on 22nd.

## Arctic Tern

*Sterna paradisaea*

*Frequent summer visitor, breeds in small numbers*

One on 8th May was a typical arrival date, and, although there were daily sightings from 12th May to 9th August, numbers were slow to build up and it was 23rd May until counts reached three figures, with 105 present, but the peak for the spring was just 108 on 1st June. Birds were seen incubating from 11th June, but there were just 30 pairs recorded nesting, a decrease of over 69% from 2014 and only one chick was raised to fledging stage. Most pairs failed at egg stage, apparently due to predation. The chick fledged on 25th July, the same day as the largest count of the year was recorded, when 245 birds were present. Numbers declined rapidly from early August and, after 9th, there were just occasional records of small numbers, with later individuals on 20th September and 2nd October.



Plate 56. Arctic Tern, Bunness, 14th May 2015.  
© Lee Gregory

## \*Sabine's Gull

*Xema sabini*

*Vagrant, six previous records, all juveniles in autumn (September to November)*

A first-summer bird flew north-east over Burkle on 31st July, an unusually early date that presumably involved a non-breeding bird summering to the south of the species' usual Arctic breeding areas.

## Kittiwake

*Rissa tridactyla*

*Common passage migrant, breeds in moderate numbers*

There were occasional records of small numbers in the first three months of the year, with birds returning to the island from 20th March. The first eggs were noted on 20th May (ten days earlier than 2014), but the whole-island count revealed a decline of almost 11% from the previous year, with just 859 pairs nesting. Chicks were seen from 20th June and the first fledged on 25th July,



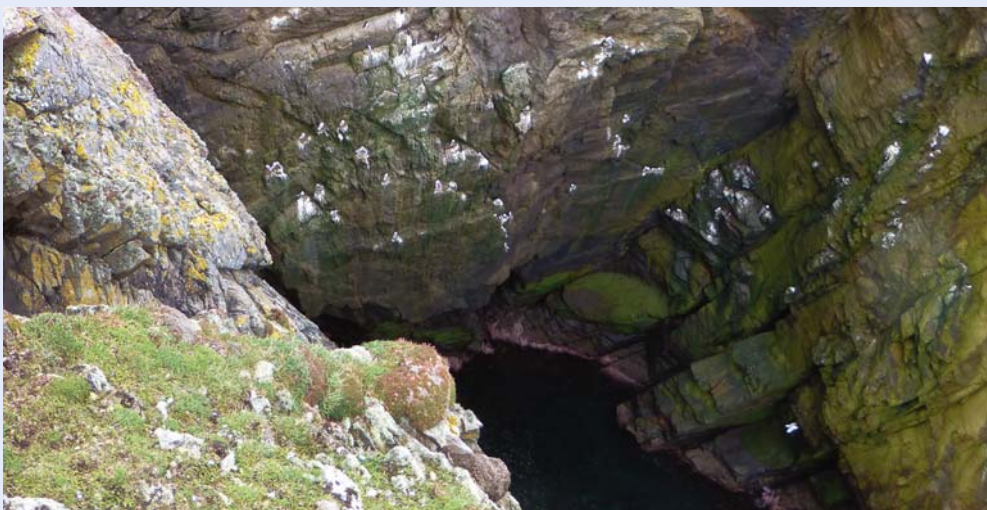


Plate 57. Kittiwakes nesting in Dog Geo, 20th May 2015. Although it is one of the largest and most productive colonies of this species on Fair Isle, numbers here have decreased from around 100 pairs in the 1980s to less than 30 pairs in 2015. © David Parnaby

but with only 0.13 chicks fledging per nest it represented a 79% decrease in productivity since 2014. Birds dispersed during August, with none around the island by 25th, although small numbers were seen irregularly offshore after that. Counts in the autumn were generally of less than 30, although at least 167 passed on 25th October and there were just occasional records of single figures in the last two months of the year.

## Black-headed Gull

*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

There were up to three in January and occasional singles in February and early March, with up to six later in the month. A quiet spring passage saw regular records, with peaks of just eight in April, 15 in May and eight in June. The first juveniles arrived from 8th July (a typical date), with a slight increase in numbers leading to a peak of 26 on 12th August. There were up to 16 regularly until mid-November and just one the following month, on 17th December.

## Common Gull

*Larus canus*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant, breeds in small numbers*

Small numbers were regular throughout the early part of the year, with birds returning to their breeding colonies in late March and spring passage seeing peaks of 49 on 18th April and 69 on 23rd May. Birds were incubating on 20th May and ten pairs nested (six at Goorn, three around Da Water and one between Pund and Setter), one less than in 2014. Although eight pairs lingered on Buness, none nested there (with the birds from Buness possibly relocating to Goorn) and productivity was generally not good. Autumn passage began in late July, with 59 on 21st, and increased rapidly in early August, peaking at 553 on 4th August with 552 on 18th August, but fewer than 100 from 22nd August onwards. There were no more than 60 in September, 91 on 5th October and then a final large influx late in the month brought 294 on 28th and 315 on 29th October. Only small numbers lingered throughout November and December.

## Lesser Black-backed Gull

*Larus fuscus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; breeds in small numbers*

The second-earliest ever record involved an adult on 17th–20th February. More typical spring passage occurred from 22nd March, with spring peaks of just 12 in April and 28 on 17th May. Four pairs nested on Goorn, which is typical of recent years (between two and five pairs have bred every year since 2005). Returning migrants were noticed from 13th July and autumn passage was generally unremarkable, with a peak of 25 on 11th August and a maximum in September of just five. There were still three in early October, a very late adult on 29th October and a juvenile in the south of the island on 1st–6th November, with probably the same bird moving past Bunes on 8th November; the only later Fair Isle record was on 12th December 1957.

## Herring Gull

*Larus argentatus*

### *Common migrant, breeds in small numbers*

Although present all year, there were very few counts of note. Nesting material was recorded as being collected from 25th April and 46 pairs bred (42 on Goorn and four on Greenholm), with the first youngsters fledging on 11th July. There were several large gatherings during poor weather in the autumn, although the only notable count was approximately 850 on 26th October.

### **Herring Gull x Glaucous Gull** *Larus argentatus x L.hyperboreus*

A juvenile at Furse on 4th December was thought to probably be a bird of this relatively common hybrid combination.



Plate 58. Great Black-backed, Herring and Glaucous Gulls, Ditfield, 9th January 2015. © David Parnaby

## Iceland Gull

*Larus glaucoides*

### *Scarce migrant in winter and spring*

Present on 11 dates from 1st–25th January, with all records involving single juveniles apart from 10th when two juveniles were present (along with a ‘Kumlien’s Gull’). A juvenile was present throughout February and until 8th March, with a second-winter on 2nd February and adults on 25th February and 8th March. There were regular sightings during 19th–29th March, peaking at three juveniles on 22nd, then a juvenile almost daily throughout April and from 3rd–7th May, with a second juvenile on 5th May and another on 12th–13th May. The last of a good spring was a late second-winter on 25th–28th May. A second-winter on 6th September was an early arrival, with a juvenile on 18th October and then another juvenile seen regularly from 7th November to the end of the year, with second juveniles present on 29th November and 8th December and an adult on 10th December.



Plate 59. Iceland Gull with Herring Gulls, South Harbour, 10th December 2015. © David Parnaby

### **‘Kumlien’s Gull’** *Larus glaucoides kumlieni*

*Vagrant; five previous records published as showing characteristics of this subspecies (four during April–May and a bird from January to August 2014 and probably the same again in December 2014)*

A second-winter on 10th–11th January could possibly have been the 2014 individual, although as it arrived during an influx of white-wingers in stormy weather, it could potentially have been a new bird. A third-winter on 27th–30th November could, conceivably, also have been the same bird and it was joined on 27th by a very distinctive juvenile, in what was the best year for this interesting subspecies.

## Glaucous Gull

*Larus hyperboreus*

### *Regular migrant in spring, late autumn and winter*

An impressive arrival in January started with an adult on 4th, a juvenile on 6th and then nine (a second-winter and eight juveniles) on 9th, with an adult amongst the seven the following day. This represents the highest count on Fair Isle since 1996, although it falls somewhat short of the record island count of 300 on 24th November 1969. There were sightings of an adult, second-winter and juvenile throughout the rest of January, a maximum of three in February, on 27th, (although three juveniles and an adult were seen during the month), a juvenile on three dates in March and one on 9th April. A first-summer bird on 4th–6th June was the first in this month since 2003, although occasional summer records are not that unusual. October saw sightings on four dates from 5th, peaking at two (an adult and juvenile) on 18th, whilst four sightings of singles in November all involved different birds and an adult and juvenile were still present in December.



## Great Black-backed Gull

*Larus marinus*

### *Common migrant, breeds in small numbers*

As usual, the species was present throughout the year, with few counts made. Only three pairs were confirmed as breeding (on Goorn, Greenholm and Dronger), with chicks seen from 1st June. There were often large gatherings in the north of the island during stormy weather in the autumn, although the only notable count was of around 700 on 26th October.

## Rock Dove

*Columba livia*

### *Resident, breeds in small numbers*

Present all year with no signs of migration noted. A difficult species to accurately census, with counts in the first part of the year limited to 48 on 6th April, a relatively high pre-breeding season count. The first fledged youngster was noted on 31st May at the Obs. As usual, the species avoided specific attempts to count the population in the autumn, but at least 80 were noted on 11th September, the largest number logged since 2009.



Plate 60. Rock Doves, Meadow Burn, 11th September 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Stock Dove

*Columba oenas*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

A late spring migrant was discovered near Houll on 6th June and lingered in the south of the island until 25th June, the first record for this month since 1998.

## Woodpigeon

*Columba palumbus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

An early bird was present on 16th–17th February, with spring passage bringing two on 19th March then up to three regularly until the end of the month. There were up to three during early April, with four on 18th, then occasional records until the end of the month. Almost daily records in May peaked at eight on 6th and 29th and two remained until 6th June. Occasional sightings of one until early September probably involved a summering bird. Two on 18th September were the first sign of autumn movement, but there was then little evidence of migration until 15 on 5th October, the peak count for the year. Up to five lingered for the rest of the month, with six on 28th October showing that some were still arriving. A couple lingered into early November, with one remaining until 18th.



## Collared Dove

*Streptopelia decaocto*

### *Frequent spring migrant, less common in autumn*

The first wasn't seen until 9th April, the latest arrival since 2010, with up to three seen regularly until the end of the month. There were also up to three throughout May, then eight arrived on the last day of the month with between one and seven seen on several dates throughout June. One was present on 23rd July, with two further singles in August and individuals on 4th and 23rd–24th September.



Plate 61. Turtle Dove, The Havens, 3rd October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Turtle Dove

*Streptopelia turtur*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

After the total absence of records in 2014 (the first blank year in FIBO's history), there was a slight return to form, with a bird trapped in the Plantation on 7th May that lingered until 13th, an individual briefly at Brecks on 9th May and the third of the spring at Setter on 22nd May that hung around the Obs until 28th May. In the autumn a tired bird was in the Havens on 3rd October.

## Cuckoo

*Cuculus canorus*

### *Scarce migrant, mostly in spring, rarer in autumn, has bred (most recently in 2002)*

One on 5th–7th May was the earliest arrival since 2008, with further singles noted on 19th and 27th May. An early juvenile was at South Green on 8th July, with the next sighting on 5th August. Singles at South Light and Wester Lothar on 15th August lingered until 16th and 23rd August respectively, with others seen at Haa on 27th August, Chalet on 5th September and Kenaby on 27th September (the latest record since one on 8th October 1977) in a very good autumn for the species.

## Long-eared Owl

*Asio otus*

### *Regular autumn migrant, scarce in spring*

Singles on seven dates from 5th–23rd May probably involved at least four individuals (including one that was seen heading high to the north-east from Bunes on 8th) in a decent spring passage. An intriguing record on 27th July involved one seen by staff coming back from Storm Petrel ringing as it flew around the Obs garden, the first July record since 2004. A good autumn passage saw almost daily records of one to three from 7th October to 21st November, with a peak of four on 6th November. During this time, one was seen to predate a Water Rail at Stackhoull on 3rd November. Occasional sightings in December showed at least one bird was wintering on the island, the first such occurrence since 2011/12.



Plate 62. Long-eared Owl, 19th October 2015.  
© Andrew Chick

## Short-eared Owl

*Asio flammeus*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

One was seen on 28th April, followed by regular sightings from 10th May until 12th June, with later birds on 22nd June, 13th and 24th July. There were sightings from 24th–30th August and then regular records from 16th September until mid-November. Numbers started rising by the end of the first week of October, increasing to 11 on 10th, with further peaks of 12 on 15th, 14 from 18th–20th and 17 on 21st October. Numbers then dropped to single figures until 19 arrived on 28th October, increasing to a Fair Isle record of 38 on 29th, with 33 still the next day. Early November saw single figures until 5th, when ten arrived, and 27 were present on 6th before numbers decreased until the last was seen on 16th November.

## Swift

*Apus apus*

### *Frequent migrant, most in summer and early autumn*

Spring passage began with an early bird on 6th May, but the next was not seen until 5th–6th June. One on 27th June and two the following day may have been the start of autumn movement, which continued with one or two on three dates during 11th–19th July. There were regular sightings of up to 11 from 2nd–18th August, then up to seven on 21st–22nd August. Daily sightings from 27th August to 4th September peaked at 44 on 31st August, the highest count since 2011, with later birds on 8th, 10th (two) and 16th September.



Plate 63. Wryneck, North Light, 25th August 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Wryneck

*Jynx torquilla*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

The first was a roaming bird from 3rd–6th May, with another in the south-east of the island on 10th–11th May during a quiet spring for the species. Autumn began with one at Wester Lother on 18th August, increasing to four across the island the next day. There were two more on 24th August, with two present on 25th including one new bird. In September there were singles on 12th in Johnny Arcus' Park and on 22nd at North Light, bringing the autumn total to a rather decent nine birds.

## Great Spotted Woodpecker

*Dendrocopos major*

### *Rare (and irruptive) migrant, mostly in autumn*

Recorded for the third consecutive year, when one was seen flying south along the cliff top at Hoini during a fall of common migrants on 5th November.

## Kestrel

*Falco tinnunculus*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

Spring was quiet, with two on 25th April and one the next day, then records from 9th–28th May, 6th–15th and 27th June, possibly involving as few as three birds. Early autumn migrants on 3rd and 5th August were followed by daily records from 18th August to 18th October. Numbers rapidly increased in August to a peak of 15 on 27th, the joint second-highest Fair Isle count, with another surge of arrivals bringing a peak of 13 on 13th and 16th September. Numbers generally declined after that, although nine on 5th October suggested another arrival. There were still two on 20th October, then a male from 22nd October to 31st October, with a late bird on 16th November.

## Merlin

*Falco columbarius*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant, small numbers overwinter*

There was at least one throughout January, with three individuals noted in February and two in March, staying until 20th April. Up to two were regularly seen from 2nd–16th May, including one seen on migration from the Good Shepherd on 14th May, with later spring migrants on 24th May and 1st June. There were daily records from 1st September to 31st October, increasing to three by 9th September and four regularly in October. There were still up to three late into November and at least two wintering birds remained into December. Small birds form the vast bulk of the diet of Merlins and both Barred and Yellow-browed Warblers were seen being predated on 30th September.

## \*Hobby

*Falco subbuteo*

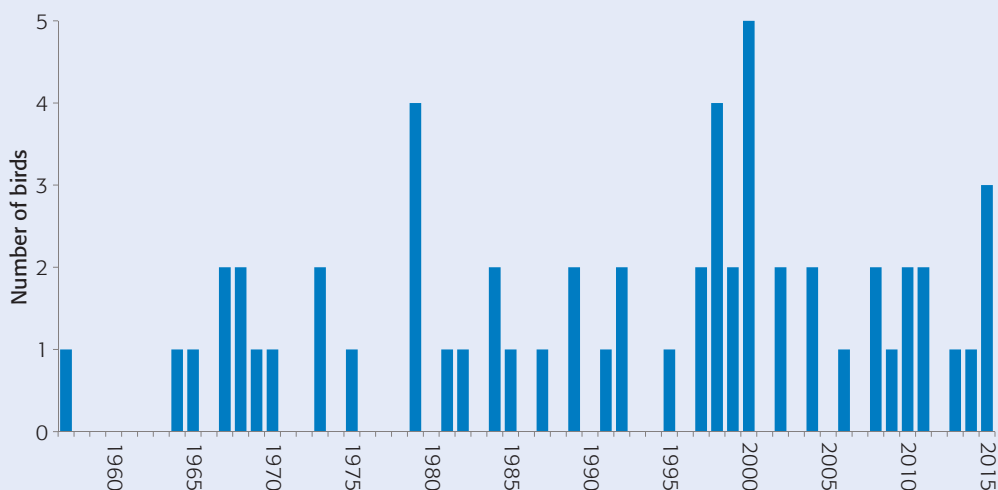
### *Rare visitor; 57 previous records, 45 in May–June, six in July and six in autumn (August–September)*

A rather tired first-summer bird was at Skadan on 30th May, where it spent some time chasing invertebrates on the ground before flying north after being harried by Common Gulls before being seen briefly at Field. One headed south over Lerness on 5th June and the third of the spring, making it the best year since 2000, was another first-summer, in Bull's Park, on 21st June.



Plate 64. Hobby, Bull's Park, 21st June 2015. © Lee Gregory

**Figure 2.** Annual occurrences of Hobby on Fair Isle since 1957. *Note: earlier occurrences were recorded in 1913 and 1914.*



Although still a scarce visitor, occurrences have become almost annual, with only two blank years in the last decade.



## Peregrine

*Falco peregrinus*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant; bred regularly until 1973 then again in 2008–2009 and 2013–2014*

An adult male was present from 9th–19th January, a female on 19th February and a pair were noted together over the Havens on 25th February. There were occasional records throughout March, and in April a pair and a juvenile female were seen regularly, with three still in May on one date at least. A pair almost certainly attempted breeding in the area of the Feltsigeos, although no nest was found, but they were presumed to have failed. The first autumn migrants were noted from 16th August and there were at least three individuals in September and two in October and early November. After that, the only records were of a juvenile female on 15th–19th November then an adult male on 11th December.

## Golden Oriole

*Oriolus oriolus*

*Rare migrant; 45 previous records (38 in spring, seven in autumn)*

Although there were eight in the seven years from 2004 to 2010, there had been only one since, so two in the spring was a pleasant surprise. The first was seen in the Obs garden by a lucky guest as he glanced out of his bedroom window on 17th May, but it disappeared long before breakfast. The second was another 'green' individual that lingered in the south of the island, particularly around Skerryholm, on the rather late dates of 22nd–30th June. The latter bird was rather lethargic-looking when first found, allowed close approach and appeared not to be long for the world, but its stay of over a week showed that there was plenty of decent food in the meadows and it was probably the most popular bird of the year amongst the island residents, with several people commenting on the delightful splash of colour it provided as it fed along the verges.

## Red-backed Shrike

*Lanius collurio*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant*

A male arrived at Nether Taft on 1st June, the latest arrival date since 1994, and lingered to 5th (during which time it was heard singing), with a female at North Naaversgill on the latter date as well. There were two females on 6th–7th (presumably including the bird from 5th), with one still on 8th when it was joined by a male, with the latter also seen on 11th and 13th June. A female arrived in the Parks on 19th and the sixth of the year was another female, at the Obs, on 27th June, making it the quietest spring since 2011. In the autumn, a juvenile arrived on 18th–19th August, a male was at Setter from 19th, with another juvenile arriving on 23rd and numbers increasing to three from 25th–30th, with the two juveniles remaining on 31st August. The fifth of the autumn was roaming the south of the island on 9th–13th September.



Plate 65. Red-backed Shrike, Setter, 21st August 2015.  
© Lee Gregory

## Great Grey Shrike

*Lanius excubitor*

### *Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring*

Although there were none in the spring, a total of five in October and November made it the best autumn since 1982. The first was at the Kirk on 18th October, with two arriving on 29th October (individuals at the Chapel and Obs). The following day, one was trapped in Double Dyke (presumably the bird that had been seen at the Chapel on 29th), with an unringed bird remaining at the Obs. Another two arrived on 5th November, at Dronger and North Light, with one still present on 6th, which was presumed to be the bird seen in the south of the island on 8th–9th November.



Plate 66. Great Grey Shrike, Obs, 31st October 2015.  
© David Parnaby

## Jackdaw

*Corvus monedula*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

There was a single on 1st–2nd April and three on 30th April but, for the first time since 2008, there were no autumn records in a very quiet year for this species.

## Rook

*Corvus frugilegus*

### *Regular spring migrant, less common in autumn*

The first was on 26th March, with two on 29th March and a single on 3rd April. An individual with crossed mandibles arrived on 14th April and, despite there being records on eight more dates in April, they may have referred to only a couple of birds. Although there were records on 21 dates in May, these mostly referred to a lingering bird, although there were five on 8th May and two the following day. The lingerer remained until 14th June, during which time it gradually lost most of its tail feathers, with continual squabbles with territorial Arctic Skuas possibly being to blame. The first autumn records since 2012 were one on 10th October and two on 3rd November.

## Carrion Crow

*Corvus corone*

### *Frequent spring migrant, less common in autumn*

One was present on 27th March, then there were regular sightings from 15th April to the end of the month, peaking at 12 on 20th April. Almost daily sightings in May peaked at 31 on 6th–8th, with just single figures in the last third of the month and four lingering to 15th June. After one on 22nd–27th July, there were sightings on seven dates in August, which probably all referred to a single bird (perhaps the bird which is thought to have summered for the last two years). Autumn passage consisted of up to three in early September, with at least one lingering bird seen regularly until 12th November.

## Hooded Crow

*Corvus cornix*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant and also resident, breeds in small numbers*

The first migrants were noted on 2nd April, when at least 15 birds were thought to have joined the small resident population. Corvid passage in early May included at least ten migrant Hoodies, with a few migrants present occasionally throughout the rest of the month. At least three pairs bred, with the first chicks fledging on 23rd June. A few migrants were noted in September, including three on 5th and seven on 22nd, whilst a flock of 14 in the north of the island on 21st November may also have involved visiting birds.

### **Carion x Hooded Crow** *Corvus corone x C. cornix*

As usual, Carion Crow passage also produced a small number of hybrids, with sightings of one or two on several dates from 29th April and throughout May, one in late June and a single on 6th September.



Plate 67. Hooded Crows, Auld Haa, 29th September 2015. © Ian Andrews

## Raven

*Corvus corax*

### *Resident, breeds in small numbers, also regular spring and autumn migrant*

At least three pairs bred, with three young each fledging from nests at Gunnawark on 23rd May and near North Light on 16th June. There were no obvious signs of migrants passing through the island during the year.

## Goldcrest

*Regulus regulus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

One on 13th March was a day later than the first arrival in 2014 and there were then just two more singles until a rather dramatic arrival of 56 on 26th March. There were still 39 by 4th April, but, although birds were present for the rest of the month, numbers dropped to single figures after 9th, other than 11 on 18th. There were one to four recorded regularly until the end of spring passage on 30th May. One on 28th August was the first of the autumn, with regular sightings from 9th September and numbers building in the last ten days of the month, peaking at 30 on 22nd. An impressive series of falls in October brought 109 on 5th, then 339 on 11th. Only two autumns have seen higher counts, with 500 on 1st October 1992 and 360 and 340 recorded on 17th and 20th October 2005. There were still around 180 during 12th–14th October and numbers then fell before 114 arrived on 17th, with numbers then tailing off dramatically, with single-figure counts from 22nd, until a small arrival brought 33 on 28th October. After a couple of birds in early November, there was another, rather late, big fall, with 103 on 5th, although just 36 were present the next day with one on 8th November the last of the year.

## **\*Firecrest**

*Regulus ignicapilla*

*Vagrant; seven previous records (three in April–May, four in October–November)*

For the second consecutive year, there was a mid-October record, with one discovered at Hjukni Geo on 11th during a large fall of Goldcrests. The following day it had relocated to Field and then Chalet where it lingered until 15th October. After two records in the 1980s and one in the 1990s there have now been five in the last nine years.



Plate 68. Firecrest, Field Ditch, 13th October 2015. © Lee Gregory

## **Skylark**

*Alauda arvensis*

*Common spring and autumn migrant, small numbers overwinter; breeds in small numbers*

A few were recorded in the winter and there were daily records from late February, with over 200 regularly recorded in March. There were similar numbers in early April, with a peak of 332 on 13th, although by the second half of month counts were generally 100–150. By late May, census counts were of less than 100 as migrants had passed through and birds got on with breeding. Food carrying was noted from 2nd June and the first fledged young were seen on 25th June, although there was no count of the number of breeding pairs. Counts during August and early September were generally around 50, with an increase from mid-month and a peak of 230 on 23rd, whilst fluctuating numbers in October peaked at 229 on 9th. Numbers dropped to less than 100 after mid-October and by mid-November there were just single-figure counts, with a handful remaining into the winter.

## **\*Short-toed Lark**

*Calandrella brachydactyla*

*Scarce spring and autumn migrant; 160 previous records of 175 individuals*

One at Bergaroo on the evening of 8th May was assumed to be the bird seen at Barkland and Setter on 9th–17th May. A second, rather confiding, bird arrived at Skadan where it was present from 16th–22nd May.

## **Sand Martin**

*Riparia riparia*

*Regular spring migrant, less common in autumn*

After one on 22nd April there were just small numbers throughout May, peaking at eight on 9th, with records of one or two on five dates in June until 30th. Autumn passage was typically light with two on 19th August, singles on 24th and 29th August, two on 10th and one on 15th September.



## Swallow

*Hirundo rustica*

*Frequent spring and autumn migrant; occasionally breeds (last recorded 2010–2012)*

The first was on 9th April (four days later than the first arrival in 2014) and from 16th April there were regular records of up to nine until the end of the month. Early May saw the heaviest passage of the spring, with numbers peaking at 55 on 6th and 9th, with generally fewer than 30 throughout the rest of the month. Light passage in early June saw a maximum of 35 recorded and then small numbers were noted throughout the summer. At least two pairs bred on Ward Hill, one fledging four chicks in mid-August and one which had a single chick in the nest which died (probably due to starvation) at around the same time. A second family party around Gilsetter in late August suggested another pair may have produced young elsewhere on the island. Small numbers were recorded throughout the autumn, although other than 53 on 15th September there was little obvious passage and just a few were recorded the following month, with the last of the year recorded on 19th October.

## House Martin

*Delichon urbicum*

*Frequent spring and autumn migrant; has bred (last recorded in 1986)*

There was one on 21st–23rd April (a slightly early arrival date), then three on 30th April and virtually daily records from 3rd May to 30th June, although no more than eight were recorded as passage was unremarkable. There were single birds on 10th and 16th July, then six on 10th August before regular sightings of up to three from 26th August to 3rd September and scattered records of one to three until 27th September.

## \*Greenish Warbler

*Phylloscopus trochiloides*

*Rare migrant; 46 previous records with 37 in autumn (August–September) and nine in spring (six in June, two in July and a single in May)*

The first multiple occurrence in the spring occurred on 3rd–5th June, when two were present, one of which was heard singing. Both ranged around the south of the island, although were never seen together. For the third year running, there was also an autumn occurrence, with one at the Obs on 19th–20th August.



Plate 69. Greenish Warbler, Obs, 19th August 2015. © Lee Gregory

## **\*Arctic Warbler**

*Phylloscopus borealis*

*Rare migrant; 90 previous records, most in August and September, also recorded in June (two), July (four) and October (six)*

One at Furse on 8th September was the only record, making it the quietest year for the species since 2009. It has only failed to make an appearance in nine of the last 40 years.

## **Yellow-browed Warbler**

*Phylloscopus inornatus*

### *Regular autumn migrant*

The earliest ever record involved a dramatic arrival of ten on 9th September, with smaller numbers present until 13th September. The next arrival was on 16th September, after which, birds were recorded daily until 21st October. There were ten on 17th September, then a record day-count of 53 on 21st September. Numbers declined to 11 by 27th, but an influx on 28th brought 76 - another record! Numbers dropped away again, but another arrival brought 55 on 5th October, with just smaller numbers after that, although 14 on 17th October showed there were still new waves of migrants coming in. Three sightings from 26th–30th October involved at least two birds, with a rather late bird on 6th November. At least 207 individuals were involved in the autumn's records, although probably many more as ringing indicated a high turnover of birds. The dramatic change of status of this delightful 'Sibe' continues and it will be fascinating to see what the next few years bring.

## **\*Radde's Warbler**

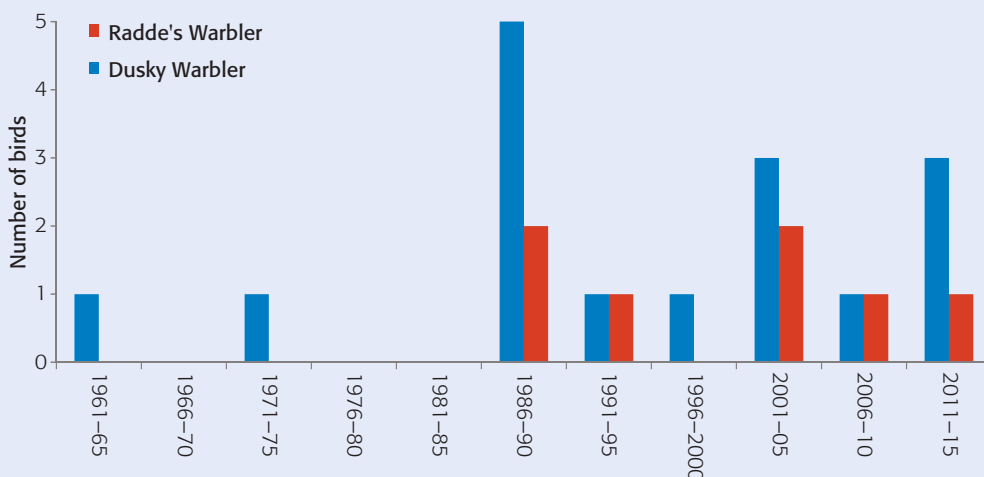
*Phylloscopus schwarzi*

*Vagrant; six previous records, all in autumn (one in September, five in October)*

One at Chalet and Barkland (occasionally roaming as far as the School) on 14th–19th October was the latest arrival (and longest staying) for Fair Isle, although three of the previous records arrived on 13th October.



Plate 70. Radde's Warbler, School, 16th October 2015. © Lee Gregory



**Figure 3.** Occurrences of Dusky and Radde's Warblers on Fair Isle by five year intervals. Note that Radde's Warbler has remained rather consistent in its rarity on Fair Isle since its debut in 1987, whilst Dusky Warbler is perhaps starting to show an increase in the last decade, although an obvious peak occurred in the late 1980s and 1990.

### \*Dusky Warbler

*Phylloscopus fuscatus*

#### *Vagrant; 15 previous records, all in autumn (September to November)*

One was in Tineside on 11th October, although it didn't linger and was present for only around ten minutes. It was a relatively early occurrence, although mid-October is the peak time for this species on Fair Isle and was the first record since two in 2013.

### Wood Warbler

*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

#### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

The first blank spring since 2010 was followed by a quiet autumn, with singles on Dronger on 21st August, Bunes on 26th August and at the Obs on 1st-2nd September.

### Chiffchaff

*Phylloscopus collybita*

#### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

Two arrived on 19th March, with up to three regularly recorded until the end of the month. There were daily records in April, with up to three until 13th, before numbers increased to nine, before peaking at 13 on 28th. Daily records in May peaked at 35 on 5th, with up to 20 regularly in the first half of the month. There were up to 11 in June and seven remained at the start of July, with at least six birds summering (one of which was found dead in Shetland Mainland in November). Autumn migrants started arriving from 14th August, with up to six almost daily throughout the rest of the month and September. In October, there were daily records, with the first double-figure count of the autumn being 11 on 5th, and an influx mid-month rising to 29 on 13th and peaking at 50 on 17th, with numbers decreasing throughout the rest of the month. There were almost daily records of one to five until 13th November, although ten were present on 5th, with a late bird on 21st-22nd November.

**'Siberian Chiffchaff'** *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

Although the totals under Chiffchaff include all subspecies, an attempt is made to accurately log the numbers of this distinctive eastern race. There were daily records from 4th October to 12th November, peaking at 24 on 19th October (on which day, *tristis* birds made up almost three-quarters of all Chiffchaffs present). In the last third of October, the percentage of Siberian birds increased (e.g. 12 out of 13 Chiffchaffs present on 21st), although only up to three were present in November. Several DNA samples of presumed 'Siberian Chiffchaffs' were sent for analysis, all of which were confirmed as *P.c.tristis*.



Plate 71. 'Siberian Chiffchaff', 18th October 2015.  
© Lee Gregory

## Willow Warbler

*Phylloscopus trochilus*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant*

An arrival date of 14th April was slightly later than usual, with a peak in the month of just 12 on 18th. Passage in early May peaked at 27 on 6th, but there were just single-figure counts for the rest of the month after 11th. A small arrival in early June brought 22 on 5th, with smaller numbers present until the last of the spring on 25th June. One was at Schoolton on 15th July, with the first juvenile of the autumn arriving on 6th August. Small numbers were then regularly present, with numbers building from 18th, rising to 56 the following day, then peaking with 90 on 25th and 93 on 26th. Counts then dwindled rapidly, with records in September only exceeding 20 on 17th, when there were 28 present. In October, a small arrival early in the month produced five on 3rd, with one to four present until the last of the year on the late date of 20th October (the latest since 2001).

## Blackcap

*Sylvia atricapilla*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant*

Two arrived on 18th April, with regular records of one or two until the end of the month. An arrival in May brought a peak of 25 on 6th, with counts of generally less than ten for the rest of the month. A small arrival in early June saw a peak of eight on 3rd and occasional small numbers were recorded throughout the rest of the month, including an arrival of four on 25th June, whilst a female on 1st and male on 3rd July finally brought an extended spring passage to an end. A juvenile trapped on 31st August was the first, with the next not until 11th September, with then a monthly peak of 12 on 17th September. October brought daily records, with numbers building to an impressive 147 on 8th (the highest count since 2000), dropping to around 40 for the next three days then another arrival brought 63 on 12th and 64 on 13th October. Numbers dropped away rapidly after that, with just single figures from 21st October, other than an arrival of 22 on 28th October. In November, there were regular counts of less than five until 11th followed by a late female at the Obs on 18th–19th November.



## Garden Warbler

*Sylvia borin*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

One on 5th May preceded three the following day then virtually daily sightings of one or two until 29th May. Daily records during 2nd–7th June peaked at 14 on 3rd, with stragglers remaining until 26th June. One on 4th August opened the autumn account for the species, with daily records from 15th August to the end of the month, including 18 on 18th then another wave of arrivals bringing 34 on 24th and 37 on 25th. Nine were still present in early September, but there were generally fewer than five, other than a small arrival of six on 9th, for the rest of the month. There were records on ten dates in October until the last of the year on 24th, all of one or two apart from three that arrived in a fall on 8th October.

## Barred Warbler

*Sylvia nisoria*

### *Regular autumn migrant, vagrant in spring (four records)*

There were daily records from 14th–27th August, generally of one or two, although the year's peak occurred on 25th when six were present, and a total of eight individuals were involved. September saw one on 1st, two on 11th, two on 17th, (with one remaining until the 20th), two on 22nd and one from 26th joined by a second bird on 27th, with both remaining to 30th September. October saw singles on 4th, 11th and 16th, bringing the autumn total to 20 birds, a decent year.

## Lesser Whitethroat

*Sylvia curruca*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

An unexceptional spring saw the first arrive on 4th May, then almost daily records during the month, with peak counts of four on 14th and 22nd May. Another small arrival during 2nd–8th June saw a maximum of four on 7th, with a late migrant on 28th June. There was also a bird present throughout June, July and early August that roamed the area between Burkle and Lower Stoneybrek and was often heard singing, the first record of summering on Fair Isle for this species. The first autumn migrant was at the Obs on 14th August, with three present the next day and almost daily records to the end of the month, peaking at five on 24th August. One to three were recorded on 18 dates in September and there were one or two on scattered dates until 19th October.



Plate 72. Lesser Whitethroat, Stackhoull, 23rd September 2015. © Lee Gregory

## \*Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler

*Sylvia subalpina*

### *Vagrant; one previous record (May 2014)*

A splendid first-summer male was seen in the Obs garden on 15th and was identified as this species due to the distinctive underpart coloration. It was trapped shortly afterwards and was relocated near Shirva the following day before lingering around the Meadow Burn and Midway area until 25th May, where it was heard occasionally giving its distinctive call. To complete the identification set, DNA analysis confirmed the bird was a Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, the second record for the island following the female in 2014 (which was found just a day later, on 16th May).



Plate 73. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Meadow Burn, 17th May 2015. © Lee Gregory

## \*Subalpine Warbler

*Sylvia cantillans*

### *Rare migrant; 89 previous records (85 in spring and four in autumn). Most currently unraced, although at least 15 thought to be 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' S.c.cantillans/albistriata*

#### **'Western Subalpine Warbler'** *S.c.iberiae/inornata*

A first-summer male was trapped in the Plantation on the late date of 30th June and went on to linger at the Obs until 3rd July, maintaining a 15-year run of consecutive annual occurrences for this species on Fair Isle.

## Whitethroat

*Sylvia communis*

### *Frequent spring migrant, less common in autumn*

After the first on 3rd May, there were regular records of up to four until the end of the month. Early June saw an increase in passage, with seven on 2nd, rising to eight on 5th and two lingering until 13th June, with later singles on 16th and 22nd June and 2nd July. Autumn passage was restricted to 19th August to 1st September, with numbers peaking at 26 on 25th August, the highest-ever autumn count for Fair Isle.

## \*Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler

*Locustella certhiola*

### *Vagrant; 23 previous records all between mid-September and mid-October*

One found in the Wirvie Burn on 19th October showed very well in an overhang before moving to the mouth of the burn. Although there had been an impressive run of six birds from 2007 to 2012, this was the first since then and was also the joint-latest Fair Isle record (one was also recorded on 19th October in 2001).

## \*Lanceolated Warbler

*Locustella lanceolata*

*Scarce autumn migrant; 89 previous records (between 4th September and 1st November)*

An initially uncooperative bird on Suka Mire on 27th September was eventually photographed well enough to prove the identification. One found late in the afternoon of 12th October as it sat in a rose bush at Kenaby then went to ground in the garden and was eventually trapped to confirm the identification. It was in good condition (weighting 10.9 grams) and, as with all birds previously aged on Fair Isle, was a juvenile. The countdown to Fair Isle's centurion Lancie has now reached single figures...

## Grasshopper Warbler

*Locustella naevia*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant*

The first arrived on 25th April, a typical date (the previous four years' first arrival dates had all been 23rd or 24th April). In May, there were two on 4th and singles on 6th, 7th and 15th (probably involving just three birds) and a late bird was present on 3rd–4th June. Autumn passage saw records on nine dates in August from 14th, six dates in September and a late individual on 7th–8th October; all were of singles apart from two on 29th August.

## \*Booted Warbler

*Iduna caligata*

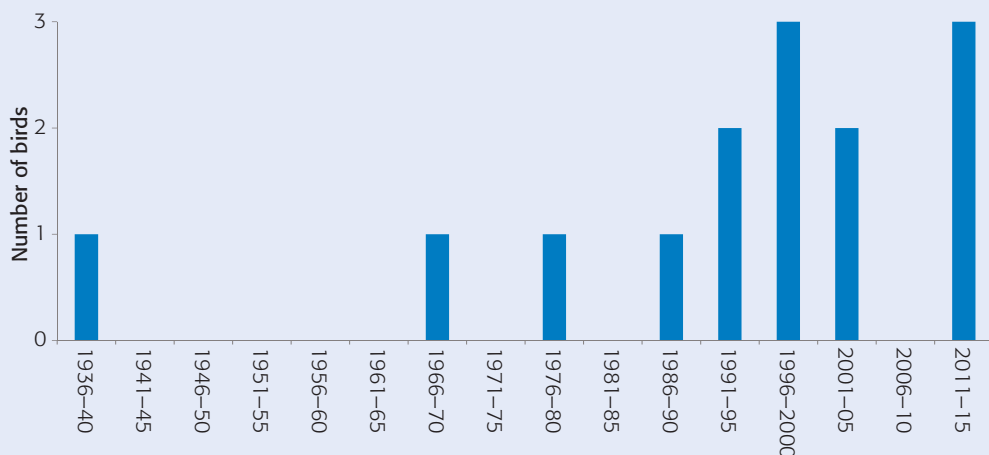
*Vagrant; 13 previous records, all in autumn (late August to early October)*

The first record since 2013 was found at Lower Leogh on 19th–22nd August, the third consecutive record for this month, which now accounts for six records, just one less than September.



Plate 74. Booted Warbler, Lower Leogh, 19th August 2015.  
© David Parnaby

**Figure 4.** Occurrences of Booted Warbler on Fair Isle by five year intervals. Note the obvious increasing trend recently.



# Icterine Warbler

*Hippolais icterina*

## Regular spring and autumn migrant

Two on the 2nd June represented the latest spring arrival date since 1991 (although there were no spring birds in 2001), with a singing male at the Obs from 3rd–8th and another bird at Furze on 4th, with the fifth of the spring at Barkland on 14th June. A very early autumn migrant was at the Obs then Schoolton from 21st–25th July, an unusual but not unprecedented occurrence. There were daily sightings from 18th August to 4th September, peaking at five on 21st and 25th–26th, which involved a total of seven individuals, bringing the autumn total to eight, making it the best autumn since 1997 for the species.

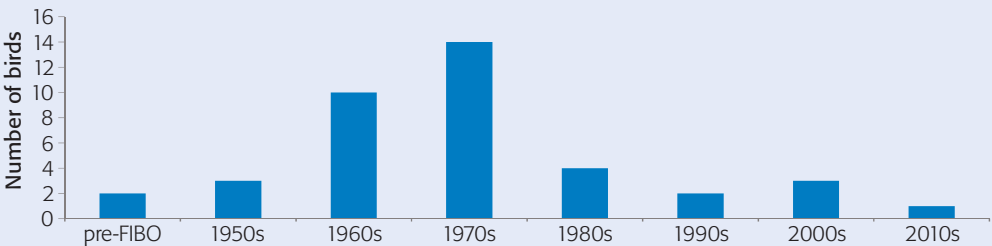


Plate 75. Icterine Warbler, Obs, 22nd July 2015.  
© Lee Gregory

## \*Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

### Vagrant; 38 previous records, most in August and September (two in October)

A smart juvenile in the Meadow Burn on 15th–16th August was the first record since 2006 of this globally threatened species.



**Figure 5.** Occurrences of Aquatic Warbler on Fair Isle by decade. Note the dramatic peak in the 1960s and 1970s, with numbers dropping away after that, mirroring a national decline in records.



**Figure 6.** Arrival dates of Aquatic Warbler on Fair Isle. Note the concentration of records in mid-August, with this year's bird being the fifth to arrive on the peak date of 15th August. The two October records are also the only two pre-FIBO records, both involving birds that were shot (in 1914 and 1935).



## Sedge Warbler

*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

### *Frequent migrant, commonest in spring; has bred (2010)*

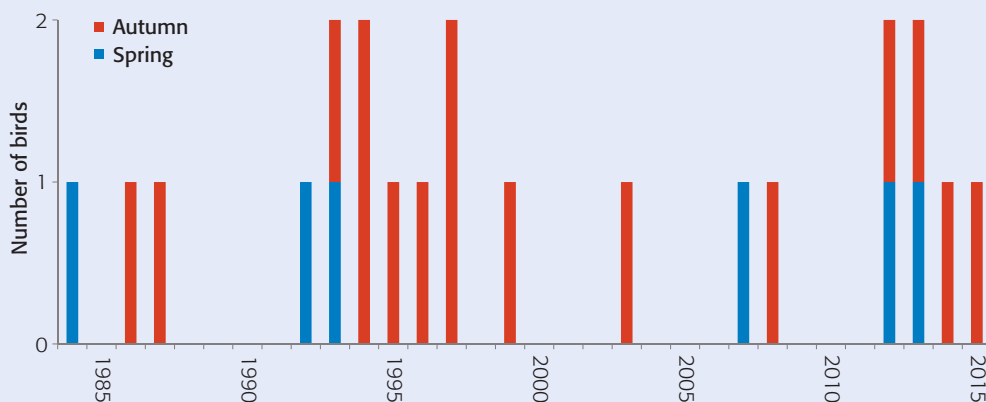
The latest arrival since 2005 saw the first of the year not appearing until 5th May, followed by daily sightings to 20th May, peaking at nine on 11th, before scattered records of one or two until the end of the month. Another arrival on 2nd–8th June peaked at nine on 5th. A very quiet autumn saw records on four dates from 24th–28th August, peaking at two on 25th.

## \*Paddyfield Warbler

*Acrocephalus agricola*

### *Vagrant; 23 previous records, 17 in autumn (15 September, two October) and six in spring (May and June, one lingering until July)*

The sixth record in the last four years involved a bird at Da Water on 8th October (only the third to arrive in this month following previous birds in 2003 and 2013).



**Figure 7.** Annual and seasonal occurrences of Paddyfield Warbler on Fair Isle (note: earlier autumn occurrences were recorded in 1925 and 1953). Note that the recent impressive run of records mirrors a similar pattern from 20 years earlier.



Plate 76. Paddyfield Warbler, Da Water, 8th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## **\*Blyth's Reed Warbler**

*Acrocephalus dumetorum*

*Rare migrant; 40 previous records, 28 in autumn (August–October) and 12 in spring (May–June)*

The seventh spring record since 2010 involved a bird trapped in the Gully on 8th June. An initially elusive bird at Upper Stoneybrek on 20th September was trapped to prove its identification and went on to linger until 25th September, moving to Lower Leogh for the last four days of its stay.



Plate 77. Blyth's Reed Warbler, Upper Stoneybrek, 21st September 2015. © Lee Gregory

## **Marsh Warbler**

*Acrocephalus palustris*

*Scarce spring migrant, rare in autumn*

One at Lower Stoneybrek on 1st June was followed by a bird at Charlie's Trees on 3rd June that lingered at Chalet until 7th, during which time there were further individuals at the Plantation on 5th and Lower Leogh on 6th June. Another was at Schoolton on 13th June, whilst records from 22nd–25th all possibly related to the same bird, which was trapped in the Gully on the last date. Another was trapped at the Obs on 30th June, whilst a very late spring migrant (or perhaps a wandering failed breeder) was also caught at the Obs on 15th July, bringing the spring total to eight birds.

## **Reed Warbler**

*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

*Regular migrant, more common in autumn*

A quiet spring saw one on 5th May (the earliest arrival since 2001), two on 11th June (with one lingering until 24th) and 20th–25th June. The first autumn migrant arrived on 7th August then a strong period of passage saw birds recorded daily from 13th August to 19th September. Numbers rose steadily during this time to nine on 22nd and 17 on 25th August (the highest count since 2008), although after seven on 1st September, numbers dropped to between one and four. Two late birds arrived on 8th October, with another on 11th October.

## **Waxwing**

*Bombycilla garrulus*

*Scarce but irruptive autumn migrant, rare in spring and winter*

The last large irruption of this species occurred in 2012, and 2015 proved to be another quiet year. Sightings of singles during 6th–8th November were assumed to relate to one bird and a late migrant flew south over Homisdale on 8th December.

## Wren

*Troglodytes troglodytes*

*Endemic race 'Fair Isle Wren' T.t.fridariensis resident in small numbers. Other races probably occur as rare spring and autumn migrants*

The first singing bird was recorded in the Havens on 2nd March and a successful season saw 43 territories located, an increase of two on the total recorded in 2014. Productivity was not recorded, but the first fledged chicks were noted (in the Havens) on 10th June, eight days later than 2014.

## Starling

*Sturnus vulgaris*

*Resident, breeds in moderate numbers, also common spring and autumn migrant*

The first eggs were noted as hatching on 25th May, with fledged young seen from 14th June, 15 days later than 2014. Monitoring of a sample of nests showed that most pairs were late in breeding, with 72.4% of monitored eggs going on to fledge.

## Rose-coloured Starling

*Pastor roseus*

*Rare migrant; 42 previous individuals, with 11 in spring (May–June), nine in summer and 22 in autumn (August–November).*

The first 'pink' bird since 2007 (there have been juveniles since then in 2008, 2011 and 2014) dropped into the Obs garden on 2nd July and lingered elusively in the area until 5th July. A first-summer bird at North Raeva on 1st August was seen on Lerness on 4th August; the first year with more than one individual recorded since 2004.

## \*Siberian Thrush

*Geokichla sibirica*

*Vagrant; one previous record (September 2008)*

A male was flushed from Hoini on 5th October but, what could have been the bird of the autumn, sadly disappeared into Steensi Geo and could not be relocated.



Plate 78. Waxwing, 6th November 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Ring Ouzel

*Turdus torquatus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

A relatively quiet spring saw up to two on four dates from 13th–28th April, daily sightings from 1st–6th May that peaked at nine on 4th, with two present from 10th–14th May and a female on 30th May. Autumn passage began with singles on four dates in September from 21st then regular sightings from 5th–17th October that peaked at 12 on 8th. Later sightings involved two from 28th–29th October and two on 5th November, with one still the following day.

## Blackbird

*Turdus merula*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant, small numbers overwinter; has bred (last recorded 2014)*

At least 20 were wintering on the island in the early part of the year and numbers were fairly consistent until a fall of 76 on 26th March. Up to 23 remained in the first week in April, with numbers dropping to single figures for the rest of spring passage, which lasted until 19th May, with a female lingering at the Obs until 31st May and a late migrant at North Light on 7th–9th June. Autumn migration kicked off on 28th September, with small numbers daily throughout the autumn. Seventy on 12th and 174 on 17th October were the highest counts until 330 on 28th October, which increased to 966 on 30th. Around 200 remained in early November, with the year's peak of 1,009 arriving on 5th (the highest count since April 2006) and 843 the following day. At least 200 were present on 16th–17th November and 10–30 were recorded until the end of the year.



Plate 79. Leucistic Blackbird, Obs, 9th November 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Fieldfare

*Turdus pilaris*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant, often overwinters*

A dozen or so were present in early January and south-east winds brought 25 on 21st, then at least 58 from 27th. Although there were still 25 in February, most birds had moved on by March, with no more than six seen. Ten arrived on 11th April, but in a quiet spring there were just 17 more dates with sightings of up to six until 24th May. Autumn passage began early on 3rd August, building to five by 15th and a flurry late in the month brought ten on 24th August. There were daily records from 10th September to the end of the year. All counts were of single figures until 63 on 5th October, but counts dropped to 13 or less again until 56 on 14th, which represented the start of a small arrival that peaked at 101 on 18th. Numbers dropped again until 126 on 26th, with the floodgates finally opening on 28th as 2,169 arrived. Numbers decreased to 238 by 3rd November but a final large arrival saw 1,105 on 4th and 4,983 on 5th November. At least 600 remained by mid-November, with just small numbers present until the end of the year.



## Song Thrush

*Turdus philomelos*

*Common spring and autumn migrant, sometimes overwinters; has bred (last recorded 1926)*

There were at least three overwintering birds present at the start of the year and a few more possibly moved through in January. Spring passage began in the last week of March, when up to six were present and, although spring migrants were present regularly until 16th May, counts did not exceed five. A bird was present from mid-May to September, although mid-summer records are relatively regular, such a protracted stay is unusual. The first autumn bird was trapped on 25th August, with no more until 10th September, after which there were daily records of up to 15 until the end of the month. A large fall from 5th October saw numbers rising to 387 on 8th, then another wave of arrivals peaked at 407 on 11th. After that, numbers dropped away rapidly to single figures until 146 on 28th October. A small fall in early November brought 45 on 5th, with smaller numbers during the rest of the month and a couple remaining to the end of the year.

## Redwing

*Turdus iliacus*

*Common spring and autumn migrant, sometimes overwinters; has bred (1935)*

The highest count in the first winter period was 20, although by early March few remained. Light spring passage began in late March and was most evident in mid-April, peaking at 128 on 11th, with small numbers recorded regularly until 2nd June, with one on 25th June the latest spring migrant since 1999. Twenty-six on 21st September began daily records throughout the autumn, although there were no more than 53 until an impressive arrival of 2,326 on 5th October. Numbers dropped away to around 500 before another arrival of 2,660 on 11th increased to 2,822 on 12th. Fluctuating counts dropped as low as 680 before the autumn's peak of 3,250 arrived on 17th October. Numbers dropped away rapidly to less than 100 before another arrival saw 1,752 on 28th October. Another fall in November saw 1,521 on 5th, but numbers quickly dwindled and, after mid-month, counts were generally in the region of 20.



Plate 80. Redwing, Pund, 15th October 2015.  
© Steve Arlow

## Mistle Thrush

*Turdus viscivorus*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant*

Spring migration began early, with one on 25th–26th February and there were further birds on 8th March (two), 18th–21st March and 4th–9th April. A fairly quiet autumn passage saw up to two regularly recorded during 8th–19th October and one at Furse on 5th–7th November, with possibly the same bird seen again on 17th November.

## Spotted Flycatcher

*Muscicapa striata*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

The species has been remarkably consistent in its arrival dates in recent years, appearing on 8th May in 2011–2013 and 9th May in 2014, so one on 7th May was pretty much bang-on schedule. There were one or two recorded on eight further dates in May, then June saw birds recorded almost daily, including an arrival of 11 on 2nd and 25 on 5th (the highest count since 2012) whilst four on 25th showed that birds were still arriving late into the month. The first July record since 2011 appeared on 26th, with autumn passage getting properly underway on 18th August when there were two, which increasing to three the following day, with up to five from 23rd–28th August. A later wave of birds saw virtually daily records from 10th–19th September, with a peak of seven on 17th and the last of the year was recorded on 29th September.

## Robin

*Erithacus rubecula*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant, often overwinters in small numbers*

There were at least seven recorded in January, a good count for mid-winter, with smaller numbers present throughout February and early March. The first signs of spring migration were 17 on 19th March and there were small numbers present for the rest of the month and throughout April, peaking at 21 on 3rd April. A small arrival at the start of May peaked at 11 on 8th and there were a few migrants noted until 16th June. For the fourth consecutive year, there was an oversummering record with one lingering at the Obs until 31st July. Autumn migrants started moving from 15th September, with a peak of just four for the month. The first large fall of the autumn occurred on 7th October when 74 were present, with 80 on 13th, but numbers then dropped away rapidly to single figures until the year's peak of 100 arrived on 28th October. Counts again fell away, until the last fall of the autumn saw 41 arrive on 5th November. Numbers dwindled after this, with at least four birds still present in December.



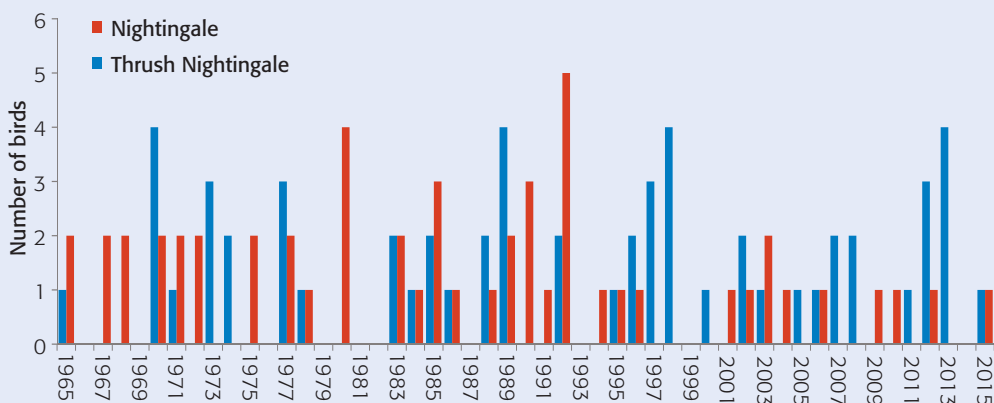
Plate 81. Thrush Nightingale, Setter, 19th August 2015. © David Parnaby

## \*Thrush Nightingale

*Luscinia luscinia*

*Rare migrant; 61 previous records, 50 in spring (May–June) and 11 in autumn (August–September, with one in October)*

After being one of the few regularly occurring species to go missing in the year list breaking record year of 2014 (only the sixth blank year since 1995), a very showy bird at Setter on 19th August restored the recent run of autumn occurrences (eight of the 12 records at this season having been logged since 2005).



**Figure 8.** Annual occurrences of Thrush Nightingale and Nightingale on Fair Isle from 1965 (note: earlier Thrush Nightingales occurred in 1928, 1957 and 1958 [two] and a Nightingale was recorded in 1949). Note that Thrush Nightingale has seemingly gone through regular surges of occurrence, whilst Nightingale records have been steadily declining. There appears to be little correlation between occurrences of these two closely related species.

## \*Nightingale

*Luscinia megarhynchos*

*Rare migrant; 53 previous records, 44 in spring (April–July) and nine in autumn (August–October)*

As recently as 2006, this was the more common of the two Nightingale species to occur on Fair Isle. However, the bird trapped in the Gully on 30th June this year was just the second record in the last five years, as its 'rarer' cousin has become the more expected visitor of the two. This late spring occurrence was not without precedent; there have been two previous Nightingales that arrived in the last ten days of June and one even later spring bird, on 1st July 1972.

## Bluethroat

*Luscinia svecica*

*Regular migrant, commonest in spring and scarce in autumn*

There were just three birds seen in spring (making it the quietest since 2007), with a male at Barkland then Field on 15th–17th May, a female in Bull's Park on 29th May and a male at Lower Stoneybrek on 3rd June. Autumn was much better and began with three on 28th September, with further singles on 4th and 8th October. One was at Stackhoull on 12th–15th October, with another in the Walli Burn on 13th and a new individual at the Mast on 16th October. The ninth and tenth of the autumn occurred on 19th October at Haa (a male) and 20th October at Setter (a female).

## \*Siberian Rubythroat

*Calliope calliope*

### *Vagrant; five previous records, all in October*

The third record in the last four years involved a female found on the Hill Dyke just east of the Rocket Station on 20th October, which proved elusive as it flitted around Setter and the Parks. It was the first of Fair Isle's six records of Rubythroat (five of which have now been females) that didn't linger beyond its finding date. After securing the first British record of Siberian Rubythroat in 1975, this species continues to be something of a Fair Isle special, with half of all British records having occurred on the island.

**Figure 9.** Arrival dates (in October) of Siberian Rubythroat on Fair Isle. Note the distinct cluster of dates for all the recent records (the 9th October record was in 1975, all others have occurred since 2003).



## \*Red-flanked Bluetail

*Tarsiger cyanurus*

### *Vagrant; 11 previous records, most in September and October with one in March–April*

Fair Isle's bluetail count reached a dozen (half of which have occurred since 2010) when one emerged from the gloom of Tineside (a small geo just south of South Naaversgill) on 11th October. Although it went on to show well as it actively fed (including being seen to catch and eat an Angle Shades moth), it was only discovered after a twenty-minute vigil on the cliff top waiting for a Dusky Warbler to reappear. Whether it had just arrived unseen, or had been sitting motionless somewhere in the meantime, it was another bird to make you wonder what goes undetected on Fair Isle's vast cliffs.



Plate 82. Red-flanked Bluetail, Tyneside, 11th October 2015. © Steve Arlow





Plate 83. Red-breasted Flycatcher, Brecks, 13th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Red-breasted Flycatcher

*Ficedula parva*

### *Rare in spring (35 previous records), scarce autumn migrant*

After three consecutive years of spring occurrences, the first this year did not arrive until 18th September when one was in North Haven. One at Wirvie Burn on 4th October was followed by two the next day (at Steensi and Copper Geos) and there were then two more on 13th October, when one was at Kenaby and another at Malcolm's Head. The former bird lingered to 17th, on which date the seventh of the year was seen at Easter Lother.

## Pied Flycatcher

*Ficedula hypoleuca*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

Spring passage was restricted to seven dates during 5th–18th May, peaking at four on 9th, and one to three from 3rd–5th June. Birds were regular throughout the autumn with sightings from 14th August to 1st September peaking at 11 on 21st and 23rd August. A further wave of arrivals from 9th–13th September peaked at ten on 10th, there were up to five from 16th–17th September and up to three during both 20th–22nd and 28th–30th September. Three were seen on 5th October with the last of the year on 9th October.

## Black Redstart

*Phoenicurus ochruros*

### *Regular spring migrant, scarce in autumn*

A quiet spring saw singles on 18th March, 4th April, eight dates from 1st–18th May (possibly involving just two or three birds), 6th–7th and 15th June. Two on 19th August were the only records for that month and there was then one on 17th September and a male that lingered at Ditfield from 24th September to 4th October. A quiet autumn was brought to an end with single birds on 27th October and 5th–7th November.

## Redstart

*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

Three on 3rd May were the latest first arrival date since 2007, with numbers increasing to 13 on 6th and then daily records until 11th. Three on 14th, with two the following day, and one on 31st, were the only other records for May, with the last birds of the spring seen on 5th and 7th June. A male on 18th August saw the start of regular sightings through the rest of the month, peaking at nine on 26th. September then saw almost daily sightings until 23rd, peaking at six on 11th and 13th. After that, there were one or two on scattered dates until the last on 20th October, with a peak of four on 12th October.



Plate 84. Redstart, South Harbour, 18th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Whinchat

*Saxicola rubetra*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

Birds were present daily from 3rd–24th May (except 14th), with a peak of six on 6th, with the only other spring record involving one on 4th June. Autumn passage began on 15th August and numbers increased rapidly to 20 on 19th, 41 on 24th August and 44 on 28th August, the highest count since 2008. The only double-figure counts amongst September's daily records were ten on 1st and 11 on 17th. One or two were recorded almost daily in October until three on 17th October, which were the last until a very late bird at Schoolton on 4th November.

## Stonechat

*Saxicola rubicola*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

For the second consecutive year there was an impressive passage in March, with a pair on 13th, two females on 15th and the male seen again on 16th. Numbers increased to five on 18th then seven the next day (the highest count since 2010), with five remaining on 20th. Another arrived on 25th and was joined by a second bird on 26th–27th, with further spring arrivals including a male on 6th–9th April, a male from 10th–13th May that was joined by female on the last date, and a late female on 2nd June (the first record for this month since 2008), that brought the total of spring birds to an impressive 15. However, there were no autumn records for the first time since 2012, a year in which none were recorded at all on Fair Isle.

## Wheatear

*Oenanthe oenanthe*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant; breeds in small numbers*

The first on 7th April was 13 days later than 2014's arrival date, although birds had obviously been bottlenecked somewhere as counts increased rapidly to 23 on 11th, 101 on 17th and 181 on 18th. Numbers fluctuated after that, with a peak for the month of 197 on 28th. May saw daily counts generally in the region of 200–250, with the peak of 265 occurring on 2nd. The first 'Greenland Wheatears' *O.o.leucorhoa* were noted on 26th April, and they were recorded throughout May,

although most individuals are not identified to subspecific level. Around 100 were present in early June, probably involving mostly breeding birds and, although there was no census of the breeding population, the first chicks of an apparently successful season fledged on 22nd June. In August counts fluctuated somewhat, but were generally in the region of 150–230, with a peak of 260 on 17th. After 105 on 1st September, numbers fell away rapidly, to less than 50 for the remainder of the month. A small arrival in early October saw a monthly peak of 28 on 4th, with decreasing counts throughout the month to 30th, then a slightly late bird in Wirvie on 2nd November.

## Duncock

*Prunella modularis*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant; has bred twice (1973 and 1993)*

Spring migration was quiet, with records from 3rd April, then on ten more dates in April, 17 dates in May and daily until 7th June, although the peak was just three. From 3rd October there were almost daily records throughout the month, with a peak of 12 on 16th and then there were singles on three dates early the next month, with late individuals on 15th and 19th November.

## House Sparrow

*Passer domesticus*

### *Resident, breeds in small numbers*

Counts in April suggested the breeding population remained in the region of 30–40 pairs. The first fledged chicks weren't noted until 21st June (at Haa and Obs), three weeks later than 2014. The breeding season appeared to be moderately successful at best, with no counts higher than 84 in the autumn.

## Tree Sparrow

*Passer montanus*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant; formerly rare and irregular breeder (last recorded 1972)*

There were three at the Obs on 20th April, increasing to five on 23rd–25th, a decent enough spring showing but just a warm-up act for the best spring passage since 1974. Nine arrived on 10th May, with numbers increasing to 24 by 15th and peaking at 28 on 24th May. Although there were still at least 20 on 31st May, just a couple were seen in June until 5th and, sadly, there were no breeding attempts.

## Yellow Wagtail

*Motacilla flava*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant; has attempted to breed once (M.f.flavissima in 1981)*

#### **'Yellow Wagtail'** *M.f.flavissima*

A decent spring passage saw singles on 3rd–4th and 10th May, 6th–7th and 30th June.

#### **'Blue-headed Wagtail'** *M.f.flava*

Three arrived on 3rd May (giving a total of four *flava* wagtails present that day, the spring peak), with one still the following day and further individuals on 8th, 15th–19th and 25th May.

### 'Grey-headed Wagtail' *M.f.thunbergi*

There was a male on 9th–11th May and a female on 21st–25th May, with another on 5th June. In the autumn there were two from 18th–23rd August with one still on 25th August, with another on 17th–22nd September that had possibly been present since 12th.

### Unidentified *flava* wagtail

There were five in May, with these records all probably referring to birds mentioned above that were only seen distantly or in flight on some dates. A more unusual record was a *flava* wagtail at Easter Lother Water on 2nd July. In autumn there were up to two during 19th–25th August (contributing to an autumn peak of four *flava* wagtails on 21st). An interesting individual on 12th–19th September was thought to probably be an 'Eastern Yellow Wagtail' *M.f.simillima/plexa/tschutschensis/taivana/macronyx*, but unfortunately remained too elusive to confirm subspecific identification.

## \*Citrine Wagtail

*Motacilla citreola*

*Rare migrant; 73 previous records, 70 in autumn (August–October) and three in spring*

Since Fair Isle recorded the first British records of this species in 1954, there has been an outstanding increase. Although recently there have just been occasional blank years, 2014 was one of these, so the two records this year were the first since 2013. An individual flying south over Ditfield on 1st September was relocated in the south of the island and lingered until 8th September, whilst a very differently-plumaged bird showed well on the cliff top at Guidicum on 12th September.



Plate 85. Citrine Wagtail, Guidicum, 12th September 2015.  
© Lee Gregory

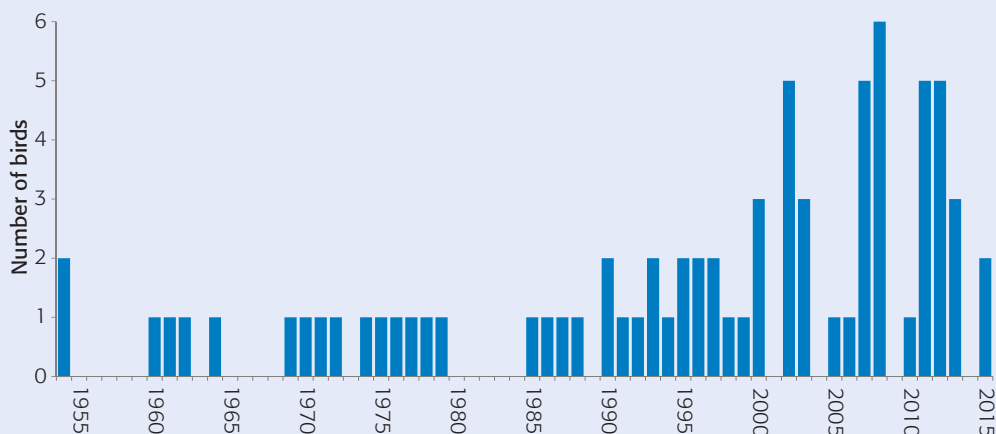


Figure 10. Annual occurrences of Citrine Wagtail on Fair Isle.



## Grey Wagtail

*Motacilla cinerea*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant; has bred twice (1950 and 1989)*

Regular sightings from 17th–27th March possibly involved just two or three birds, with further records on 6th–8th and 18th–23rd April, 14th and 18th May and late records on 1st, 9th–10th and 14th June. Two on 26th August were the earliest autumn records since 2005 and there were birds on 18 dates in September, with numbers rising towards the end of the month and peaking at six on 27th. There were regular records of one to five throughout October, with sightings on five dates in November until 9th.

## Pied Wagtail

*Motacilla alba*

### **‘Pied Wagtail’** *M.a.yarrelli*

#### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant, breeds in small numbers*

A male arrived on 9th–12th March, a typical arrival date, and there were up to ten by the end of the month. In April the peak count was just 20 (on a day when there were also five unidentified *alba* wagtails). Light passage in early May saw a maximum of 24 on 3rd (which was also the day with the peak total *alba* count of the month, with 42 present) and by June it was just the breeding birds present. Five pairs nested (at North Light, Furze, North Haven, Landberg and Hesswalls), with a sixth pair probably present on Lerness in another good breeding season. The first fledged chicks were seen on 25th June in what appeared to be a productive season. Numbers started building up in mid-August, although there was a maximum of just 25 of this subspecies on 28th, with no more than 26 in September and just single figures from 8th October until the last of the year on 25th October.

### **‘White Wagtail’** *M.a.alba*

#### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant, formerly bred occasionally, but last pure alba pair bred in 1986, although occasional mixed pairings have been recorded since*

The first was a male at Easter Lothar Water on 9th April, with numbers increasing during the month to a peak of nine on 30th. There were regular sightings throughout May, peaking at 20 on 9th and small numbers were present until 6th June. A male singing at North Light on 24th June recalled the bird that held territory there in 2014 and could have been a returning individual. The first autumn migrants were detected from 11th August and numbers increased at the end of the month to 101 on 31st (when there were also 21 unidentified *alba* and 16 Pied Wagtails). Numbers dropped away in early September, with 43 until 11th, 25 to 19th and just single-figure counts from 26th September until the last on 13th October.

## Richard’s Pipit

*Anthus richardi*

### *Scarce autumn migrant, vagrant in spring (five spring records, all in May)*

Five arrived on 5th October and birds were present until 1st November, with most records thought to be lingering individuals, although there were six on 14th October, the largest count since 2001. Up to four remained until 20th October, with three until 24th and two until 29th October, with the last bird involving one that made its way into a workshop at Shirva on 30th, which remained at the Obs the following day before moving back down to Leogh.



Plate 86. Tawny Pipit, Meadow Burn, 17th May 2015. © Lee Gregory

### **\*Tawny Pipit**

*Anthus campestris*

*Vagrant; 17 previous records, 13 in spring (mostly May) and four in autumn (September–October)*

One was on the road by Schoolton on 4th May and lingered in that area until 6th May, with presumably the same bird reappearing at Quoy from 16th–19th May. The species has declined at a national level (and was readmitted to the BBRC list in 2015), which has been reflected in Fair Isle records, with six in the 1970s, three in the 1980s, two in the 1990s and none since the last record in 2005.

### **\*Olive-backed Pipit**

*Anthus hodgsoni*

*Scarce migrant; 97 previous records, 95 in autumn and two in spring*

The years 2011–2014 produced an average of six birds per year, so the seven this year was another good season and in keeping with the current trend that saw this bird dropped from the BBRC list at the start of 2013. The first was a roaming bird on 28th September, with another present at Boini Mire on 5th–8th October. There were then lingering birds at North Shirva on 12th–15th October (the 100th Olive-backed Pipit to be recorded on Fair Isle!), Taft and Schoolton from 13th–17th October and a newly-arrived bird near the top of Malcolm's Head on 17th October. A bird briefly at the Obs on 19th October relocated to the Wirvie Burn where it remained until 30th October. The last of the year was trapped in the Vaadal on 3rd November and lingered around the Obs and Havens until 8th November.

### **Tree Pipit**

*Anthus trivialis*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant*

There were regular spring records between 25th April and 6th June, with peaks during this time of 23 on 6th May, 20 on 10th May and 19 on 16th May. After 28th May there were only singles recorded apart from a small arrival of three on 3rd June. The first autumn record was two on 15th August, then up to four were recorded almost daily from 21st August to the end of month. There were records on 18 dates in September, all of one or two apart from four on 12th. October continued the regular presence but unremarkable numbers, with up to three regularly until 21st. One at Steensi Geo on 3rd November was the latest in FIBO history, although Eagle Clark obtained a later bird on 9th November 1908.

## Meadow Pipit

*Anthus pratensis*

### *Common spring and autumn migrant; breeds in small numbers*

Three on 25th February were the first of the year, with birds trickling back in March and 43 present by the end of the month. Numbers rose rapidly in early April to 274 on 6th and 520 by 13th, with around 200–300 for the rest of the month. After a peak of 339 on 8th May, numbers started to decline, with around 150 regularly recorded to the end of the month. Food carrying was noted from 26th May, with fledged young recorded from 15th June, although there was no census of breeding numbers. Counts in August opened at 200–224, but generally decreased until a strong movement at the end of the month saw 625 on 30th and 729 the following day, with numbers increasing to an annual peak of 810 by 4th September. Numbers remained high until the middle of the month when there was a slight decrease, although another peak of 581 on 23rd September showed further movement. A count of 468 on 3rd October was more than double any other count during the month, with nothing higher than 100 after 17th. Relatively high numbers remained in early November, with 70 on 4th, although numbers then dropped away rapidly, with at least a couple remaining until the end of the year.

## Rock Pipit

*Anthus petrosus*

### *Resident, breeds in small numbers, also frequent spring and autumn migrant*

Present throughout the early part of the year, although no counts were made until census started in April, when around 90 were generally recorded, although a Black Guillemot survey on 17th produced a total of 172, as the coast was followed more closely than in a normal census. Census counts suggested passage in early May, when numbers increased to 125 on 6th and there were still around 90 being recorded in early June. At least 40 territories were recorded (the actual number will have been higher, possibly considerably so), with food-carrying noted from 24th May. August counts were consistently around 180 early in the month, as family parties were present on the cliff tops, with larger numbers at the end of the month probably indicating passage. During this time, the annual peak of 287 was recorded on 28th August, showing remarkable consistency with 2014, when the peak of 290 was recorded on 27th August. There were never more than 200 recorded in September, with most counts between 70 and 150. Numbers in the first half of October were generally around 100, decreasing in the second half of the month to around 50, with similar numbers probably present until the end of the year.

### **'Scandinavian' Rock Pipit** *A.p.littoralis*

*Scarce spring passage migrant, occasionally recorded holding territory in the summer. Records at other times of year likely to be overlooked due to identification difficulties*

A good showing saw birds recorded on five dates in April from 11th, one on 1st May, two on the 2nd and intriguing records of a singing bird at Hoini on 18th and a bird paired to a nominate Rock Pipit on Bunes on 19th May. There were records on 4th and 16th June, with two on the latter date including a bird carrying food on Hoini, suggesting that the individual recorded singing there in May had successfully bred.



Plate 87. 'Scandinavian Rock Pipit', Hoini, 18th May 2015. © Lee Gregory

## Brambling

*Fringilla montifringilla*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

A male at Haa on 22nd–26th January, was the first January record since 2003. Spring migrants were noted from 11th April and then were regular until 8th May with nine on 21st April and ten on 6th May the peak counts. A late male was present from 10th–22nd May and was singing from 18th, with a female also present on the latter date. A male at Schoolton on 20th June was late, although it was the third June record in the last four years. Up to two were present from 28th–30th September, then 23 arrived on 5th October and began a series of daily census records until 12th November. There were several waves of arrivals during this time, including peaks of 79 on 13th October, 85 on 28th October and 95 on 5th November. The last of the year was a male on 17th November.

## Chaffinch

*Fringilla coelebs*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

There were four from 17th–20th February, with three lingering to 6th March. Remarkably, two males amongst this group were ringed and, although they evaded capture, the rings were read as they fed in the Obs garden enabling them to be identified as birds that had been ringed on Fair Isle in October 2014 and had presumably been wintering somewhere on the Northern Isles. There were small numbers present throughout the rest of March and April, with peaks of five on 29th March and 1st April. In May there were up to three from 3rd–8th and a female on 19th–23rd, with a late female from 4th–8th June. Autumn migrants were present virtually daily from 28th September to 10th November, although other than 12th–17th October, when numbers peaked at 20 on 15th, there were only single figures. Winter records are not unusual (although they usually involve lingering birds rather than new arrivals) and a male appeared on 8th–18th December.

## Hawfinch

*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant; 105 records of 120 individuals*

Spring passage began on the typical date of 28th April, with a female that went on to linger at the Obs until 2nd May. Another female arrived at South Raeva on 10th May and was seen at Stackhoull then Haa until 17th May, during which time a male was also at the Plantation on 11th. The fourth of the spring was at Gunnawark on 5th June. The two autumn records involved an early male at Barkland on 1st–6th September and a late female at Kirm o'Skroo on 5th November that was at Burkle the following day.

## Common Rosefinch

*Erythrina erythrina*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

A first-summer male on 1st–2nd June was the latest arrival date since 2000, with a quiet spring seeing only two more birds, on 11th and 18th June. One at the Obs from 20th July until 1st August was not that unusual; there have been July records in ten years since 2000. It was a quiet autumn, with singles on 31st August to 3rd September, 9th September then daily records from 18th–25th September, peaking at three on 21st. The seventh of the autumn lingered from 4th–12th October.





Plate 88. Common Rosefinch, Schoolton, 8th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## Greenfinch

*Chloris chloris*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

There were just two in the spring, with individuals on 25th March and 16th April. A very poor year saw the quietest autumn since 2006, with just one record, on 18th–19th October.

## Linnet

*Linaria cannabina*

### *Regular spring migrant, less common in autumn*

From 7th April there were regular sightings to 31st May, generally of up to three, with a peak of five on 6th May, although ringing during this time showed that there was obviously a reasonable turnover. The last of the spring was one on 8th June, with mid-summer records of up to two from 15th–25th July. From 1st August there were up to three on 21 further dates to 7th September. Ten then arrived on 20th–21st September, the largest number recorded since 11 in April 2002 and the highest count in autumn since the remarkable record of 100 on 10th October 1995. There were then regular records of up to six until 18th October.

## Twite

*Linaria flavirostris*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant, small numbers breed and overwinter*

**Table 3.** Maximum monthly counts of Twite on Fair Isle 2015

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
25	32	30	72	67	36	n/c	323	364	369	95	15

Wintering numbers were fairly typical, with spring seeing slightly higher counts than usual. Numbers nesting were probably in the region of 10–15 pairs, although there was no census of the breeding population. The first fledged young were noted on the relatively late date of 27th June. Autumn numbers were good, with the peak count occurring slightly later than usual, on 4th October. As usual, there was a good number of birds retrapped from earlier years conforming to the usual pattern of birds wintering in Orkney and returning to Fair Isle in spring, some of which presumably go on to breed further north.

## Lesser Redpoll

*Acanthis cabaret*

### *Scarce migrant in spring, summer and autumn*

A good year for this species saw two on 18th May, then singles on 10th, 12th, 22nd and 27th June. The bird on the 22nd had been ringed in Lancashire on 7th April 2013 and was caught at Grantown-on-Spey, Highland on 25th April 2014. Whether it was a Scottish bird that was wandering having failed in a breeding attempt, or whether it was moving back south from Scandinavia we can't tell, but it is an intriguing set of records. A summer influx of redpolls brought records of Lessers on 3rd, a probable on 14th, 17th–18th (two), 25th and 26th July and 10th–15th August, although even in the hand, the identification of some birds was difficult. A series of autumn records involved one on 6th September, regular records of up to four from 25th September to 15th October (and four unidentified redpolls earlier in the month may have been the same group). One of these had been ringed as a juvenile on the island on 15th July - where had it been in the intervening two and a half months? There were then later birds on 28th and 30th October and 4th November.

## Common Redpoll

*Acanthis flammea*

### **'Mealy Redpoll'** *A.f.flammea*

#### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

A bird present throughout January and until 19th February may have been a leftover from December 2014. There were then no more until spring passage began with up to three during 17th–20th April, with a strong spring showing continuing with records on 23 dates in May, peaking at six on 18th and one or two on seven dates in June, including an interesting pale bird on 18th–22nd, which was trapped and confirmed to be a 'Mealy', despite views in the field suggesting another (sub)species may have been involved. Unidentified redpolls on four other June dates were probably also 'Mealies'. Two on 13th July began a series of regular sightings during the month, with a peak count of 11 on 18th. This mid-summer arrival involved mostly birds still in juvenile plumage and a high turnover was also noted (with 28 ringed during the month for example). Lesser Redpolls were also involved in the movement and



Plate 89. 'Mealy Redpoll', Stackhoull, 18th June 2015. © Lee Gregory

many of the 'Mealy Redpolls' were at the small (and dark) end of the range for that species. There were still one or two until 7th August, with at least four unidentified redpolls also around at that time, and one on 18th–22nd August. Passage in the more expected late autumn period was rather quiet, up to two on seven dates in October (although flyover redpolls were also seen on seven additional dates) and up to three in early November, with one to 15th November. Two arrived on 14th December and remained to the end of the year, making March the only month in which this always-interesting species wasn't recorded.

**'North-western Redpoll'** *A.f.rostrata/islandica*

*Scarce migrant, mostly in autumn*

A bird on 26th April was thought possibly to be 'Icelandic Redpoll' *C.f. islandica*, with another, rather pale, north-western bird on 13th May. An undoubted 'Greenland Redpoll' *C.f.rostrata* was present at the Obs on 17th–25th May; this beast of a bird had a wing length of 82.5mm and increased its weight from 18.5 grams on 18th to 24.6 grams on 24th, making it twice as heavy as many of the other Common Redpolls caught during the year! Despite seemingly favourable winds at times in the autumn, the only other record of a 'North-western Redpoll' was one on 30th September.

**Common Crossbill**

*Loxia curvirostra*

*Irregular irruptive summer and autumn migrant*

There were May records on 8th, 10th (two) and 15th–16th then daily records from 1st–6th June, peaked at four on 2nd with two on 11th June. There were daily records of five to seven from 21st–24th June, then nine on 29th June preceded almost daily records until 26th July, with peaks during this time of 11 on 9th July and 14 on 14th July. There were one to four on eight dates in August and later migrants on 14th September and 5th November.

**Goldfinch**

*Carduelis carduelis*

*Regular spring and autumn migrant*

Spring saw sightings on 27th March, 17th and 25th April, 15th and 18th–19th May. In autumn there were three on 4th October then eight on 8th October (the largest flock since the record count of 27 on 9th October 2002) with one still present the next day. There were another two on 16th October with one the next day and another on 4th November. At least one was roosting at the Obs on 22nd November, with three noted from 25th that lingered until the end of the year; the first overwintering record for Fair Isle as this delightful *Carduelis* continues to rewrite its place in the record books.

**Siskin**

*Spinus spinus*

*Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

There were sightings of up to three on ten dates in April from 6th, with regular sightings in May peaking at seven on 4th. There were also records in June that peaked at six on 22nd, with some relatively strong passage in early July peaking at 20 on 7th, with scattered records continuing until 1st August. There were then further occasional records of up to three from 29th August throughout September and daily census records from 1st–18th October, with a maximum of six on 5th, then up to two from 3rd–7th November bringing a largely unremarkable autumn passage to an end.

## Snow Bunting

*Plectrophenax nivalis*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant, often overwinters*

The highest count in the first two months of the year was 40, whilst single-figure flocks from late March and throughout April probably involved north-bound migrants. Up to three were seen until 14th May, which were the last of the spring. Autumn passage began with small numbers from 7th September, although counts built up to 43 on 17th and 101 the following day before peaking for the month at 111 on 20th September. Birds were recorded virtually daily in October, with generally less than 30, although the highest count was 110 on 13th October. Early November saw numbers peak for the year, with an impressive count of 265 on 5th. After 131 on 12th November counts were 55 or less, with records of at least 40 until the end of the year, suggesting overwintering.

## Lapland Bunting

*Calcarius lapponicus*

### *Frequent autumn migrant, less common in spring*

A stunning male in the Havens and at the Obs feeders on 26th–27th April was followed by a female near South Naaversgill on 30th April in what was a very quiet spring for this species. The first autumn arrival was on 10th September and there were then regular records until 21st October, although the peak was just six on 27th September. The only later record was a male at Barkland on 8th November.



Plate 90. Lapland Bunting, Obs, 26th April 2015. © Lee Gregory



## **\*Ortolan Bunting**

*Emberiza hortulana*

### *Scarce spring and autumn migrant*

A first-winter bird at Ditfield on 16th October lingered until 7th November, becoming the latest ever Ortolan to be recorded on Fair Isle and the first since 2013. After being weighed at 18.0 grams when it was trapped on 21st October its weight increased to a maximum of 21.5 grams on 26th as it took advantage of the feeder in the Plantation.

## **Yellowhammer**

*Emberiza citrinella*

### *Regular spring and autumn migrant*

A first-winter female was trapped in the Gully on 3rd November, having been seen briefly at the Obs first, and went on to linger until 10th November. A very quiet year, with the first blank spring since 2011 and the quietest autumn since 1986 when there were none.

## **Reed Bunting**

*Emberiza schoeniclus*

### *Frequent spring and autumn migrant*

One on 19th March was the first of four records that month, with just three singles in April. There were daily records from 1st–25th May, with numbers rising to 12 on 6th and 17 on 9th but just single figures after 10th May and late birds on 2nd and 6th–7th June. Autumn passage didn't begin until 5th October, with numbers rising to 11 by 8th and 20 by 12th, then counts dropping away after that, although another small arrival from 3rd–6th November produced a peak of 4 on 5th before a late bird was seen on 15th November.

## **Little Bunting**

*Emberiza pusilla*

### *Scarce autumn migrant, rare in spring (29 previous spring records)*

One was trapped on 27th September and lingered until 5th October, with an unringed bird seen on 29th September. The next arrived on 11th October, with three present the next day (including two together at Shirva), dropping to two on 13th, before two new birds arrived on 14th (bringing the total present to four), with three still present the next day and one still on 16th October. The eighth of the year was a confiding bird at Hjukni Geo on 18th–20th October, with presumably the same bird at North Raeva on 25th–26th October.

## **\*Rustic Bunting**

*Emberiza rustica*

### *Rare spring and autumn migrant; 130 previous records (66 in spring, mostly in May and June with three in April and 64 in autumn, mostly September and October with one in November)*

Although there was only one blank year for this species between 1984 and 2011, there have been two since (2012 and 2014) as the nationwide decline in records has been reflected on Fair Isle, where the species has become much scarcer and is now very rare in the autumn in particular. The species celebrated its 'promotion' back onto the BBRC list in 2015 with a female present at Utra on 19th May, a typical arrival date.

## RINGING SUMMARY

Ciaran Hatsell and David Parnaby

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Birds ringed	2	2	63	221	254	524	1422	717	314	1004	447	10
Species ringed	2	1	9	27	47	42	38	45	47	48	28	7

A total of 4,980 birds of 114 species was ringed during 2015 which, although it was over 2,000 birds less than in 2014, was still the third highest total in the last 15 years. Unfortunately, seabirds did not contribute to a great deal to the overall ringing total this year, with only around 500 ringed. This was more an issue with the weather at the key times preventing access to the colonies, rather than a total failure of the breeding season, although numbers of breeding seabirds are still greatly reduced from the heydays of the early 1990s.

The Helgoland traps accounted for the majority of the passerines ringed during the year, with around 2,100 new birds trapped in them during 2015. Standardised trap rounds were carried out, with the traps run six times per day (weather permitting) in the peak migration periods (mid-April until mid-June and again from mid-August until the end of October) and just the morning trap round daily from mid-June until mid-August, with over 500 people accompanying the wardening team on the morning traps during the season.

The Obs (mostly through the garden mist nets, but also through use of spiral traps and the crow trap near the generator shed) produced approximately 675 new birds, with the Barkland subsite (including the Barkland Helgoland and Chalet mist net) adding around 180 and Burkle approximately another 100.

Storm Petrels once again made a hefty contribution towards the overall ringing totals, with 1,076 individuals newly ringed in 2015. Windy weather in the summer saw a greatly reduced number of petrel-ringing sessions, which resulted in less than

half the 2014 total of birds ringed, although there were still good numbers around, with the single session in August producing 221 new birds.

The poor weather in August did at least allow for more dazzling sessions this year, where birds are caught at night using a combination of a torch and handnet. This resulted in decent numbers of waders being trapped, and a few species that are rarely ringed on Fair Isle. In all, around 110 birds were dazzled during the course of the year, including over 20 large gulls and 34 birds (mostly thrushes) around North Light during an 'attraction' in early November. The ringing of several Herring Gulls in this manner, along with decent numbers ringed on Goorn, contributed to the best ringing year for this species since 1998.

Other ringing that contributed to the total were around 200 non-seabird pulli (mostly Starlings, but also 15 wader chicks) and various miscellaneous ringing activities. The latter included targeting individual birds either to confirm identification (individuals of Lanceolated, Grasshopper and Blyth's Reed Warblers) or in the case of a Reed Warbler at Quoy, to confirm the details of a 'foreign-looking' ring (it turned out to be the first Norwegian-ringed Reed Warbler to be caught on Fair Isle). There were three birds caught by islanders in or around their buildings and brought to the Obs: Richard's Pipit, Little Auk and Yellow-browed Warbler!

There were five record or joint-record annual ringing totals reached in 2015: the Mallard total was bettered yet again, with five ringed (the previous record of four was set in 2014), five Common Sandpipers was equal to the record set

in 1965, Yellow-browed Warbler eclipsed the previous record of 16 set in 2013 with 82 ringed, the Chiffchaff total was once again smashed after the record of 101 was set in 2014, with 128 ringed. A new Tree Sparrow record was set at 19 ringed, the previous record being 15, which was achieved in 1966 and 1970.

Some other notable totals included 24 Reed Warblers (second highest-ever ringing total), 21 Sparrowhawks (joint second best year for this species after a record of 26 in 1994), 16 Lesser Redpolls (second highest total), 13 Linnets (the joint second highest total), 76 Goldcrests (the fifth best year), 84 House Sparrows (the highest total since 1969) and 20 Fieldfares (the highest total since 1977, with the majority ringed during dazzling at North Light). The Sparrowhawk total is testament to the autumn influx, with a record count of ten individuals logged in early September. A snapshot of the influx was when five were ringed in just a couple of hours in the Helgoland traps on 12th September, with several others avoiding capture and a peak of eight roosting together in the Plantation. Fair Isle became a mini raptor watchpoint around this time, with the Sparrowhawks joined by 13 Kestrels, a Merlin, three Hen Harriers and a Pallid Harrier on 13th September!

One of the most remarkable stories of the year was the incredible leap in Yellow-browed Warbler numbers ringed. With an estimated minimum of 207 individuals recorded on the island this year, the figure of 82 ringed shows that this number is probably a huge under-estimate, with the scale of the invasion very difficult to gauge. With the previous ringing record standing at sixteen, this year's ringing total is actually greater than the number of individuals previously recorded during any season at FIBO! Hopefully, the large numbers ringed will yield some recoveries and help elucidate the movements of these Siberian waifs.

There were many other highlights throughout the ringing year involving species that are rarities or scarcities, or which are rarely caught on Fair Isle. These included the 2nd Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, 5th Barnacle Goose, 11th Rook and Olive-backed Pipit, 14th Richard's Pipit, 16th Greenshank, 19th Short-eared Owl, 21st Ortolan Bunting, 24th and 25th Blyth's Reed Warblers, 29th and 30th Goldfinches, 33rd–35th Hawfinches, 41st Subalpine Warbler, 43rd Lanceolated Warbler, 44th Little Bunting and 53rd Whooper Swan to be ringed on Fair Isle.

Two colour-ringing projects continued on Fair Isle in 2015: the long-term Starling research project started in 1980 and the Shag colour-ringing project that is run by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology which looks at the dispersal, survival, distribution and movement patterns of juvenile and adult Shags. There were 37 Shags (32 pulli and five full grown) colour-ringed as part of the project.

Over 378,000 birds have been ringed at FIBO since 1948 and there have been some remarkable movements logged, with ringed birds recovered as far away as Brazil, Canada, Russia and South Africa amongst others. In recent years, an increase in colour-ringing projects has enabled us to find out details of movements of individual birds without having to catch them, improving our knowledge of which birds are passing through Fair Isle. It was a remarkable year for the recording of colour-ringed birds, with some species recorded with colour marks for the first time and these are detailed in the recoveries section.

Storm Petrel retains its usual 'top-spot' (it has been the most ringed species every year since 2009), whilst the good late autumn passage of thrushes is reflected by Blackbird and Redwing both appearing in the top four (Redwing recorded its third best year). The lack of seabirds other than Great Skuas was largely weather-related, although

**Table 1.** Ten most commonly ringed species on Fair Isle in 2015, with species totals (2014 totals in brackets for comparison). The 'top ten' for 2014 is also included for comparison

Species	2015
Storm Petrel	1,076 (2,453)
Blackbird	517 (274)
Starling	465 (546)
Redwing	365 (406)
Great Skua	188 (238)
Blackcap	164 (183)
Meadow Pipit	140 (138)
Chiffchaff	128 (100)
Robin	126 (272)
Brambling	124 (284)

Species	2014
Storm Petrel	2,453
Starling	546
Guillemot	419
Redwing	406
Brambling	284
Blackbird	274
Robin	272
Great Skua	238
Fulmar	229
Blackcap	183

the usual ringing sites for Fulmars produced far fewer chicks than in 2014. The generally poor weather for bringing in migrants during the key periods is reflected by much lower totals for some of the commoner species (e.g. Brambling, Blackcap, Robin), although another record-breaking year for Chiffchaffs saw them make it into the top ten. How long will it be before Yellow-browed Warbler appears in this chart, given the remarkable increase noted in the last few years?

FIBO is extremely grateful to residents of Fair Isle for their co-operation and help throughout the season; in particular Shaun Milner and Rachel Challoner of Barkland, as it was with their permission that the Helgoland trap in their garden was used. Also, many people were able to see their first Lanceolated Warbler thanks to Ian Best of Kenaby, whose permission to set up a net in his garden allowed the identification of this bird to be clinched.

We are also grateful to all the visiting ringers who joined in our ringing activities and we look forward to welcoming more of you in the future.

**Plate 91.** Spotted Flycatcher with German ring, 25th August 2015. © David Parnaby





# RINGING SUMMARY

Species	Total 1948–2014	Average/year							Ringed 2015			Highest/Lowest	Since	Year ranking (out of 68)
		1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010–2014	adult	pullus	Total			
Whooper Swan	52	0.3	0.6	1.5	0.6	0.9	1.1	0.4	1	0	1	=	2014	Joint 10th
Barnacle Goose	4	0	0.1	0	0.2	0	0.1	0.0	1	0	1	Highest	2004	Joint 2nd
Teal	88	0.3	2	1	0.5	3.2	1.4	0.8	1	0	1	Highest	2013	Joint 18th
Mallard	21	0	0.6	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.2	0.8	2	3	5	Highest	ever	1st
Fulmar	18062	50.7	346.3	363.5	641.3	244.2	99	1170	6	78	84	Lowest	2013	49th
Storm Petrel	36625	3.7	160.5	575.4	446.6	1640	301.5	1069.2	1076	0	1076	Lowest	2012	11th
Leach's Petrel	131	0	0.3	1.2	0.5	5.2	2.7	6.4	1	0	1	Lowest	2010	Joint 25th
Gannet	646	0.2	1.3	1.2	11.5	20.4	17.4	25.0	1	0	1	=	2014	Joint 33rd
Shag	23858	87.5	579	383.5	674.5	375.9	267.2	32.6	5	32	37	Lowest	2013	52nd
Sparrowhawk	448	3.3	2.9	6	8.7	12.5	6.6	9.2	21	0	21	Highest	1998	Joint 2nd
Water Rail	345	6.6	5.4	7.4	4.6	4.4	4	2.2	2	0	2	Lowest	2013	Joint 52nd
Moorhen	108	1.5	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.3	0.7	0.8	1	0	1	=	2014	Joint 30th
Oystercatcher	1602	24.7	27.6	33.1	32	25.8	8.9	9.0	2	6	8	Highest	2012	Joint 59th
Ringed Plover	829	7.5	14.3	11.7	15.4	16.9	11.9	10.4	11	9	20	Highest	2008	11th
Curlew	221	0.3	1.6	1.9	5.6	5.4	5.7	3.2	2	0	2	Highest	2012	Joint 31st
Turnstone	118	0.8	3.5	1.8	0.2	1.2	2.4	3.8	1	0	1	=	2014	Joint 19th
Knot	109	1.1	2.5	2.8	1.2	2	1.1	0.0	6	0	6	Highest	1998	Joint 2nd
Ruff	41	0.3	1.3	1.5	0.1	0.9	0	0.0	1	0	1	Highest	1998	Joint 6th
Sanderling	130	2.7	3.6	1.4	1	0.4	2.9	1.8	1	0	1	=	2014	Joint 28th
Dunlin	645	5	16.7	17.3	4.3	10.2	7.1	7.6	26	0	26	Highest	2005	Joint 6th
Little Stint	123	0.2	1.2	4.9	0.6	5.2	0.2	0.0	1	0	1	Highest	2004	Joint 14th
Common Sandpiper	71	0.7	1.7	1.2	1.9	1.2	0.1	0.4	5	0	5	Highest	1965	Joint 1st
Greenshank	15	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.2	1	0	1	Highest	2010	Joint 2nd
Redshank	19	0	0.9	0.6	0.1	0.2	0.1	1.2	3	0	3	Highest	2010	Joint 23rd
Woodcock	611	4.7	6.9	9.2	9.6	8.4	11.1	21.6	31	0	31	Lowest	2013	2nd
Snipe	594	2.8	8.1	14.3	7.8	10.9	10.7	9.6	15	2	17	Highest	2009	Joint 6th
Arctic Skua	4073	71.7	38.2	131.8	61	67.7	27.3	16.0	0	19	19	Highest	2010	51st
Great Skua	4475	16.9	13	19	51.5	110.8	134	203.0	2	186	188	Lowest	2013	8th
Puffin	14311	128.2	277.3	318.8	294.8	216.9	131.7	119.0	40	52	92	Lowest	2013	52nd

# RINGING SUMMARY

Species	Total 1948–2013	Average/year										Ringed 2014		Highest/Lowest	Since	Year ranking
		1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010–2013	adult	pullus	Total					
Black Guillemot	1688	11.3	45.6	52.1	25.2	26	6.7	3.8	3	0	3			Lowest	2013	Joint 60th
Razorbill	11943	6.5	60.9	173.5	231.6	412.5	281.8	55.0	22	10	32			Lowest	2013	53rd
Little Auk	14	0.3	0.2	0	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.0	1	0	1			Highest	2006	Joint 3rd
Guillemot	38278	7.9	82.6	468	1268	1314.8	588.8	195.4	18	3	21			Lowest	2013	52nd
Arctic Tern	11915	0.1	0.4	0	16.4	954.8	216.5	6.6	0	4	4			Lowest	2013	26th
Kitiwake	7196	8.8	85.9	158	266.7	162.5	33.8	7.4	1	0	1			Lowest	2013	Joint 58th
Black-headed Gull	51	0.6	0.6	0.7	1.4	1.2	0.6	0.0	1	0	1			Highest	2009	Joint 14th
Common Gull	324	0.5	1.3	4.6	8.8	3.9	10.6	5.4	0	3	3			Highest	2012	Joint 27th
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1474	10	25.7	49.7	40.4	13.8	5.7	2.2	0	6	6			Highest	2009	Joint 49th
Herring Gull	4661	12.1	64.9	163.6	140.8	34.8	34.6	27.4	13	40	53			Highest	1998	29th
Great Black-backed Gull	2886	8.8	39.1	92.2	51	92	2.2	6.4	11	0	11			Lowest	2013	Joint 36th
Rock Dove	221	0	0.2	0.9	1.1	4.8	7.9	14.4	25	2	27			Highest	2007	3rd
Woodpigeon	79	0.6	1.6	0.5	1.6	2.6	0.5	1.0	1	0	1			Lowest	2013	Joint 25th
Collared Dove	425	0	1.1	10.5	7.2	10.6	10.8	4.6	2	0	2			Lowest	2001	Joint 43rd
Turtle Dove	82	0.9	0.6	3.5	2.1	0.8	0.3	0.0	1	0	1			Highest	2007	Joint 21st
Long-eared Owl	283	1.4	3	7.6	5.8	5.7	2.7	4.0	5	0	5			Highest	2011	Joint 20th
Short-eared Owl	18	0.1	0	0.8	0.8	0	0.1	0.0	1	0	1			Highest	2002	Joint 4th
Wynneck	267	2.3	4.4	7.1	4.8	2.2	4.2	3.4	2	0	2			Lowest	2013	Joint 41st
Kestrel	55	0.9	1.4	0.6	1.4	0.3	0.6	0.6	2	0	2			Highest	2005	Joint 6th
Merlin	200	7	4.2	2.7	2.4	1.4	1.8	0.6	1	0	1			=	2014	Joint 36th
Red-backed Shrike	379	2	4.4	11.5	7.8	4.2	5.4	4.6	2	0	2			Lowest	2011	Joint 41st
Great Grey Shrike	124	0.5	3.3	5.5	1.2	0.6	0.4	1.6	1	0	1			Lowest	2013	Joint 26th
Rook	10	0.2	0.2	0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	1	0	1			Highest	2010	Joint 2nd
Goldcrest	2021	17	28.7	47.9	28.7	33.9	31.4	22.6	76	0	76			Highest	1998	5th
Skylark	1442	16.6	22.4	27.4	7.4	48.4	15.2	11.0	2	4	6			Lowest	2013	Joint 47th
Swallow	328	3.6	9.9	9.9	2.1	1.7	2.1	6.6	6	1	7			Highest	2011	Joint 17th
Yellow-browed Warbler	215	1.1	2.3	3.3	1.9	2.8	5.2	9.8	82	0	82			Highest	ever	1st
Chiffchaff	1869	4.9	16.6	24.7	30.9	32.5	44.9	64.6	128	0	128			Highest	ever	1st
Willow Warbler	4413	44.2	80.9	94.6	66.6	56.3	65.8	64.6	93	0	93			=	2014	Joint 14th

# RINGING SUMMARY

Species	Total 1948–2013	Average/year					Ringed 2014		Highest/Lowest	Since	Year ranking
		1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010–2013			
									adult	pullus	Total
Blackcap	6726	15.2	59.8	158.7	149.4	105.1	115.5	137.6	164	0	164
Garden Warbler	3976	30.7	78.1	74.6	88.2	59.2	50.4	31.4	45	0	45
Barred Warbler	488	5.3	9.6	12.9	4.8	5.8	6.4	8.0	8	0	8
Lesser Whitethroat	938	7.4	11.9	19.7	12.1	13.4	20.3	16.8	13	0	13
Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler		1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	1	0
Subalpine Warbler	40	0.4	0.3	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.6	1.8	1	0	1
Whitethroat	1119	19.7	28.8	17.7	10	14.7	14.8	11.4	24	0	24
Lanceolated Warbler	42	0.1	0.2	0.9	1	0.7	0.9	0.8	1	0	1
Grasshopper Warbler	166	0.8	2.4	3.6	2.1	2.2	3.5	4.0	4	0	4
Icterine Warbler	145	1.5	2.6	1.5	1.7	3	2.9	2.6	6	0	6
Sedge Warbler	631	7	9.5	7.8	11.2	5.5	14.1	14.0	15	0	15
Blyth's Reed Warbler	23	0	0	0	0.1	0.6	0.6	2.0	2	0	2
Marsh Warbler	172	0.8	1.7	2.1	3.2	2.9	4.3	4.4	4	0	4
Reed Warbler	363	1	4.9	4.8	4.4	7.5	10.9	5.4	24	0	24
Wren	1084	20.8	15.7	15.6	8.1	15.6	19	20.2	14	0	14
Starling	31817	269.2	337.4	662	746.9	445.8	424.3	536.0	299	166	465
Ring Ouzel	558	1.4	16.8	12.7	13.1	4.6	3.6	7.2	3	0	3
Blackbird	25946	414.7	591.2	464	384	277.3	306.1	284.0	517	0	517
Fieldfare	689	7.9	33.6	12	5.7	2.7	3.7	5.6	20	0	20
Song Thrush	3395	19	76.6	72.1	52	53.1	40.1	50.2	63	0	63
Redwing	10559	139.1	184.1	231.3	143	144.4	121.8	170.6	365	0	365
Spotted Flycatcher	891	7	16.6	15.6	13.2	19.9	10.4	11.8	20	0	20
Robin	10317	64.3	196.1	196.9	199.7	143.8	132.2	191.8	127	0	127
Nightingale	31	0	0.6	0.6	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.2	1	0	1
Bluthroat	318	5.4	4.6	5.3	6.4	4.2	4.5	2.6	1	0	1
Pied Flycatcher	1042	16.2	23.1	24	14.3	12.6	9.1	7.8	8	0	8
Black Redstart	170	1.6	2.5	4.2	3.4	3	1.4	1.4	1	0	1
Redstart	1941	36.6	41.4	51.4	20.4	24.7	14	9.2	9	0	9
Whinchat	700	14.7	14.4	11.5	13.5	7	6.6	4.0	8	0	8

# RINGING SUMMARY

Species	Total 1948–2013	Average/year					Ringed 2014		Highest/Lowest	Since	Year ranking
		1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010–2013			
									adult	pullus	Total
Wheatear	19073	505	407.8	284	229.8	142.8	212.8	207.0	111	0	111
Duncock	2995	11.2	50.2	67.8	65.7	41.1	35.3	55.8	21	0	21
House Sparrow	2094	46.7	31.4	11.8	22.2	18.3	35.3	54.2	84	0	84
Tree Sparrow	126	0.1	3.1	5.6	1	0.4	1.8	1.2	19	0	19
Grey Wagtail	62	0.4	0.2	0.5	1.3	0.5	2.7	1.2	5	0	5
Pied/White Wagtail	1048	13	15.5	10.7	10.7	14.6	18.8	37.4	31	0	31
Richard's Pipit	13	0	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	1	0	1
Olive-backed Pipit	10	0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0	0.2	1	0	1
Tree Pipit	683	9.2	14.2	20.2	12.3	6	4.4	2.2	1	0	1
Meadow Pipit	12282	214	243.3	191.1	162	140.6	183.9	160.8	140	0	140
Rock Pipit	10133	208.6	187.8	221.4	171.6	108	82.6	38.8	26	5	31
Brambling	4711	15.1	29.6	139.1	79.5	72.1	63.6	143.4	124	0	124
Chaffinch	3482	26.4	30.4	69.5	103.6	59.1	40.1	34.2	22	0	22
Hawfinch	32	0	0	0.3	0.7	0.6	0.9	1.4	3	0	3
Common Rosefinch	281	1	1.2	3.4	5.9	6	6.3	8.6	7	0	7
Greenfinch	550	0.2	2.3	4.8	8.2	9.1	28	4.8	1	0	1
Linnit	225	0.2	2.7	7.2	2.9	1.9	4.5	6.2	13	0	13
Twite	7212	114.1	69.1	162	96.5	96.6	110.3	121.4	107	0	107
Lesser Redpoll	42	0	0	0	0	0	1	6.4	16	0	16
Common Redpoll	961	7	6.4	34.2	8.2	6.5	17	33.2	40	0	40
Common Crossbill	575	12.7	13.7	2.6	0.9	16	10.2	2.8	3	0	3
Goldfinch	28	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.6	1	1.4	2	0	2
Siskin	675	3.6	9.4	7.3	7.7	11.4	19.6	17.0	19	0	19
Ortolan	20	0.2	1.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	1	0	1
Yellowhammer	75	0.4	1.8	1.4	1.5	0.7	1.2	0.8	1	0	1
Reed Bunting	565	3.4	7.8	14.2	8.9	8.4	7.5	11.8	13	0	13
Little Bunting	43	0.4	0.8	0.4	1	0.8	0.4	1.0	2	0	2
<b>Total:</b>									<b>4349</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>4980</b>
									<b>Lowest</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>39th</b>



## OTHER SPECIES ON THE FIBO RINGING LIST THAT WERE NOT RINGED DURING 2015

Species	Total 1948–2015	Species	Total 1948–2015
Bean Goose	1	Whimbrel	18
Pink-footed Goose	20	Black-tailed Godwit	1
White-fronted Goose	3	Bar-tailed Godwit	9
Greylag Goose	101	Curlew Sandpiper	6
Shelduck	5	Temminck's Stint	2
Wigeon	58	Purple Sandpiper	193
Pintail	2	Baird's Sandpiper	1
Shoveler	1	White-rumped Sandpiper	1
Pochard	3	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	1
Ring-necked Duck	1	Pectoral Sandpiper	5
Tufted Duck	26	Semipalmated Sandpiper	1
Scaup	8	Red-necked Phalarope	5
Lesser Scaup	1	Grey Phalarope	3
Eider	174	Green Sandpiper	63
Long-tailed Duck	19	Spotted Redshank	3
Velvet Scoter	2	Wood Sandpiper	19
Goldeneye	23	Jack Snipe	156
Red-breasted Merganser	3	Great Snipe	2
Goosander	3	Pomarine Skua	1
Quail	8	Common Tern	488
Red-throated Diver	1	Little Gull	1
Swinhoe's Petrel	2	Iceland Gull	1
Cormorant	7	Glaucous Gull	40
Grey Heron	23	Cuckoo	114
Little Grebe	10	Scop's Owl	2
Great Crested Grebe	1	Snowy Owl	1
Red-necked Grebe	1	Nightjar	8
Slavonian Grebe	3	Swift	19
Marsh Harrier	1	Hoopoe	3
Hen Harrier	2	Great Spotted Woodpecker	34
Goshawk	2	Red-footed Falcon	1
Spotted Crake	20	Peregrine	6
Little Crake	1	Golden Oriole	9
Baillon's Crake	1	Brown Shrike	1
Corncrake	45	Isabelline Shrike	2
Coot	18	Lesser Grey Shrike	7
Great Bustard	1	Woodchat Shrike	13
Grey Plover	1	Jackdaw	16
Golden Plover	27	Carrion Crow	3
Dotterel	4	Hooded Crow	49
Little Ringed Plover	1	Raven	29
Lapwing	386	Firecrest	2

## OTHER SPECIES ON THE FIBO RINGING LIST THAT WERE NOT RINGED DURING 2014

Species	Total 1948–2015	Species	Total 1948–2015
Blue Tit	2	Thrush Nightingale	38
Great Tit	15	Siberian Rubythroat	2
Coal Tit	1	Red-flanked Bluetail	3
Woodlark	3	Red-breasted Flycatcher	65
Shore Lark	5	Collared Flycatcher	2
Short-toed Lark	8	Rock Thrush	1
Sand Martin	8	Stonechat	63
House Martin	150	Black-eared Wheatear	3
Greenish Warbler	26	Pied Wheatear	1
Arctic Warbler	39	Yellow Wagtail	11
Pallas's Warbler	4	Citrine Wagtail	7
Hume's Warbler	1	Blyth's Pipit	2
Wood Warbler	121	Tawny Pipit	3
Radde's Warbler	1	Pechora Pipit	10
Dusky Warbler	7	Red-throated Pipit	9
Western Bonelli's Warbler	2	Pallas's Rosefinch	1
Sardinian Warbler	1	Bullfinch	309
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler	14	Arctic Redpoll	25
River Warbler	11	Two-barred Crossbill	7
Savi's Warbler	4	Parrot Crossbill	37
Thick-billed Warbler	2	Citril Finch	1
Booted Warbler	8	Snow Bunting	681
Sykes's Warbler	2	Lapland Bunting	105
Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	2	Savannah Sparrow	2
Melodious Warbler	13	Song Sparrow	3
Aquatic Warbler	25	White-crowned Sparrow	1
Paddyfield Warbler	12	White-throated Sparrow	1
Great Reed Warbler	8	Black-headed Bunting	4
Waxwing	250	Red-headed Bunting	5
Treecreeper	1	Corn Bunting	4
Rose-coloured Starling	3	Chestnut-eared Bunting	1
Daurian Starling	1	Cretzschmar's Bunting	1
Dipper	17	Pine Bunting	2
White's Thrush	1	Pallas's Reed Bunting	2
Hermit Thrush	1	Yellow-breasted Bunting	6
Grey-cheeked Thrush	2	Yellow-browed Bunting	1
Eyebrowed Thrush	1	Rustic Bunting	17
Dusky Thrush	1	Chestnut Bunting	2
Black-throated Thrush	2	Tennessee Warbler	2
Mistle Thrush	24	Blackpoll Warbler	1
Brown Flycatcher	1		
Rufous-tailed Robin	1	Total:	4601

# RINGING RECOVERIES AND CONTROLS

Ciaran Hatsell and David Parnaby

## Notes

The co-ordinates of Fair Isle are 59°32'N, 01°38'W.

### Order of data for each record:

Ring number - age (and sex if known) of bird - date of record - location, with distance (km), direction (°) and duration (days) between ringing and recovery/control

**Ages of birds:** The numbers given are EURING age codes and do not represent years. Definitions are as follows:

- 1 = pullus (nestling or chick)
- 2 = fully grown, but year of hatching quite unknown
- 3 = definitely hatched during calendar year of ringing
- 4 = hatched before calendar year of ringing, but exact year unknown
- 5 = definitely hatched during calendar year previous to year of ringing
- 6 = hatched before calendar year previous to year of ringing, but exact year unknown
- 7 = definitely hatched in the calendar year 2 years previous to the year of ringing
- 8 = hatched three or more calendar years previous to year of ringing, but exact year unknown

**Sex:** M = male, F = female

### Condition at recovery:

- X found dead
- XF found freshly dead or dying
- +
- shot
- WV alive and probably healthy, ring or colour marks read in the field
- R caught and released by ringer

## Whooper Swan

A8967	8M	08/08/2013	Kalbforgararvatn, Fljotsheid, Sudur-pingeyjarsysla, <b>Iceland</b>
	W	26/10/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland (1041 km, 130°, 444 days)

*A typical movement, with darvic sightings in recent years suggesting that the majority of the Fair Isle sightings in autumn come from the Icelandic-breeding population.*

## Brent Goose

121100	6	19/05/2014	Álfanes/Fótboltavöllur, <b>Iceland</b>
	WV	31/10/2014	Strangford Lough
	WV	02/11/2014	Strangford Lough
	WV	30/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	WV	04/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	WV	07/05/2015	Grutness, Shetland
	WV	08/05/2015	Grutness, Shetland

*This bird, sporting the darvics 'White P right leg, Red 2 left leg' was likely to have been present on Fair Isle from 25th April (when one was seen briefly in the Havens). Having been ringed on an Icelandic football pitch as it headed to its breeding grounds in the east Canadian High Arctic, it was sighted on its way to winter in Ireland (although small numbers from this population winter in western and southern Great Britain, France and the Channel Islands). It was the first bird marked by the Irish Brent Goose Research Group to be recorded on Shetland, but was followed on 1st May 2015 by another on Mainland Shetland (with the Fair Isle bird also relocating to Mainland Shetland, although the two birds did not meet up). It seems possible that both birds found themselves way to the east of their normal migration route due to the strong westerly winds encountered in the spring.*

**Mallard**

*Ring number GR11112, which was one of a brood ringed at Utra on 28th September 2014, was retrapped in Boini Mire on 20th September.*

**Fulmar**

FC00698	1	31/07/1992	Fair Isle, Shetland
	XF	13/10/2015	Munka Grunnurin, off <b>Faeroe Islands</b> (298km, 295°, 8,474 days)

*This bird landed on a boat and was described as 'ill' and had to be put down. Although a decent age, this species is well known for its longevity, with the oldest British birds being recorded at over 40 years old.*

**Storm Petrel**

*As usual, there were more details of Storm Petrel movements than any other species, partially due to the large numbers that are trapped on Fair Isle in the summer and partially due to the species' biology, with non-breeding immatures wandering around the North Sea and other British coasts for the first few years of their life. As would be expected, the majority of birds retrapped had been ringed since 2013, with a number of birds returning to Fair Isle from 2014 and most other movements from Sumburgh Head, the nearest land to the north. One bird made the journey from Fair Isle to Sumburgh in 50 minutes on the night of 25th July, a journey time that many passengers on the Good Shepherd must be envious of!*

*The birds from Orkney and Fair Isle that were ringed in 2011 were older than would be expected for non-breeding birds. Whilst the Fair Isle bird from 2006 moving to Sumburgh was unusual, it could have been a failed breeder (or was perhaps caught on its way to a breeding colony).*

**Table 1. Storm Petrel movements from birds trapped in the Havens in 2015**

Trapped in 2015								
Site	Year of ringing							
	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Fair Isle	12	26	4		1			
Sumburgh	6/3	7/4	1/0					1/0
Mousa	1/0	2/0	1/0					
Other Shetland		2/0						
North Ronaldsay	0/1	0/2	1/0					
Other Orkney	2/2	2/3	1/0	0/1	0/1			
Eilean nan Ron, Highland		5/1						
Other Highland		1/0		1/0				
Western Isles		2/0						
Argyll and Bute		1/0						
Co. Durham	1/0	0/1						
Calf of Man		1/0						
Norway		1/0						
Portugal		1/0						
<b>Note:</b> details are awaited on a Faeroese-ringed bird caught in 2015. <b>Key:</b> Fair Isle to other site / other site to Fair Isle								



One bird that doesn't feature in the table is ring number 2535863 which was ringed on 3rd September 1999 on Fair Isle and was retrapped in the Kirn o' Skroo on 13th June, where it was presumably breeding. It had also been caught in the Kirn in 2012, whilst in 2013 it was trapped in the Havens.

Details are still awaited on a Danish-ringed bird (presumably from the Faeroes), which was trapped on Fair Isle in 2015, whilst details of two Norwegian-ringed birds caught on Fair Isle in 2014 have been received:

8E06400	4	01/08/2013	Lindesnes Fyr, Lindesnes, Vest-Agder, <b>Norway</b>
	R	01/08/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
ED01322	4	26/07/2014	Pedleneset, Utsira, Rogaland, <b>Norway</b>
	R	06/08/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland

### Leach's Petrel

NB84891	4	01/08/2012	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	31/07/2013	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	11/08/2013	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	27/07/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
NB84941	4	11/08/2013	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	02/07/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	06/07/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	31/07/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland

Retraps from previous years are given in full here as this is a recent phenomenon (NB84891, a female that was sexed on DNA in 2012, was the first Leach's Petrel to be retrapped on Fair Isle after the year it was ringed). It is likely that these are all non-breeding immatures, as Leach's Petrels usually spend at least five years roaming before settling to breed, although this increase in returning birds is certainly interesting.

### Gannet

1374237	1	27/06/2003	Fair Isle, Shetland
	X	06/12/2012	near Sidi Ouassai, <b>Morocco</b> (3,333km, 191°, 3,450 days)
1427076	1	14/07/2010	Fair Isle, Shetland
	X	09/05/2015	Hedehusum, Fohr, <b>Germany</b> (809km, 132°, 1,760 days)

The second Fair Isle Gannet to make it to Morocco, there have also been singles in Ceuta (the Spanish autonomous city located on the northern coast of Morocco), Spain and Portugal, all of which have been recovered in November or December, indicating where Fair Isle's breeding birds spend the winter. The German record is the first from Fair Isle to be recorded in that country and, as with records from France, was a spring recovery of an immature bird.

### Shag

1427189	1	11/07/2014	Lericum, Fair Isle
	W	27/09/2014	Wirvie, Fair Isle
	W	07/04/2015	Noss, Shetland
1427123	1	26/07/2014	South Feltsigeo, Fair Isle
	W	04/06/2015	Toft, Shetland

The darvic rings that have been fitted in recent years have increased the number of sightings, particularly of immature birds, around the island, whilst adult birds are sometimes trapped at the nests during monitoring work. This produced records of birds ringed in 1997 (ring number 1339230, ringed as a chick in South Gunnawark and seen there again in 2010 and 2014), 2006 (1393882 ringed as an adult male in Easter Lothar) and nine birds ringed in 2014 (seven as chicks), plus another 2014 chick found dead.

*The sightings from Shetland illustrate the wanderings of non-breeding immature birds, with the darvic rings enabling these birds to be identified.*

### **Sparrowhawk**

DB75894	5M	26/05/2014	Holland, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	04/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (49km, 68°, 343 days)

*An interesting record of a bird that appears to like to track up through the Northern Isles on its return to its breeding grounds.*

### **Moorhen**

*An interesting record was a bird ringed on 24th March that was retrapped on 13th April, despite not having been seen in the intervening three weeks.*

### **Oystercatcher**

FC99569	3	21/09/2006	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	15/06/2015	Stokkseyri, Arnessylsa, <b>Iceland</b> (1129km, 296°, 3189 days)

*The first Fair Isle-ringed Oystercatcher to be recorded moving to Iceland (although a bird ringed as a nestling in Iceland in June 1996 was found long-dead on the Isle in September 2012).*

### **Turnstone**

?	17/08/2013	Leihoek, Peeten, The Netherlands
VV	17/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
VV	18/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland

*A bird sporting a yellow leg-flag with the code 'HUU', this individual was presumably on its way north to breed. Two birds trapped on 16th May 2005 on Fair Isle had been ringed in winter in Belgium, so this bird was perhaps wintering in The Netherlands, or may have been passing through on its way south when it was caught.*

### **Purple Sandpiper**

4651128	?	16/11/2013	Nidingen, Sweden
	VV	15/04/2014	Nidingen, Sweden
	R	11/05/2014	Nidingen, Sweden
	VV	19/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland

*This bird with a blue darvic 'AYL' on its left leg and lilac ring over metal on the right leg winters on the small island of Nidingen off the Swedish west coast. Recoveries and ring sightings suggest that most of the population of 400 or so birds that winter there breed in Svalbard, but this bird (and a previous sighting of one of the birds from the same scheme in Shetland on 20th May 2007) suggest that some may be from more westerly populations. This represents the first ringing movement of a Purple Sandpiper involving Fair Isle.*

### **Woodcock**

EW19948	3	06/11/2011	Fair Isle, Shetland
	XF	29/06/2015	Ringsalet, Arjeplog, Norbotten, <b>Sweden</b> (1203km, 51°, 1,331 days)
EX79994	3	16/11/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	+	21/11/2015	Fano, Esbjerg, Ribe, <b>Denmark</b> (755km, 128°, 5 days)
EW47048	2	07/11/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
	+	11/12/2015	near Peterhead, Aberdeenshire (227km, 185°, 399 days)

*Another interesting set of movements, with a wintering bird shot in Scotland, another that made a rapid movement back across the North Sea to Denmark and a bird in Sweden that was presumably on its breeding grounds when it was killed by a car. The previous four Fair Isle-ringed birds recovered in Sweden were all between May and July.*

## Snipe

Ring number DB16098, which was ringed as a chick on Fair Isle on 15th July 2014 was retrapped on 5th May.

## Arctic Skua

A Bonxie-predated bird bearing the ring ET83778 was found at Ferny Cup on 27th July 2015 and had been ringed on 21st June 2003 as an adult at the Mast.

## Great Skua

MA31295	1	09/07/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
	X	28/06/2015	Blainville sur Mer, Manche, <b>France</b> (1163km, 180°, 354 days)
MA31224	1	20/07/2012	Fair Isle, Shetland
	XF	01/08/2015	Langeoog, Ostfriesische, <b>Germany</b> (853km, 139°, 1,107 days)
HT78479	1	20/06/2006	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	14/07/2015	Sule Skerry, Orkney (165 km, 253°, 3,281 days)

The bird recovered in France was presumably a non-breeding youngster spending the summer south of the species' breeding range. The bird found on Orkney was presumably an example of a Fair Isle-bred bird that has established a territory in another colony.

## Puffin

Monitoring work provided a number of retraps (or birds found dead), including birds ringed in 1992 (two), 1997, 1998 (two), 2001 and 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014.

## Razorbill

A number of birds were retrapped from previous years, including individuals that had been ringed on Fair Isle in 1994, 1996, 1997 (three), 1999 (three), 2001, 2002 (two), 2003, 2004, 2005, 2011 (three), 2012 (five) and 2014 (two).

## Guillemot

T26630	1	25/06/1987	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	08/07/1994	Bonden, Angermanland, <b>Sweden</b> (1227km, 70°, 2,570 days)

A bird ringed on Fair Isle on 26th June 1991 (ring number T44027) was retrapped in South Mila Hesslands on 14th July 2015, whilst other retraps included birds ringed in 1998 (two), 2002 (three), 2003, 2005 (five), 2006 (two), 2009, 2010 (two), 2013 (six) and 2014 (five). Most of those retrapped that had been ringed in recent years had been done so as adults and were found in the same locations in 2015.

## Arctic Tern

SV23995	1	04/07/2009	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	30/05/2015	Aiker Ness, Evie, Orkney (95km, 241°, 2,156 days)
SV17425	1	24/06/2000	Fair Isle, Shetland
	X	30/05/2015	Sumburgh, Shetland (41km, 30°, 5,453 days)
SV17914	1	28/06/2000	Fair Isle, Shetland
	X	14/07/2015	Westness, North Ronaldsay, Orkney (48km, 250°, 5,494 days)

This batch of recoveries includes two more examples of birds hatched on Fair Isle coming to the end of their lives (the Sumburgh bird was killed by a plane), whilst the bird at Evie was found with a broken wing, so is presumably now also not part of the population.

## Kittiwake

With a declining breeding population and another poor breeding season for this species, there were very few caught, although a bird ringed in 2010 was found dead in Gunnawark.

### Black-headed Gull

6232911	P	18/06/2014	Torvmyra, Vassoy, Stavanger, Rogaland, <b>Norway</b>
	VV	29/07/2014	Ugie Estuary, Grampian Region (473km, 252°, 41 days)
	VV	21/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (426km, 281°, 337 days)
	VV	22/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (426km, 281°, 338 days)

*It is established that at least some of the birds that pass through Fair Isle in late summer and early August are from Norwegian breeding populations and this is the first example of a Norwegian-ringed bird on spring passage.*

### Herring Gull

*A bird ringed as a chick on Fair Isle on 17th July 2014 (ring number GR11107) was found dead in South Haven on 25th January 2015, showing that at least some Fair Isle-bred birds remain on the island in the winter (there are also records of Fair Isle chicks moving to Denmark, Bedfordshire and Norfolk).*

### Great Black-backed Gull

HT64800	10	02/02/1998	Fair Isle, Shetland
	X	21/06/2015	Aith, Shetland (83km, 10°, 6,348 days)

*Another bird (ring number HT55154) that had been ringed as a chick on Fair Isle on 30th June 1994 had its ring read on 19th April as it fed outside the Obs (it was also seen on Fair Isle in 2001 and 2013) and becomes the oldest known Fair Isle-ringed Great Black-backed Gull. Another that was ringed on the same date was found dead on the Isle on 31st July 2014.*

### Long-eared Owl

*An interesting record involved ring number GR11140, which was ringed on 4th November and retrapped on 15th November, during which time it increased in weight from 225.6 grams to 287.4 grams.*

### Merlin

EX79957	3F	20/12/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	17/04/2015	Holland, North Ronaldsay (49km, 248°, 118 days)
EX79768	1	13/07/2015	Mid Yell, Shetland
	R	17/09/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (121km, 195°, 66 days)

*Of the 33 Merlins ringed elsewhere that have been caught on Fair Isle, 29 of them were ringed on Shetland, so this nestling from Yell making its way south was entirely typical. The bird that moved to North Ronaldsay in the spring was interesting, perhaps suggesting that some Fair Isle winterers may have originated in Orkney.*

### Skylark

*Ring number TP38661 was trapped in the Obs garden on 21st March 2014 and was retrapped in the same location on 7th April 2015.*

### Chiffchaff

EEC578	3J	28/06/2014	Stanford Reservoir, Northamptonshire
	R	04/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (792km, 358°, 310 days)
HKP752	5	12/06/2015	Holland, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	23/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (49km, 68°, 11 days)
	R	26/07/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (49km, 68°, 44 days)
HYB559	5	09/06/2015	Bardsey Island, Gwynedd
	R	16/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (779km, 15°, 7 days)
	R	17/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (779km, 15°, 8 days)
ERE641	4	15/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	XF	06/11/2015	Grindahoull, Brae, Shetland (96km, 10°, 144 days)



*With record numbers of Chiffchaffs ringed on Fair Isle in 2015, there were also several birds retrapped during the year that provided some interesting information, including proof that sightings during the summer involved lingering individuals (including birds present from 12th June to 21st September and 19th June to 18th September).*

*The movements above include what was presumably an overshooting individual (EEC578), the first Welsh-ringed Chiffchaff to be caught on Fair Isle and an interesting movement of a bird that summered on Fair Isle before being killed by a car in Shetland in November.*

### **Willow Warbler**

ERE631	4	10/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	18/05/2015	Twinyess, North Ronaldsay, Orkney (51km, 247°, 8 days)
HKP803	3	25/08/2015	Holland, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	26/08/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (49km, 68°, 1 day)

*These movements between Fair Isle and our nearest neighbours to the south went somewhat against the expected grain, with a southbound individual in the spring and one heading north in the autumn*

### **Blackcap**

13734953	3M	23/09/2014	Hayen, Liege, <b>Belgium</b>
	R	12/10/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland (1099km, 336°, 19 days)
Y479699	2	06/05/2015	Virkie, Shetland
	R	15/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (44km, 206°, 9 days)
	R	16/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (44km, 206°, 10 days)
V626386	3F	10/09/2015	Persingen, Gelderland, <b>The Netherlands</b>
	X	23/09/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (978km, 332°, 13 days)
BE68970	3M	29/09/2015	3E Kroonspolder, Vlieland, <b>The Netherlands</b>
	R	08/10/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (807km, 330°, 9 days)

*Three typical movements (one from 2014) of birds ringed on the European mainland heading across the North Sea in the autumn, including the fifth and sixth from The Netherlands, all of which have been found on Fair Isle within a month of being ringed in September or October. The movement of a bird from Virkie back down to Fair Isle in the spring suggests an individual that had overshoot and was reorientating.*

### **Reed Warbler**

HE45073	3	12/07/2015	Skirstadtjernet.E, Gran, Opland, <b>Norway</b>
	R	28/08/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (680km, 263°, 32 days)

*In a very good autumn passage for Reed Warblers, this individual was trapped at Quoy. It was only the third foreign-ringed Reed Warbler to be trapped on Fair Isle, with birds from Sweden (2000) and The Netherlands (2002) also being caught on the Isle in late August.*

*Note that a bird reported in the 2007 FIBO Annual Report as a Norwegian-ringed Reed Warbler that was caught on Fair Isle in 2007 was actually identified on the Isle as a Marsh Warbler, and appears in the BTO and FIBO records as such.*

### **Starling**

LC43037	1	04/06/2010	Fair Isle, Shetland
	WV	04/05/2015	Ham, Foula, Shetland (69km, 341°, 1,795 days)
LB75641	3J	12/06/2010	Fair Isle, Shetland
	WV	27/09/2015	Grutness, Shetland (42km, 28°, 1,933 days)
LC44882	1	02/06/2012	Fair Isle, Shetland
	WV	12/06/2015	Ham, Foula, Shetland (69km, 341°, 1,105 days)

LH79238	1	03/06/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
	XF	25/05/2015	Balmoral Fpv, off Aberdeen, North Sea, (215km, 133°, 358 days)
LH79328	3J	16/06/2014	Fair Isle, Shetland
	X	09/12/2015	Buchanhaven, Aberdeenshire (225km, 183°, 541 days)
LJ02538	1	01/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	VV	18/08/2015	Noss, Shetland
LH79844	3J	20/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	VV	16/08/2015	Noss, Shetland
LH79662	3J	20/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	VV	16/11/2015	Scalloway, Shetland
LH79852	3J	22/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	VV	22/08/2015	Bigton, Shetland

*In addition, there were a number of retraps from earlier years (including three from 2010), whilst the large percentage of the population that is colour-ringed enables field identification of a number of Fair Isle-ringed birds to be made.*

*A typical set of movements, with three Fair Isle-raised birds wandering in the early autumn to Shetland. Although Starlings ringed on Fair Isle have turned up in a variety of far-flung locations, those raised on the island generally go no further than Shetland, Orkney or the northern mainland of Scotland. The two Fair Isle chicks (ringed in 2010 and 2012 respectively) that were seen on Foula may have settled on that island, whilst the bird seen in Grutness may make the regular crossing to Shetland every autumn before returning to Fair Isle in the spring. The date of the bird seen on the oil production vessel off Aberdeen seems unusually late for a bird to be moving, although presumably it was a non-breeder in its first summer. Despite being 'at sea' this unfortunate Starling was killed and eaten by a bird of prey.*

### **Blackbird**

CW90720	3M	30/10/2014	Isle of May, Fife
	R	01/11/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (377km, 9°, 367 days)
7584137	6M	27/03/2015	Store Faerder, Tjome, Vestfold,, <b>Norway</b>
	R	12/10/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (692km, 275°, 199 days)
7523539	6M	20/04/2015	Grimstadvatnet, Hareid, More og Romsdal, <b>Norway</b>
	R	30/10/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (519km, 233°, 193 days)
LJ43134	3M	07/11/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	XF	12/11/2015	near Ribe, <b>Denmark</b> (773km, 128°, 5 days)
LB18116	3M	10/12/2013	Craibstone, Aberdeen
	R	17/11/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (264km, 8°, 707 days)

*In addition, a bird (ring number LH79539) ringed on the Isle on 19th November 2014 was retrapped on 18th February and 19th and 21st March 2015, proving that some birds winter on the island. One ringed on the Isle as a 3J on 14th August 2014 (ring number LH79408) was retrapped on 19th September, 4th and 8th October 2014 and then again on 26th March 2015. This bird was considered to have been raised on Fair Isle in a rare breeding attempt, but whether it wintered on the island, or perhaps was recorded on spring passage isn't known.*

*A fascinating set of movements of birds caught in 2015 included the 22nd Fair Isle-ringed bird to move to Denmark (only Norway and Sweden have recorded more Fair Isle-ringed Blackbirds), although this one was unusual in that it had made the crossing back across the North Sea just five days after being ringed in the autumn, but was then unfortunately killed by a car. Two adult males ringed within a few weeks of each other in Norway (although at sites some distance apart) in the spring both arrived on Fair Isle in the October. The bird ringed on Isle of May in 2014 made landfall in the UK almost exactly a year later, whilst ring number LB18116 was presumably heading back to Scotland for its third winter.*

## Song Thrush

The record of ring number RL64217 that was ringed on 30th June and retrapped on 25th August showed that this individual was lingering during the summer.

## Spotted Flycatcher

V108589	4	26/05/2015	Helgoland, <b>Germany</b>
	R	25/08/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (832km, 316°, 91 days)

The first Spotted Flycatcher ringed elsewhere to be found on Fair Isle, although Fair Isle birds have moved to North Ronaldsay, Highland, Germany (one ringed on 13th June 1984 that was caught on Helgoland three days later) and Italy.

## Robin

90444414	3	03/10/2014	Horumersiel, Weser-Ems, <b>Germany</b>
	X	30/10/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (877km, 318°, 392 days)

There was one ringed on 5th November 2014 on the Isle (ring number Z226114) that was still present on 19th March, proving that at least some individuals overwinter. Another long-stayer was ring number D975191 which was ringed on 10th May and was retrapped several times until 21st July. The German-ringed bird (the third to have been caught in Fair Isle from this country) was an unfortunate victim of a Great Grey Shrike at the Obs.

## Wheatear

Ring number TP38791, ringed as a chick on Fair Isle on 13th June 2010 was retrapped on 3rd May (having also been seen on the island in July 2012 and May 2013). Two birds ringed in 2012 as adults (Y123093 and L274573) were recorded on 17th April, both probably breed on Fair Isle.

## Pied Wagtail

Z228494	3F	31/10/2014	Radipole Lake, Dorset
	WV	22/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (993km, N, 173 days)

The second colour-ringed bird from Dorset to be seen on Fair Isle, following one on 27th April 2011 that had been ringed at Abbotsbury Swannery on 22nd September 2009.

## Meadow Pipit

There were several records of birds trapped in 2015 that had been ringed in earlier years on Fair Isle. These included D008630 that was ringed as a juvenile on 10th July 2013 and was present until at least 9th September that year. It presumably returned to Fair Isle to breed in 2014, when it was trapped between 20th April and 8th September and records on 13th and 16th April 2015 showed it had returned to Fair Isle again. Two other birds ringed as juveniles in the summer of 2013 were caught in 2015 and one bird ringed on 10th April 2014 was retrapped on 11th and 24th April 2015, presumably as it returned to breed, although it may have been a passage migrant passing through the island.

## Rock Pipit

2611440	5	03/01/2015	Rosehearty, Aberdeenshire
	WV	27/08/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (208km, 8°, 236 days)

The well-established link between Fair Isle and North-east Scotland for this species was further confirmed with this sighting. This individual, with its distinctive 'metal over white (left leg), orange over blue (right leg)' colour-ring combination, was almost certainly passing through Fair Isle on passage, whilst there was no sign of any of the Aberdeenshire-ringed birds that had bred on Fair Isle in recent years.

## Brambling

EH30145	3F	06/10/2013	Bomyra, Randaberg, Rogaland, <b>Norway</b>
	R	11/11/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (414km, 279°, 766 days)

The fifth Norwegian-ringed Brambling to be caught on Fair Isle, although all the others had been caught either during the same autumn as they were ringed, or the return spring passage the following year.

## Chaffinch

Z722942	2F	04/10/2015	Scousburgh, Shetland
	R	19/10/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (48km, 202°, 15 days)
	R	21/10/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (48km, 202°, 17 days)
Z830904	4M	16/10/2015	Holland, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	03/11/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (49km, 68°, 18 days)

*In addition, a small arrival of this species in February contained two males that had been ringed the previous autumn (on 5th and 8th October) at the Obs. Presumably they had been wintering somewhere on the Northern Isles and remembered Fair Isle as a decent stopover point as they headed back to their breeding areas. The two autumn movements involved birds arriving from the north and south of Fair Isle.*

## Linnet

D975149	6F	28/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	07/09/2015	Scousburgh, Shetland (48km, 22°, 132 days)
D975158	5F	04/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland
	R	01/09/2015	Scousburgh, Shetland (48km, 22°, 120 days)
Z330905	3M	15/08/2015	Scousburgh, Shetland
	R	03/10/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (48km, 202°, 49 days)

*The majority of the Shetland population of Linnets winter away from the islands (possibly in mainland Scotland where a previous Fair Isle-ringed bird has been recovered), so these records presumably involve two birds moving north through Fair Isle to their breeding grounds and another locally-bred bird heading south.*

## Twite

D089221	3M	15/11/2012	Twinyess, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	28/03/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 863 days)
	R	15/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 881 days)

Also trapped 4th April 2015 and three times during April 2014

L741407	5M	20/01/2013	Stromness, Orkney
	R	16/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (115km, 56°, 816 days)

Also trapped 10th June 2014

D089290	5	05/02/2013	Twinyess, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	23/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 807 days)

Also trapped during spring 2013 and 2014

D397026	4F	04/04/2013	Twinyess, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	12/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 738 days)
	R	13/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 739 days)
	R	14/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 740 days)

D397062	4M	18/04/2013	Twinyess, North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	30/03/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 711 days)
	R	17/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 759 days)

Also trapped 14th April 2015 and three times during April 2014

Z423150	4F	16/02/2015	North Ronaldsay, Orkney
	R	27/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 70 days)
	R	15/05/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (51km, 67°, 88 days)

*There were also a number of birds recorded that had been ringed in previous years on Fair Isle. The oldest of these (ring number X713772) had been ringed on the Isle on 29th August 2010 and was retrapped five times between 15th February and 23rd May (having also been recorded annually on Fair Isle from 2012–2014). There were also birds originally ringed in 2012 (five), 2013 (three) and 2014 (24), with those from earlier years having often been seen again on Fair Isle in the intervening period.*



A typical set of records involving birds wintering on Orkney and heading to Fair Isle in the spring, with several individuals being regularly returning birds. Aside from Orkney, the only movements involving Fair Isle Twite are a single bird found in Aberdeenshire, two movements to Clachtoll, on the north-west coast of Highland and one found dead on a ship in the North Sea (at an undisclosed location). Given the preponderance of retraps during April, it is possible that these are spring passage birds heading to more northern breeding grounds, but it is also possible that April is simply a better time to catch them (with birds being more readily attracted to food sources earlier in the spring before setting up territories for example).

### Lesser Redpoll

L733536	5M	07/04/2013	Rossall School, Lancashire
	R	25/04/2014	Grantown-on-Spey, Highland
	R	22/06/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (632km, 8°, 806 days)

*This fascinating bird raises more questions than it provides answers. It could be a bird that winters in north-west England and breeds in Scandinavia, with the Grantown record involving northwards spring passage and it may have finished breeding and been on its way south when it was on Fair Isle, but that's all speculation! Although quite a dark bird, the measurements were in the overlap zone between this species and 'Mealy Redpoll'.*

### Snow Bunting

TR01190	5F	09/01/2013	Glen Shee, Perth and Kinross
	WV	19/04/2015	Fair Isle, Shetland (316km, 21°, 830 days)
	WV	06/12/2015	Glen Shee, Perth and Kinross

*This female (with the colour-combination 'left: yellow over white, right: metal over orange') is only our fifth movement of a Snow Bunting, with previous records involving Fair Isle-ringed birds that were found in winter in The Netherlands and Spurn, East Yorkshire, one ringed in winter in Salthouse, Norfolk that passed through Fair Isle in the spring and a bird ringed on Fair Isle in April 1959 that was trapped in Newfoundland in May 1960.*

*The colour-rings put on this bird by the Grampian Ringing Group (GRG) have enabled a detailed history of it to be built up. It was judged to be on the nominate race *P.n.nivalis* and after its initial capture went on to linger at Glenshee ski area (near Braemar) until 4th April 2013. The following winter it was present from January to 12th March 2014 and then returned in December 2014 and was last seen at Glenshee on 29th March 2015. The GRG have commented that most of the birds of the Icelandic race *P.n.insulae* leave Glenshee in early March, with this bird tending to linger longer and its late emigration suggesting it breeds in the far north.*



Plate 92. Snow Bunting, Bunness, 21st September 2015. © Lee Gregory



Plate 93. Great Skua, 23rd August 2015. © Lee Gregory

# FAIR ISLE'S SEABIRDS IN 2015

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Ciaran Hatsell

## Overview

2015 was a mixed year for Fair Isle's seabirds, with most species faring well despite the inclement weather during the summer months. Fulmar productivity remained stable, although heavy rain early in the season meant that many eggs were washed off the ledges. The Gannet population declined once again, bucking the British trend, representing the second year in a row of population decline. The productivity however, remained high.

Skuas generally had a good season, with Arctic Skuas rising from 30 to 37 AOT and a decent productivity of 0.47 chicks fledged per AOT, the third highest productivity since 2002. The Great Skua population suffered a huge crash, with less than half the AOT than in 2014. However, the productivity was much improved, with 0.9 chicks fledged per AOT, the second highest productivity since 2000. The record population high in 2014 coincided with very low breeding success, with the population perhaps reaching saturation point. It was good to see this globally rare species once again faring well on Fair Isle.

The auks had a decent year, perhaps not mirroring the spectacle of 2014 but positive nonetheless. The whole-island population counts made for uplifting reading, with both Guillemot and Razorbill showing decent percentage increases since the last count in 2010. This was especially notable for Razorbill, with a 41.2% population increase to 1,930 individuals.

On the other hand, the whole-island Puffin count produced a 37.7% decline, with 6,666 individuals counted, in keeping with the overall picture of decline for this species. Productivity also fell from 2014, with the prey samples collected being noticeably smaller and lighter than in 2014.

After a great season in 2014, Kittiwakes came back down to earth with a crash, with yet another decline in the overall population and negligible breeding success. Terns also had another disastrous year, with Common Terns once again registering zero productivity and Arctic Terns not far behind, with a productivity of just 0.03 per AIA.

Although the underlying story is one of huge decline for many of our seabirds, 2015 was a reasonable season, with a small glimmer of light still visible at the end of the tunnel for some species. Others however, may not be so lucky. With so many years in recent history of poor breeding success, it is hard to see a recovery of the Kittiwake on Fair Isle, and it is a genuine possibility that they will become extinct as a breeding species on Fair Isle in the not too distant future. The campaign for a Marine Protected Area around the Isle may play a big part in the future of our seabirds, but is it too little, too late?

**Fulmar:** A decrease of 11.1% was recorded at the population monitoring plots in 2015 (351 AOS), in comparison with 2014 (395 AOS). This is consistent with the gradual fluctuating increase noted in the monitoring plots since the early 2000s, which reversed a previous gradual decline. Heavy rainfall in the period immediately before the plot counts resulted in several eggs being washed off breeding ledges and therefore the weather may have been at least partially responsible for the decline noted this year.

Mean Fulmar breeding success on the monitoring plots remained the same between 2014 and 2015, at 0.54 chicks fledged per apparently occupied site. The long-term trend in breeding success is neither one of consistent increase or decrease, but rather relatively short-term fluctuations.

*Phenology records:* eggs were first seen on 19th May (Parks) and the first fledging was recorded on 26th August.

**Gannet:** In comparison with 2014, the island population of Gannets decreased by 6.3% in 2015, from 3,591 to 3,363 AON. After a gradual increase following colonisation in 1975, a rapid expansion was noted from 2008 to 2010, although numbers have shown a slight downward trend since 2011.

Gannet productivity in 2015 was 0.74 chicks fledged per apparently occupied nest, representing an increase of 8.8% from 2014 (0.68 chicks fledged per AON). The 2015 figure maintains the high productivity values seen over the last 15 years: above 0.6 in all years with data from 2001 to 2015. The sample size of nests monitored in 2015 was 258.

*Phenology records:* eggs were first seen on 9th April (Yellow Head) and chicks on 29th May, with the last chick fledging from the monitoring plots on 24th October.

**Shag:** Long-term whole-island monitoring and plot counts have shown that the Fair Isle population of Shags has declined considerably since 1969. However, the total count from plots in 2015 numbered 33 apparently occupied nests, an increase of 37.5% since 2014 (when 24 AON were found). It appears that the population decline may have stabilised since around 2011.

Shag productivity was 12.4% lower in 2015 (1.62 chicks fledged per AON) than in 2014 (1.85 chicks per AON). The long-term trend since 1986 has been a gradual decline in productivity, with particularly poor breeding success recorded in 2008, 2009 and 2011 and, despite the small decrease noted this year, productivity was still the second highest since 2002. The breeding Shag population on Fair Isle has declined severely and the total number of occupied nests in the productivity monitoring plots is now very low: 13 in 2015 compared with 68 in 1986.

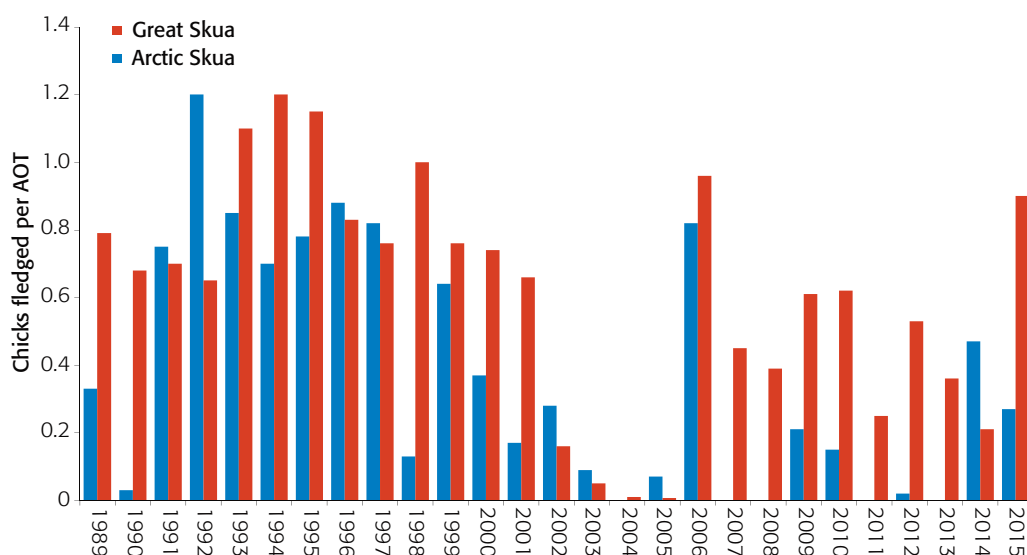
*Phenology records:* the first eggs were seen on 4th April (Busta) and the first chicks on 14th May (Easter Lothar).



**Arctic Skua:** Numbers of Arctic Skuas (apparently occupied territories) increased by 23.3% in 2015 to 37 AOT (from 30 AOT in 2014), the second consecutive year of increase. The long-term trend in the population has been a gradual decline with occasional fluctuations. Arctic Skua productivity decreased 42.6% in 2015, to 0.27 chicks per AOT, from 2014 (0.47 chicks per AOT). Although this a significant decline, it still represents the third highest productivity recorded since 2002, with several recent years seeing productivity of zero, or just above that.

Of the 37 AOT, eight fledged at least one chick (two AOTs fledged two chicks, six fledged a single chick), nine failed at chick stage, 18 failed at egg stage and two involved birds on territory that appeared not to attempt breeding. A small number of fledged chicks were known to have been predated by Great Skuas after fledging. The higher percentage of nests failing at an earlier stage (48.65% failed at egg stage in 2015 compared to 20.0% in 2014) may be indicative of adult birds having to spend longer away from the nest searching for food.

*Phenology records:* the first egg was first seen on 23rd May (Gilsetter) and chick on 23rd June (Buness), with the first chicks fledging from 21st July (Mast and Buness).



**Great Skua:** Great Skuas (apparently occupied territories) decreased by 55.7% to 188 AOT in comparison with the record total of 424 AOT in 2014. The overall trend for Great Skua has been a long-term increase, which was particularly rapid between 2004 and 2008, although numbers appeared to have stabilised between 2008 and 2013. There was then a rapid increase in 2014, which was reversed in 2015 with the breeding total being the lowest since 2005. Breeding success was 328.6% higher in 2015 (0.9 chicks fledged per AOT) than in 2014 (0.21 chicks fledged per AOT). Prior to 2000, productivity was generally high (usually 0.7 chicks or higher per AOT), but this represents the second highest productivity since then.

**Figure 1.** Breeding success of Arctic Skuas and Great Skuas on Fair Isle, 1989–2015.



Plate 94. Puffins and the Obs from Bunness, 10th June 2015. © Ian Andrews

*Phenology records:* eggs were first seen on 17th May (Homisdale) and chicks on 13th June, with the first fledging noted from 22nd July, with the last chick fledging in mid-September.

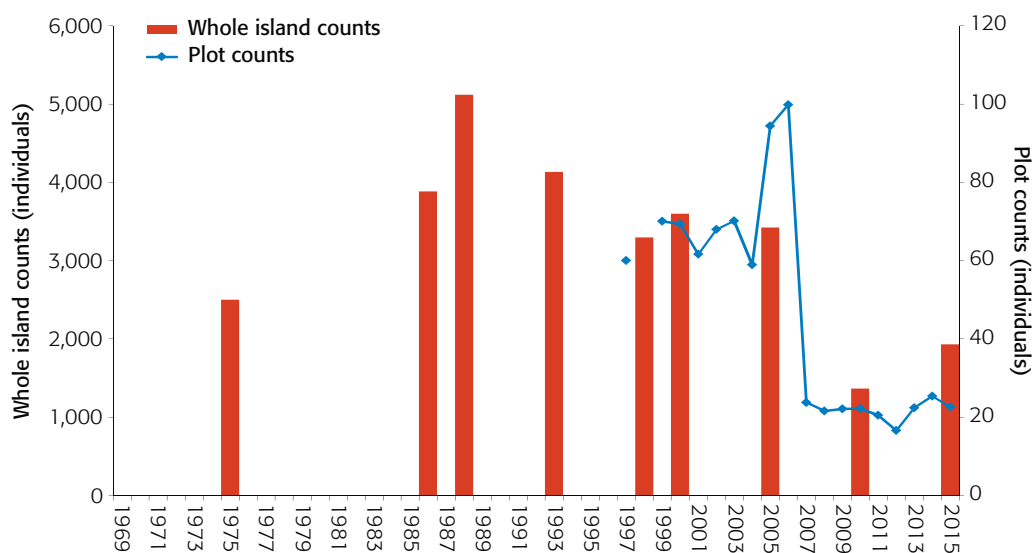
**Puffin:** The number of individual Puffins counted in 2015 was 6,666, a 37.7% decrease since the last whole-island count in 2012 (10,706 individuals). The count of 6,666 individuals was the maximum recorded from counts made on 8th and 14th May (6,122 and 6,666 individuals respectively). Whole-island counts of Puffins on Fair Isle are a crude method of censusing the population and the figures should be interpreted with some caution, although the 2015 count fits in with a trend of gradual decline since 1989.

Productivity was 17.9% lower in 2015 (0.64 chicks fledged per egg laid) than in 2014 (0.78 chicks fledged per egg laid). Puffin productivity was above 0.5 chicks fledged per egg laid every year from 1987 to 2000 and, although it has fluctuated more since then, it has remained relatively high (especially compared to the other auks), with no years of zero productivity. The productivity in 2015 may have been affected by heavy rain in the incubating period as, although no nests were found flooded, there were several abandonments during this time, which may have been the result of some unusually sustained rainfall.

*Phenology records:* copulation was noted from 29th April and chicks were first located on 8th June, with chicks fledged from 19th July.

**Black Guillemot:** The number of Black Guillemots in breeding plumage counted along the east coast of Fair Isle (North Lighthouse to South Lighthouse) was 1.0% lower in 2015 (194 individuals) than in 2014 (196 individuals). The count of 194 individuals in 2015 was the maximum day-count from counts made on 29th March, 8th April and 18th April (counts of 153, 181 and 194 respectively). Despite the very slight decline from 2014, the 2015 count maintained the recent trend of gradual increase observed since 1999. Black Guillemot productivity was formerly monitored at nests in the boulder beaches along the east coast of Fair Isle (1987–2000). However, use of these nest sites has greatly declined (possibly due to predation by feral cats) and since 2000 either too few nests were found and accessed for any meaningful data on breeding success to be collected, or none were found. Data collected between 1987 and 2000 showed productivity fluctuating, with no obvious long-term pattern of increase or decrease. Accessible Black Guillemot nest sites are extremely rare now, and new sites containing accessible nests for productivity monitoring have not been found, despite searches being made annually since 2011.

*Phenology records:* the first fledged chick was noted on 12th August.



**Razorbill:** Razorbill numbers at the Lericum monitoring plot decreased by 11.0% in 2015 (23 individuals) compared with 2014 (25 individuals). The whole-island count produced a total of 1,930 individuals, an increase of 41.2% on the last whole-island count (1,367 individuals in 2010). Razorbill numbers on Fair Isle have been steadily declining since the late 1980s, with a particularly sharp crash in numbers noted after 2006. Although the numbers in the monitoring plots have remained generally steady, showing perhaps just a slight increase in recent years, the whole-island count is a hopeful sign that the population is recovering. Razorbill productivity in 2015 was 0.70 chicks per egg laid, a 2.9% increase from the 0.68 recorded in 2014. From 1990 to 2002, productivity fluctuated but remained relatively

**Figure 2.** Population change of Razorbills on Fair Isle, 1969–2015 (whole-island counts and plot counts of individuals). Plot counts for each year are from the Lericum plot only. Plot data for the annual series was not collected in 1998.

high at between 0.47 and 0.8, but since 2003 productivity has consistently been low ( $<0.5$ ) or, in four years, has been zero, so the last two year's productivity figures have gone against the recent trend, with the 2015 productivity being the highest recorded since 1998.

*Phenology records:* eggs were first seen on 1st May (Dog Geo), an adult was noted carrying fish into a nest on 1st June, indicating the presence of a chick (Easter Lother), and chicks had fledged from 25th June (Easter Lother).

**Guillemot:** Although plot counts decreased by 5.0% in 2015 (1,286 individuals) compared with 2014 (1,354 individuals), the whole-island count of 20,924 individuals was an increase of 7.3% from the last whole-island count (in 2010) of 19,501 individuals.

Since 1999, the pattern of change is one of decline in numbers recorded by plot counts and whole-island counts, although this was thought to have perhaps started to stabilise since 2008 which 2015's whole-island count may suggest is the case.

In 2015, Guillemot productivity was 0.59 chicks per AIA, an increase of 3.5% from the 0.57 chicks per AIA recorded in 2014 and the highest productivity recorded since 2006. From 1988 to 2002, Guillemot productivity remained relatively high, fluctuating between 0.67 and 0.85; however, since 2002 the general trend has been for productivity to be relatively low ( $<0.5$ ) or to be zero, so the last two years have been a welcome improvement.

*Phenology records:* copulation was noted from 8th May (Lerness), with eggs from 14th May (Easter Lother), the first chick seen on 14th June (Gunnawark) and fledged chicks noted from 3rd July.

**Figure 3.** Population change of Guillemots on Fair Isle, 1969–2015 (whole-island counts and plot counts of individuals). Plot counts for each year are the sum of counts from five study plots. Plot data for the annual series was not collected in 1998.

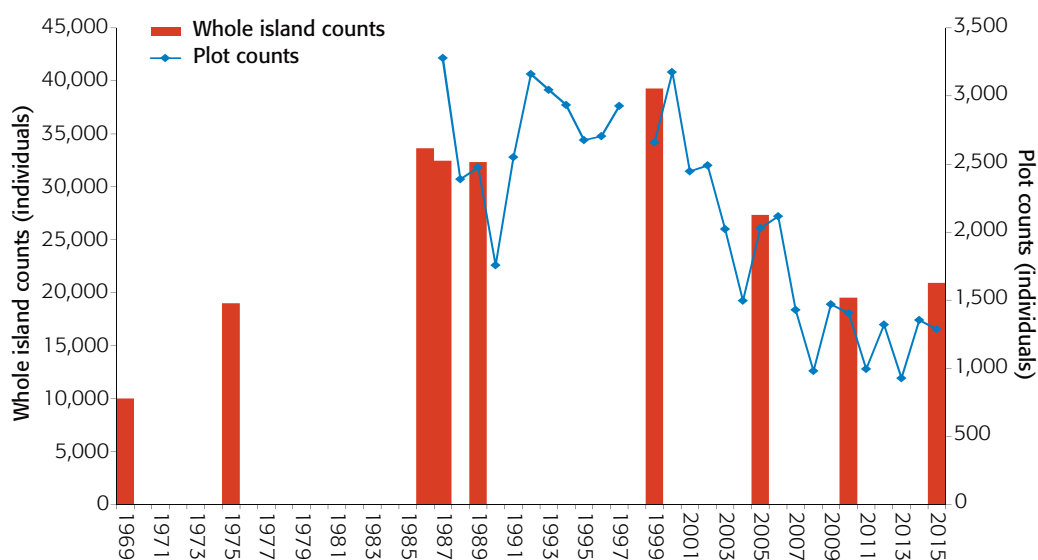






Plate 95. Arctic Terns over Bunness, 25th July 2015. © Ciaran Hatsell

**Common Tern:** One pair nested in 2015 (the same as 2014), the third year of the last four to produce a nesting attempt after six blank years prior to that, although there is no indication of a recovery in the breeding population to that of the 1980s. Productivity was zero for Common Terns in 2015, the same as 2014. There were no breeding attempts on Fair Isle for this species in 2006–2011 and 2013, with a pair raising a single chick in 2012.

**Arctic Tern:** The whole-island count showed a decrease of 69.4% in 2015 (30 AIA) in comparison with 2014 (98 AIA). Breeding numbers have fluctuated greatly since 1987, although a general upward trend until 2001 has now clearly been reversed. Although the species' breeding ecology, in which they often prospect for nest sites in large, cohesive flocks and do not always nest at the same site every year, may be partially responsible for the fluctuations, a genuine decline also seems to be occurring.

Arctic Tern productivity decreased by 50% in 2015 to 0.03 chicks per AIA, compared to the 0.06 chicks per AIA recorded in 2014. Since 2001, chicks have been raised to fledging stage in only four other years (2006, 2009, 2012 and 2014), with productivity in those years ranging from 0.03 to 0.39.

*Phenology records:* scrapes were recorded from 29th May (Buness), although eggs were not recorded until 11th June (Buness). The first chicks were seen on 18th July (Buness), although one fledged from Buness on 25th July proved they obviously hatched earlier than that.

**Kittiwake:** Plot counts in 2015 produced 46 AON, a decrease of 20.7% in comparison to 2014 (58 AON). Similarly, the 2015 whole-island count produced 859 AON, a decrease of 10.8% from 2014 (963 AON). After a slight increase in counts from 2013 to 2014, 2015 has seen a return to the established trend of a severe decline in the Kittiwake population on Fair Isle since 1987.

Productivity for Kittiwake decreased by 79.0% in 2015 to 0.13 chicks per fledged AON from 0.62 chicks per AON in 2014. After a decent year in 2014 it was disappointing to return to another poor year, although it was an improvement on the zero productivity recorded on six occasions in the last decade (including 2011, 2012 and 2013). No nesting attempts were made in 2015 at seven of the ten monitoring plots (South Gunnawark, Lericum, Stroms Heelor, Johnny's Peats, Shaldi Cliff, Da Swadin and Trottie Kame). No Kittiwakes have returned to the productivity plot at Lericum since a substantial landslide occurred there in the winter of 2010/2011 and it seems that the cliff here no longer contains suitable nest ledges for this species.

**Figure 4. Breeding success of Kittiwakes on Fair Isle, 1986–2015.**

*Phenology records:* the first egg was seen on 20th May (Inner Sound o' Holms), with the first chicks noted from 20th June (Gunnawark) and the first fledging from 25th July.

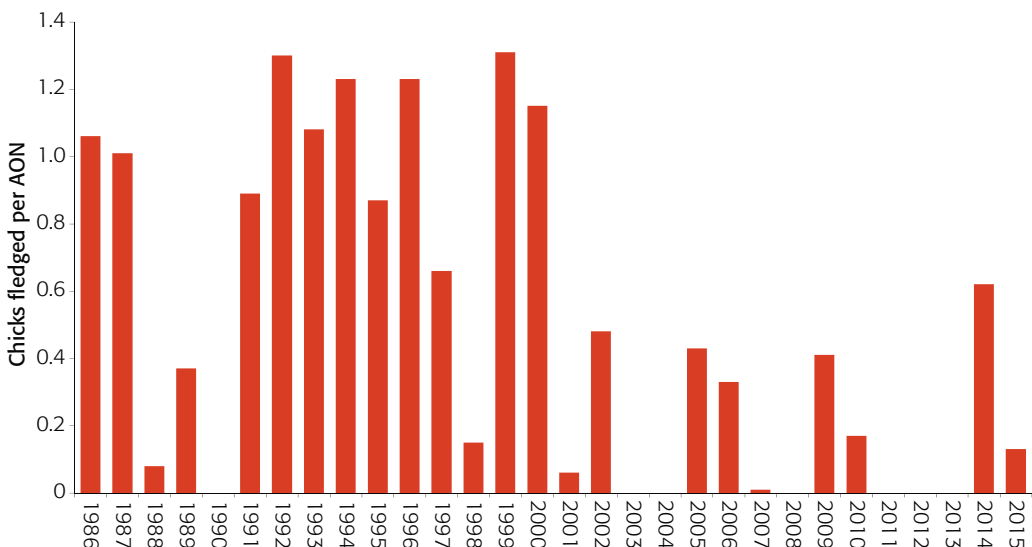




Plate 96. The northern cliffs looking west from North Light towards the gannetries of Inner and Outer Stack, 7th June 2015. © Ian Andrews

**Other seabird studies on Fair Isle in 2015:** Despite a successful breeding season for Shags, just 37 birds were colour-ringed (five adults and 32 chicks). This was down largely to the poor weather at the peak time of ringing, with heavy rain and strong winds curtailing any ringing activity within the colony. It still represents a good total (with 114 Shags colour-ringed previous to 2015) but it was frustrating knowing the birds were out there to ring but the weather wasn't on our side. The birds were ringed as part of the long term study carried out by the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology around north-east Scotland. The aim of this project is to look at dispersal, survival, distribution and movement patterns of juvenile and adult Shags.

Eleven birds were re-sighted during 2015; nine on Fair Isle, one sighted on Noss, with another at Toft on Shetland. One bird was recovered dead on Fair Isle, while another was found dead at Leebiton, Shetland. Hopefully the good breeding season and numbers of birds ringed over the past two years will yield more re-sightings.

The seabird tracking work carried out by the RSPB continued once again this year (see separate report on page 172).

Fair Isle Bird Observatory wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the JNCC Support Co.

# FIRST AND LAST MIGRANT DATES

David Parnaby

Species	Earliest ever	Earliest 2015	Latest ever	Latest 2015
Quail	30.04.61	6th May	13.10.89	25th June
Osprey	25.04.66	4th May	04.11.35	4th May
Corncrake	10.04.66	28th August	03.11.77	12th October
Dotterel	25.04.73	18th May	03.12.86	20th May
Whimbrel	09.04.13	16th April	12.12.1907	31st August
Common Sandpiper	05.04.83	19th April	02.11.1908	17th September
Green Sandpiper	08.04.79	5th May	12.11.70	12th September
Arctic Skua	04.04.88	25th April	25.10.	7th October
Great Skua	17.03.09	2nd April	25.11.14	12th November
Sandwich Tern	23.04.07	no records	18.09.77	no records
Common Tern	25.04.83	10th May	18.10.75	26th August
Arctic Tern	No data	8th May	30.10	2nd October
Lesser Black-backed Gull	02.02.11	17th February	12.12.57	8th November
Turtle Dove	23.04.71	7th May	01.11.82	3rd October
Cuckoo	17.04.87	5th May	08.10.77	27th September
Swift	16.04.13	6th May	26.10.75#	16th September
Wryneck	18.04.81	3rd May	17.10.74	22nd September
Red-backed Shrike	04.05.84	1st June	08.11.93	13th September
Goldcrest	27.02.	13th March	19.12.03	8th November
Sand Martin	02.04.89	22nd April	19.10.78	15th September
Swallow	31.03.02	9th April	02.11.84	19th October
House Martin	10.04.11	21st April	02.11.11	27th September
Wood Warbler	14.04.81	21st August	06.10.73	2nd September
Chiffchaff	12.03.73	19th March	no data	22nd November
Willow Warbler	25.03.10	14th April	23.11.27	20th October
Blackcap	27.03.12	18th April	20.12	19th November
Garden Warbler	21.04.68	5th May	20.11.76	24th October
Lesser Whitethroat	20.04.09	4th May	08.11.	19th October
Subalpine Warbler	20.04.00	30th June	29.10.07	3rd July
Whitethroat	11.04. Pre 59	3rd May	21.10.78	1st September
Grasshopper Warbler	07.04.02	25th April	25.10.14	8th October
Icterine Warbler	08.05.13	2nd June	13.10.76	4th September
Sedge Warbler	19.04.87	5th May	11.11.75	28th August
Marsh Warbler	18.05.13	1st June	06.10. Pre 63	15th July
Reed Warbler	28.04.01	5th May	31.10.80	11th October
Ring Ouzel	16.03.88	13th April	18.12.1909	6th November
Spotted Flycatcher	20.04.49	7th May	26.10.85	29th September
Bluethroat	22.03.1908	15th May	13.11.83	20th October
Pied Flycatcher	21.04.83	5th May	29.10.85	9th October
Black Redstart	09.02.1989	18th March	22.12.86x	7th November
Redstart	12.04.1981	3rd May	11.11.81	20th October



# FIRST AND LAST MIGRANT DATES

Species	Earliest ever	Earliest 2015	Latest ever	Latest 2015
Whinchat	14.04.81	3rd May	26.11.90	4th November
Wheatear	13.03. Pre 59	7th April	19.11.59	2nd November
Yellow (flava) Wagtail	25.03.54	3rd May	20.11.57	22nd September
Pied (alba) Wagtail	20.02.03	9th March	17.11	25th October
Tree Pipit	14.04. Pre 63	25th April	09.11.1908	3rd November
Red-throated Pipit	08.05.36	no records	01.11.1908	no records
Common Rosefinch	08.05.77	1st June	30.11.91	12th October
Ortolan Bunting	26.04.64	16th October	01.11.00	7th November*
Little Bunting	04.04.58	27th September	19.11.75	26th October
Rustic Bunting	25.04.80	19th May	08.11.75	19th May
*new record    x arrival date (went on to winter)    # note: a swift sp. was seen on 07.11.11				



Plate 97. Ortolan Bunting, Ditfield, 16th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

## GREAT WHITE EGRET, 31ST MAY 2015; THE FIRST FOR FAIR ISLE

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David Parnaby

On his last visit to Fair Isle in October 2011, Ade Cooper was part of a group that found a Lesser Scaup on Buness, a first for the island. With the Fair Isle list standing at 384 when he arrived in May 2015, there were not that many opportunities for adding further species to the island list, but remarkably, Ade did it again!

He and Caroline Scott were staying at the South Lighthouse and, on 31st May, had gone for an early morning walk, with a promising south-east breeze and bright conditions greeting them.

At 05:15hrs they saw a large, white bird on Da Water that was being mobbed by Lapwings. Even with the naked eye, it seemed likely to be a Great White Egret, and that was confirmed when views through binoculars revealed all white body plumage with long scapular plumes, a long thin neck, a dagger-like bill that was black with a yellow base, green lores and a gape-line that extended just past the eye. It had very long legs with yellow tibia and black with a slight mix of yellow on the tarsus, whilst the size of the bird was roughly that of a Grey Heron (although there were none for comparison).

The bird had moved to Utra by 07:40hrs and, when seen in flight, revealed black feet that extended beyond the tail, whilst a distinctive neck bulge was also noted. All of that added up to Great White Egret, with the bare-part coloration proving it to be a bird of the European subspecies *Egretta alba alba* that was coming out of breeding condition.

Great White Egret now breeds in England and is a familiar sight for birders in many areas of the southern United Kingdom (Ade sees the species annually in Cambridgeshire) and so it was not until around 08:00hrs when Simon Colenutt returned from a wander round the south of the island and casually mentioned to the Warden and guests in the ringing room that he'd seen a Great White Egret on Da Water, that panic set in, as the enormity of the find in Fair Isle terms was realised. Obs vehicles immediately headed off down the road and phone calls were made around all the islanders who would be interested in this addition to the Fair Isle list. On arrival at Da Water (which the bird had returned to), the egret had just taken off. It flew over the very grateful Obs team, then headed north, gaining height before eventually disappearing around the back of Ward Hill and was assumed to be on its way to Shetland. It obviously had a change of heart, as it was later seen back at Da Water (and also at South Light and Utra as it continued to roam the island), and was present until at least 21:00hrs, but was not seen the following day. A Great White Egret on Orkney on 26th May could conceivably



Plate 98. Great White Egret, Da Water, 31st May 2015. © David Parnaby

have been the same bird, but there were no sightings from elsewhere in the Northern Isles after the Fair Isle record.

It seemed inevitable that an egret would make it to Fair Isle eventually, although whether Little or Great White would be first was also a matter of speculation. Little Egret was perhaps the most likely, having been recorded on all of the larger islands in Shetland and being a relatively regular visitor to the county in recent years, and there would be no surprise if that species was the next bird to be added to the island list. There are still a surprisingly high number of other possible additions that could be made to the Fair Isle list, indeed there are few years that go by without at least one new species being seen.

#### **Additions to the Fair Isle list (2006–2015):**

**2015:** Great White Egret

**2014:** Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Glossy Ibis, Bridled Tern

**2013:** Swinhoe's Petrel, Red-eyed Vireo

**2012:** Magnolia Warbler

**2011:** Lesser Scaup

**2010:** *no additions*

**2009:** Green-winged Teal, Brown-headed Cowbird

**2008:** Night Heron, Caspian Plover, Black Kite, Citril Finch, Siberian Thrush

**2007:** Surf Scoter, Terek Sandpiper

**2006:** Black Duck

Of the recent additions, there is a notable American influence (seven of the 18 species, made up of three passerines and four ducks). Palearctic species are represented by three wetland birds, two wandering seabirds, a couple of eastern waders, a raptor and unexpected finch from southern European and just one Siberian passerine. Fair Isle's wonderful track record of far eastern vagrants, extending back more than a century, means that many of the most likely candidates have already been recorded, although Siberian Blue Robin, Taiga Flycatcher and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler are amongst those that have come close recently whilst Eastern Crowned Warbler seems a good shout. If Siberian or Black-throated Accentor eventually make it to Britain, Fair Isle would be as good a bet as any to produce the goods.

The five commonest BBRC species (according to <http://www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/statistics>) not yet to appear on Fair Isle are Nutcracker, Black-winged Stilt, Gull-billed Tern, Penduline Tit and Blue-winged Teal. Perhaps the stilt will follow Glossy Ibis and Great White Egret and make the journey north from a southern wetland, but Blue-winged Teal seems the most likely of the five (especially given the recent run of Nearctic ducks to debut on the isle). There are several other American waders (Least Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalarope for example) and gulls (Bonaparte's, Franklin's and American Herring amongst the possibilities) that could occur, as could Snow Goose. American passerines that have come close on multiple occasions include Dark-eyed Junco, Veery, American Robin and Ovenbird, but just about anything feels possible in a big October westerly gale.

Nobody predicted the Citril Finch in 2008 though, and perhaps the next addition will be something as random as White-winged Snowfinch, or something equally as odd from closer to home such as Bearded Tit, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (both with one Shetland record) or Egyptian Goose!



Plate 99. Great White Egret, Da Water, 31st May 2015. © David Parnaby



## MOLTONI'S SUBALPINE WARBLER, 15TH MAY 2015; THE SECOND FOR FAIR ISLE

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Lee Gregory

15th May dawned nice and sunny with a slight breeze from just east of south, so the mist nets were opened early in the Bird Observatory garden by Ciaran Hatsell. Just before 08:30hrs I was helping to close the nets ready for breakfast when there was a knock at the library window that faces onto the Obs garden. Obs guest Keith Pellow, who had arrived the previous evening, was waving and pointing to the garden very close to me. I couldn't see what he was pointing at so he opened the window and shouted 'Subalpine Warbler.' I panicked slightly as I didn't have my binoculars round my neck fearing they would get caught in the net - so do I go and get my binoculars or try and see it without? I decided to reposition myself around the willow that was between me and the bird and saw it straight away feeding unconcerned in the long grass. I was struck by its pale pink-washed breast and belly and was confident it was a Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, a species I am familiar with from Corsica and Sardinia, and called it out as such. The mist-nets were quickly opened again and within a matter of minutes the bird was caught by David Parnaby. David ringed and processed the bird, with Ciaran scribing and, during this time, a couple of loose belly feathers dropped out, which were bagged for later DNA analysis.

Quite a crowd of islanders and visiting birders had gathered by the time the bird was ready for release. It was photographed and released back into the Obs garden, where it was seen occasionally during the day, although it remained quite elusive in the dense cover. The following day there was no sign of the Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler in the Obs garden, but it was relocated later in the day by Ciaran. Initially it was found near Stackhoull, although it then followed the dykes south to the Lower Leogh and Shirva area, where it spent the rest of its stay feeding along lichen-covered walls and in croft gardens.

The bird remained in that area until 25th May. During that time, it could be elusive, but would often then emerge from roadside vegetation close to where people had been looking. As it is still a very rare British bird, with only four records prior to 2015 (whilst another was seen in Norfolk four days before the Fair Isle sighting), three of which had been in Shetland, one charter plane of birders came to twitch it. It was the second Fair Isle record, following almost exactly a year after the first, a female found on 16th May 2014, which was only identified from DNA analysis. It remains to be seen whether recent developments in identification and taxonomy (the species was only split from Subalpine Warbler in late 2014), and greater awareness of the subalpine warbler complex results in this species being proven to be occurring more regularly in Britain than is currently appreciated.

**Description:**

A small *Sylvia* warbler obviously of the subalpine complex.

Upperparts (crown, ear coverts, mantle, rump and upper tail coverts) ash grey with a bluish tinge, wings brownish retained juvenile feathers with darker centres, tertials pale bordered, alula blackish with thin white edge. Underparts a pale salmon pink, being slightly darker around the throat/breast sides, very faint white moustachial stripe and grey along flank. Tail quite broad, round tipped, presumably moulted adult-type blackish feathers with grey outer web, outer tail feather (T6) with pure white outer web and inner web white until one third along then tapering to the feather base, T5 large white tip to feather and T4 a small white tip to feather. The legs were quite bright orange, the bill fine black with a yellowish base to the lower mandible and gape line. The eye was orangey/red with a black pupil and was surrounded by an obvious, bright red eye-ring.

The call was a pretty quiet, dry rattle which was identical to a recording of Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler checked shortly after being heard and quite different to the calls of 'Eastern' and 'Western Subalpine Warbler'. Although the plumage of male Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler is distinctive, females are indistinguishable from female 'Western Subalpine Warbler' on plumage, on current knowledge. The call however is diagnostic (so it is a shame that the female of 2014 did not call). The bird was also heard to sing briefly a few times by visitors, especially in sunny weather.

The feathers that were shed during ringing were sent to Professor Martin Collinson at Aberdeen University, who said, 'DNA sequence back last night. It's confirmed Moltoni's - DNA sequence identical to a Moltoni's sampled in Tuscany, near-identical to multiple other Moltoni's and very different from all other taxa.'



Plate 100. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Upper Leogh, 17th May 2015. © Lee Gregory



Plate 101. Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, Obs, 15th May 2015. © Lee Gregory

### DNA analysis:

Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler 'Z226404', Fair Isle, 15th May 2015.

Aberdeen University reference: Sub404.

Sub404 cyt b = moltoni haplotype m17

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TTGCTTAATCACACAAATCACCACAGGCCTATTCTAGCAATGCACTACACAGCAGACACCT-
CACTAGCTTTTGCTTCCGTGGCCACATATGCCGAGACGTACAGTTCCGTTGACTTATCC-
GAAACCTACATGCAAACGGAGCTTCATTCTTCTTATCTGCACTACCTTCACATCGGCC-
GAGGAATCTACTACGGATCTACCTAAACAAGAAACCTGAAACGTCGGAGTTCTACTCC-
TATTAACCCCTATAGCCACCGCTTCGTAGGTTACGTCTTCCATGAGGCCAAATATCATTCT-
GAGGGCGCACTGTAATCACAAACCTATTCTCAGCCATCCCCTACATTGGCCAAACACTAGTA-
GAATGAGCCTGAGGCGGATTCTCAGTAGACAACCCACATTAACCCGATTCTTCGCC-
CTTCACTTCTCTCCCTTTGTCATCGCAGGCCTCACATTAGTCCACCTCACACTTCTACAT-
GAAACAGGATCAAGCAACCCCTAGGAATTCCATCAGACTGCGACAAAATCCCATCCACC-
CTTACTACTCCAAAAAGACCTACTCGGCTTCGCACTCATATTATCCCCCTCGCTTCCTAG-
CACTATTGCCCCAAACCTTCTAGGGGACCCAGAAAATTCACGCCGCCAACCCCTAGC-
CACACCCCCCACATTAACAGAGATGATACTTCTATTTCGCCTACGCTATTCTCCGATCCATC-
CCCAACAACTAGGCGCGCTACTTGGCCCTAGCCGCTTCCGTCCTAGTCTATTCTCATGC-
CACTGCTCCACATCCAACTACGCTCAATAACCTTCCGCCCCCTATCCAAATCCTATTCT-
GAACCTTAGTCGCCAACCTACTCATCTTACCTGAGTAGGCAGCCAACCGGTAGAACCC-
CTTCATTATCATCGGACAACCTAGCCTCACTCTCTACTTCACAATCATCTAATCCTCTTCCC
```

### Ringling details:

Ring number:	Z226404
Time:	09:05hrs
Age:	5
Sex:	male
Wing:	59.5
Fat (out of 8):	3
Pectoral muscle score (out of 3):	2
Bill (to skull):	12.7
Bill (depth):	2.8
Bill (width):	3.7
Tarsus:	18.2
Tail:	50

## SIBERIAN RUBYTHROAT, 20TH OCTOBER 2015; THE SIXTH FOR FAIR ISLE

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Ciaran Hatsell

I love my job. Getting paid to monitor seabirds and migrant birds every day on Fair Isle is a dream come true. It had been another great year, with the seabirds faring reasonably well and a good run of rarities in the autumn that kept folk happy. Although September was relatively quiet by Fair Isle standards, it still produced Arctic Warbler, Pallid Harrier, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Lanceolated Warbler and a record day-count of Yellow-browed Warblers (76), along with some truly memorable days of birding and some great folk visiting the Obs. October had been great too, with five Glossy Ibises, Siberian Thrush, Red-flanked Bluetail, Firecrest, Paddyfield, Lanceolated, Radde's and Dusky Warblers. That's not to mention the whole host of scarcities, loads of Killer Whales and even a record of a Migratory Locust.

I was on a real high after being lucky enough to find a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler on the 19th October, an absolutely incredible bird which, after initially flushing, showed very well out in the open at the Wirvie Burn. I was absolutely bouncing and didn't think it could get much better than that, but this is Fair Isle...

There's a phrase that Andy Clements of the BTO used this year when he and the BTO crew came to visit Fair Isle: Zen birding. During an all-day bird race, while everyone else ran around from one corner of the island to the other, his team took their time, went to look at some knitting and had a cup of tea with islanders. They won and Zen birding was born. I liked this idea.

As part of the wardening team on Fair Isle, we often walk in excess of 20 miles a day, covering every blade of grass and every rocky cliff face in search of migrant birds. I think sometimes it's possible to try too hard and there is a tendency to half-run around the island, leaping over ditches and sprinting up hills, trying to cover as much ground as possible. Time to try out Andy's theory...

Morning census in south-east had been very quiet, with a notable decrease in thrush numbers and a 'nothing really new' feeling. David Parnaby had found a Little Grebe during morning census, a Fair Isle tick for him and the first since 2008, so after lunch I headed up to Easter Lothar with him to twitch this island mega. It was a little belter. Somehow (and I'm still not sure how or why), after doing north census yesterday I ended up carrying on with David as he completed the second half of his route. Back on to Dronger and up Ward Hill, what was I doing? It was actually a rare opportunity to catch up and have a chat about work (and talk a load of rubbish). Zen birding!





Plate 102. Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Wirvie Burn, 19th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

We had seen very little, with North having that start of season feel with just a few birds scattered in odd places. At several points I was about to split off to cover some other ground and didn't, but reaching the Hill Dyke seemed like a natural division. David carried on to cover some ditches and I headed down the Hill Dyke with the aim of getting back through the traps before the light faded.

We were less than 30 feet apart when I headed over to check a seemingly innocuous pile of stones just north of the dyke, which sometimes holds Wheatear, when out it flew - a big, long, plain-brown chat with a huge tail. My thought process went quickly from sparrow? - no, to AAAARGHHHH! It flew away from me over the dyke and then looped back on to my side, landing briefly on the wall, when I got my bins on it for a second, before it bounced back over again. HOLY CALLIOPE BATMAN! I looked round and could still see David: "PARNABY! RUBYTHROAT!" As he ran over, phoning people on the way, I had that instant 'did I really just see that?' feeling. I hadn't even seen the throat or seen it well at all but it was one of those birding moments that I'd dreamt of over and over. As he ran over, I heard him say the words on the phone "Ciaran's found a Rubythroat at Hill Dyke" and it sunk in. Blimey Charlie!

I ran round the other side of the dyke and we walked it together, with David getting brief views as it hopped up on the wall. Alice, the domestic assistant, was close by and having recently taken up birding added Siberian Rubythroat to her list before Black-headed Gull. Lobstronomous!

It flew down the wall towards Steve Arlow who saw it bomb towards Setter. Eventually folk arrived for what transpired to be a wild Rubythroat chase. I've never seen a bird move so quickly. It was effortlessly mobile as it bounded around for the next couple of hours like a super-charged Siberian squash ball, enabling everyone to get reasonable views but only fleetingly. Just when we thought we knew where it was, cutting it off and getting everyone lined up ready for a view, it would do a Houdini. People were dropping cameras, falling in ditches left right and centre with Short-eared Owls flushing up from every tussock - there was that real buzz and excitement of a classic Fair Isle twitch.

I was made up that everyone got on the bird, with a few well-placed folk getting good views. I couldn't believe my luck, two megas in two days - Fair Isle never ceases to amaze and surprise me, and there is nowhere like it in the world to go birding.



Plate 103. Siberian Rubythroat, Bull's Park, 20th October 2015. © Steve Arlow

I know there is a lot of talk (as with many other former mythical rares) of them becoming almost annual and no longer having that same wow factor as they once did and yes, it is Britain's 12th and Fair Isle's 6th Rubythroat. But to find one, to have that sheer adrenaline and thrill of a Rubythroat flying out in front of you, was absolutely, unforgettably mind blowing.

My missus Bex, who works on the Isle of May, found two firsts for the island this year (Red Grouse and Pallid Harrier, the latter of which was also a first for the county) and is constantly reminding me that I am yet to find a first. It'll take some doing to find a first for Fair Isle, but I'll be back in 2016 trying to do just that.

## AQUATIC WARBLER, 15TH AUGUST 2015; THE 39TH FOR FAIR ISLE

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Lee Gregory

On 15th August, whilst covering South-west census on Fair Isle, I had picked up a few common migrants (several Willow, Reed and Garden Warblers, Chiffchaff plus two Barred Warblers). That was despite the moderate north-west wind and occasional heavy rain being less than ideal conditions for migrants (although it appeared that birds had probably arrived late the previous day when the wind had been in the east for a while). I approached the fenced-off area of Meadow Burn, stopped ten metres short and pished. A Reed Warbler jumped out onto the fence, then jumped back in, then another bird hopped onto the fence in the same spot. Binoculars up, "nice Sedge Warbler, hang on, it's yellow and black." It lifted its head and showed a huge central crown stripe. "Holy Moly - it's an Aquatic Warbler!" That memory will stay with me for the rest of my life, having looked at thousands of Sedge Warblers searching for an Aquatic, over the past 30 years. I fumbled with my phone and eventually managed to call or text all Obs staff and birders on the island, who quickly gathered on site and had reasonable views. Later on, after the rain, the bird showed very well with some reasonable photos being taken.

### **Description:**

A highly distinctive, heavily streaked *Acrocephalus* warbler, being yellowy/orange and black.

The head pattern was of black lateral crown stripes with a very obvious, broad yellowy/orange central crown stripe and supercilium, with a touch of apricot colour at the base of the bill, a smudgy dark eyestripe and a short moustachial stripe.

The upperparts consisted of a broad black patch running down the centre of the back, bordered by pale broad mantle braces, then more streaks on the sides of the mantle. The rump and tail were slightly richer rufous than the upperparts, with the rump covered in random black streaks and the tail being dark centred. The tips of the tail feathers were very pointed, with the outer tail feathers slightly paler, which were seen in flight. On the folded wing, the most obvious feature was the black-centred tertials with pale edges, which were the same colour as the background of the upperparts. All the other coverts were also dark-centred with pale edges, with slightly duller brown primaries compared to the tertials, with a primary projection equal to the tertial length. The underparts were creamy below, the throat was paler, with a darker wash on the flanks and upper breast, which was the same colour as the mantle. The flanks showed a series of random fine streaks.





Plate 104. Aquatic Warbler, Meadow Burn, 15th August 2015. © Lee Gregory

The legs were quite thick and pale pink, with the claws the same colour. The bill was dark blackish on the upper mandible with a pink lower mandible that showed dark smudges near the tip.

The call was a quite loud 'tack' repeated several times, which helped locate the bird as it moved through the reeds. When in the tall reeds it could be quite skulking but it would then hop up and look around with legs spread like a Bearded Tit, or it would creep out of the dense vegetation and hop along the fence, making its way along the ditch and either hopping between stems or flying low before swooping up.

It was still present and showing well the following day, but was not seen after 16th August.

Aquatic Warbler was formerly a much more regular visitor to Fair Isle, but records have tailed off in recent times and this was the first since 2006. It occurred at the peak time for the species on Fair Isle and its discovery coincided with a small movement of the species noted on the Dutch coast, with south-east winds across the North Sea no doubt being responsible for pushing this individual further off course. Incidentally, the first Sedge Warbler of the month was not seen until 24th August - there can't be many sites that get their first Aquatic of the autumn before their first Sedge!



## FAIR ISLE'S BEST EVER SEAWATCH

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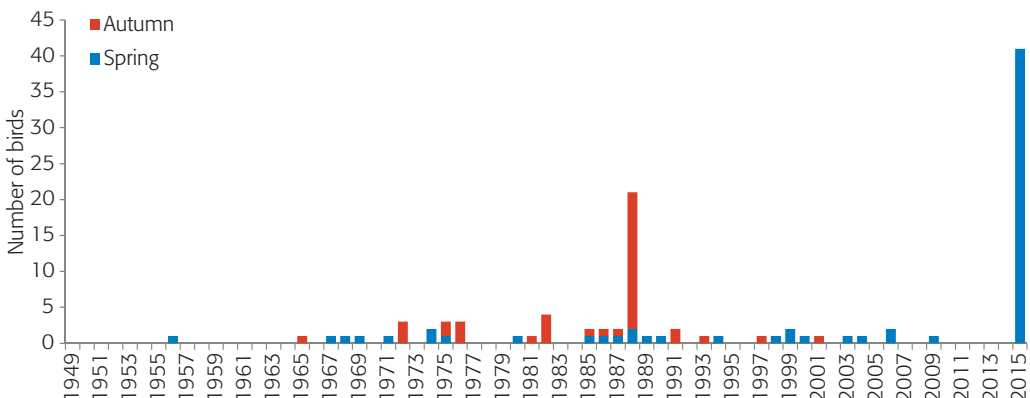
Lee Gregory and David Parnaby

With the morning of Wednesday 13th May showing a forecast of NW wind force four to six with heavy showers, and with few migrants around, it was decided that the wardening team's time would be best spent seawatching. That activity is usually a last resort on Fair Isle, but with good numbers of skuas reported passing North Ronaldsay and Mainland Shetland in previous days, it was surely worth a try. There can't be many FIBO wardens who haven't attempted to prove that spring skua passage occurs off the island since it was shown in the late 1970s that Long-tailed and Pomarine Skuas moved in large numbers up the north-west coast of Scotland (Davenport, 1979). However, despite various locations (North Light, South Light, Buness and Malcolm's Head amongst others) being tried in suitable conditions, often when birds were moving off elsewhere in Shetland, there had been no sign. In fact the highest spring day-count for both species was just two. Was Fair Isle being deliberately avoided, or had we just never hit it lucky? Either way, it was worth another try...

Jodie Crane, Ciaran Hatsell, DP and LG arrived at South Light shortly after it stopped raining heavily, at around 09:30 hrs, and positioned ourselves on the sheltered south east corner of the wall and started scanning. After a quiet 40 minutes having recorded a 'blue' Fulmar, but nothing else to trouble the notebook other than an Arctic Tern and Black-headed Gull, we were resigning ourselves to having another typical Fair Isle seawatch, but at 10:12 hrs all that changed! We picked up a group of four skuas heading north-west, all pale phase, all looking rather bulky, and as they got slightly closer, the telescope views confirmed the full sets of spoons - unbelievably they were all Pomarine Skuas. The previous highest spring day-count had just been doubled with this one flock and already the seawatch was a success! What happened next was quite remarkable. With the 'Poms' just lost to view, another group of seven small skuas was picked up in roughly the same area that we had first seen the 'Poms', although slightly further out. Looking through our scopes we had a Victor Meldrew "I don't believe it" moment - they were all adult Long-tailed Skuas! We watched incredulously as they passed but as we lost sight of these another two Long-tailed Skuas passed west, then another, and it was clear we were observing Fair Isle's first ever spring passage of skuas! A quick set of phone calls around island brought a few other people to witness the spectacle, with Chris Dodd, Susannah Parnaby and Tommy Hyndham amongst those to call in and witness the spectacle. Over the next 90 minutes the skuas kept passing, with the details as overleaf (all were adults except the Pomarine Skua at 11:33 hrs, which was noted as being a sub-adult):

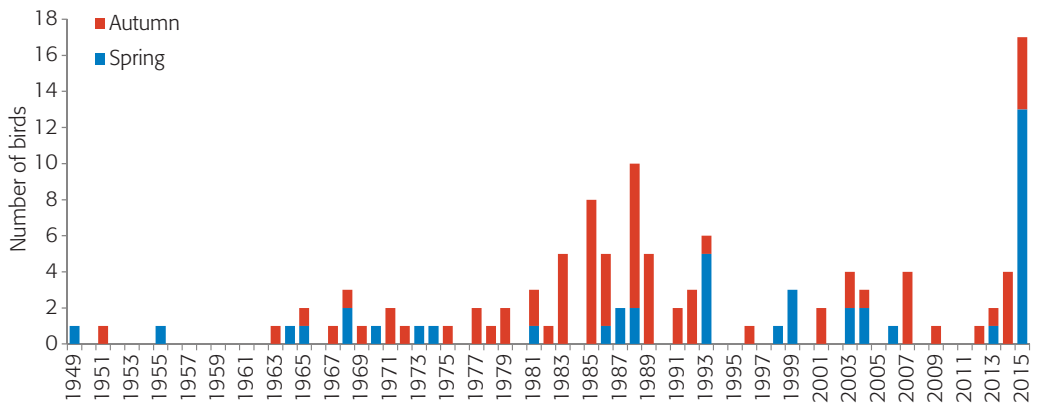
10:12 hrs: four omarine Skuas north-west  
 10:14 hrs: seven Long-tailed Skuas, north-west  
 10:16 hrs: two Long-tailed Skuas west  
 10:18 hrs: one Long-tailed Skua west  
 10:28 hrs: five Long-tailed Skuas north-west  
 10:38 hrs: three omarine Skuas north-west  
 10:43 hrs: four Long-tailed Skuas north-west  
 10:52 hrs: four Long-tailed Skuas east  
 11:05 hrs: five omarine Skuas east  
 11:11 hrs: eight Long-tailed Skuas north-west  
 11:33 hrs: one omarine and two Long-tailed Skuas east  
 11:36 hrs: three Long-tailed Skuas east  
 11:46 hrs: one Long-tailed Skua east  
 11:53 hrs: three Long-tailed Skuas north-west

The seawatch continued from 11:53 hrs until 12:30 hrs, but no other skuas were recorded. resumably the passage had stopped or they had changed their course and moved further out, but no one was complaining with 13 omarine and 40 Long-tailed Skuas. To put these numbers into conte=, the previous highest day-counts for the species had been five and 18 respectively, whilst only 67 Long-tailed Skuas had been recorded from Fair Isle before 2015. A later attempt from Buness and South Light from 14:00 hrs until 16:30 hrs was unsuccessful in recording anymore skuas, but nobody cared - surely we had witnessed Fair Isle's best ever seawatch



**Figure . Occurrence of Long-tailed Skuas (number of individuals) by season on Fair Isle 1948–2015.**

The e=ceptional movement of skuas past Fair Isle coincided with a record-breaking passage off the Outer Hebrides, with 4,640 Long-tailed and 3,004 omarine Skuas noted passing Aird an Runair during May ([www.birdguides.com web?ine=article.asp+a+5107](http://www.birdguides.com/web?ine=article.asp+a+5107)). Interestingly, the peak day during this phenomenal movement was on 12th May, when 1,310 Long-tailed and 423 omarine Skuas passed during south-south-west winds that veered north-west. It seems likely that most skuas, once they have passed the Hebrides, will continue past the west coast of Shetland (Wynn *et al.*, 2014) and indeed, the following day Shetland recorded its highest ever count, when 645 Long-tailed and 465 omarine Skuas passed shaness.



**Figure 1.** Occurrence of marine Skuas (number of individuals) by season on Fair Isle 1948–2015.

The very large numbers that had moved past the Hebrides the previous day had presumably continued on, before the north-west winds pushed them close to Shetland on 13th as they moved towards their breeding grounds in the Arctic. The birds passing Fair Isle may have been diverted further east by the winds before reaching Mainland Shetland, with the huge numbers of birds involved increasing the chances that some of them would come within range of Fair Isle.

Another possibility is that some of these birds were detected passing Fair Isle as they were relocating to the west of Shetland having cut across mainland Scotland, a regular route for at least some north-bound spring skuas (Wynn *et al.*, 2014). The discovery of spring passage of Long-tailed Skuas moving north past North Ronaldsay since 2013 (birds have been detected passing there in every attempt to see them during suitable conditions [www.northronbirdobs.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.northronbirdobs.blogspot.co.uk)) may add weight to this theory and, on 13th May 2015, 7 Long-tailed Skuas were recorded passing the most northerly of the Orkney islands, a record count for the site.

The massive passage of skuas in spring 2015 followed closely on from a very good year in 2013, in which several sites also logged record spring counts (although 2015 produced even more birds). With more observers recording skua movements in Scotland, and up-to-date information on bird movements and weather available online, there seems to be as good a chance as there has ever been that spring skua passage from Fair Isle could be predicted and hopefully a repeat occurrence could be observed.

## References:

- aven, ort .L. 19 9. Spring passage of skuas at Balranald, orth ist, tt 10: 216 220.
- ynn . . ro2n . omas . olt . . re anssen S. oe . and ilg O. 2014. Spring migration routes of Long-tailed Skuas around and across the - results of observational and tracking data. t 107: 220 228.



Plate 105. The Havens, Obs and Sheep Rock from the flight to Shetland, 8th June 2015. © Laurence McGowan



## COMMITTEE DECISIONS ON RARITIES FROM 2014

*The following records have been accepted:*

Species	Date, Location, Observers	Committee
'Taiga Bean Goose'	21 Nov, Utra, D.Parnaby	SBCRC
Mandarin Duck	29 Apr, South Harbour, P.Harvey and R.Riddington	SBCRC
Green-winged Teal	18–22 Mar, Da Water, D.Shaw <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Swinhoe's Petrel	9 Jul–1 Aug, Havens and Skadan, C.Hatsell, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Glossy Ibis	16 & 26 May, roaming, C.Hatsell, J.Hunt <i>et al.</i>	SBRC
Honey-buzzard	30 May, Furse, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Honey-buzzard	9 Jun, roaming, R.Cope <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Pallid Harrier	8–17 Sep, Da Water and roaming, R.Cope, C.Round, D.Shaw <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Rough-legged Buzzard	17 Oct, Hoini, C.Hatsell	SBCRC
Temminck's Stint	27 May, Da Water, R.Cope and D.Parnaby	SBCRC
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	10–15 Sep, Brecks, A.Ash <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Pectoral Sandpiper	3–6 Sep, Muckle Uri Geo, C.Hatsell, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Grey Phalarope	2 Oct, Da Burrian, R.Cope	SBCRC
Grey Phalarope	25–27 Oct, South Haven, C.Dodd <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Bridled Tern	16–19 Jun, Bunes and Shalstane, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Roseate Tern (two)	24 Jun, Shalstane, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Laughing Gull	19 Jun, Shalstane, P.Harris <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Barn Owl	7 Oct, Meadow Burn, J.Day <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Nightjar	26 May, Gully, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Hobby	9 Jun, Easter Lothar, D.Parnaby	SBCRC
Firecrest	15–23 Oct, Linni Geo and South Raeva, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Short-toed Lark	27 Apr–2 May, Havens, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Short-toed Lark	27 Apr–6 May, Meoness, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Short-toed Lark	27 Apr, Midway, N.Riddiford <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Short-toed Lark	9–30 May, Malcolm's Head, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Short-toed Lark	30 Aug–6 Sep, Meoness and Kenaby, R.Cope <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Short-toed Lark	18 Sep, Ward Hill, C.Hatsell	SBCRC
Short-toed Lark	23–24 Sep, North Naaversgill, R.Ahmed, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Calandra Lark	22 May, Ward Hill, D.Parnaby, D.Steel <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Greenish Warbler	6 Jun, North Haven, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Greenish Warbler	6 Aug, Gully, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Arctic Warbler	22 Aug, Chalet, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Arctic Warbler	22 Sep, North Shirva, R.Ahmed, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
'Western Subalpine Warbler'	25 Apr–2 May, Obs and South Feltsigeo, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
'Western Subalpine Warbler'	3–21 May, Burkle, D.Shaw <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
'Western Subalpine Warbler'	13 Jun, Schoolton, R.Hughes <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
'Eastern Subalpine Warbler'	8 May, Gully, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler	16–27 May, Plantation and Obs, R.Cope <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Lanceolated Warbler	22 Sep, Midway, M.Culshaw, P.Harris, M.Maher <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Paddyfield Warbler	5 Sep, Lower Leogh, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Blyth's Reed Warbler	27 May, Hill Dyke, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Blyth's Reed Warbler	13 Jun, Schoolton, R.Hughes <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Blyth's Reed Warbler	25–28 Jun, Obs, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Blyth's Reed Warbler	14 Aug, Gully, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Blyth's Reed Warbler	16 Aug, Obs, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC

Species	Date, Location, Observers	Committee
'Northern Treecreeper'	9 Oct, South Light, D.Pullan <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
White's Thrush	4 Oct, Wester Lothar, R.Cope <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Hermit Thrush	13–16 May, South Green and Furse, J.Hunt <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Grey-cheeked Thrush	24 Oct, Obs, G.Gardiner <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Red-flanked Bluetail	30 Mar–5 Apr, Klinger's and Swarzie Geos, C.Hatsell, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Red-flanked Bluetail	13–16 Oct, Obs and Skinners Glig, P.French, M.Peck <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Collared Flycatcher	28–29 May, South Naaversgill and Guidicum, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
'Caspian Stonechat'	27 Apr–30 May, Upper Leogh, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Siberian Stonechat	31 Oct–3 Nov, Barkland, C.Hatsell, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	BBRC
Olive-backed Pipit	21–22 Sep, Quoy, D.Liley <i>et al.</i>	SBRC
Olive-backed Pipit	7–13 Oct, Hjukni Geo and Pund, C.Holt <i>et al.</i>	SBRC
Olive-backed Pipit	8–18 Oct, Gully and Ditfield, D.Parnaby <i>et al.</i>	SBRC
Olive-backed Pipit	13 Oct, Kenaby, S.Colenutt	SBRC
Olive-backed Pipit	18–25 Oct, Hill Dyke and Pund, C.Hatsell, W.Miles <i>et al.</i>	SBRC
Olive-backed Pipit	19 Nov–6 Dec, Quoy, D.Shaw <i>et al.</i>	SBRC
Red-throated Pipit	20–24 Sep, Setter, C.Hatsell <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Red-throated Pipit	13–20 Oct, Hill Dyke and Buness, C.Hatsell, E.Mills <i>et al.</i>	SBCRC
Cretzschmar's Bunting	27 Apr–2 May, Burkle and Boini Mire, D.Shaw <i>et al.</i>	BBRC

*In addition, the following records that did not feature in the Annual Report were found not proven:*

'Taiga Bean Goose'	14–15 Nov, Field and Setter.	SBCRC
Olive-backed Pipit	18 Oct, Klinger's Geo.	SBCRC

#### Key to abbreviations:

**BBRC** - British Birds Rarities Committee

**SBRC** - Scottish Birds Records Committee

**SBCRC** - Shetland Bird Club Records Committee



Plate 106. Glossy Ibises, Obs scrape, 2nd October 2015. © Ian Andrews

# CETACEANS AND OTHER MARINE WILDLIFE

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David Parnaby

For recording purposes Fair Isle cetacean sightings include all those in 'Fair Isle waters' (i.e. half way from Fair Isle to Shetland, usually made from the Good Shepherd) as well as those from land. For the sake of completeness all sightings made from the Good Shepherd in 'Shetland waters' are also included here.

## **Minke Whale**

*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

*Annual visitor in small numbers, most records from May to September, usually seen singly*

In June there were sightings from the Good Shepherd on 6th and 20th (two) and one from North Light on 25th. The next were not seen until August when two were seen from the Good Shepherd on 25th and one was off Bunness on 28th. There were sightings from the Good Shepherd on 8th September, Ditfield on 19th September and two were seen on 18th October (from North Lighthouse and South Harbour).

In addition, singles were seen from the Good Shepherd in 'Shetland waters' on 8th September and 13th October.

## **Risso's Dolphin**

*Grampus griseus*

*Annual visitor, most records in August and September, usually in groups of up to a dozen*

There were two off North Light on 30th May, then an impressive run of sightings in the autumn. After at least three were seen off Bunness on 26th August, there were then sightings on 14 further dates until 4th October. The maximum count during this time was 19 on 19th September and calves were seen on several dates, with at least three noted on 29th September. It was presumed that the sightings referred to a lingering group (or groups), which often performed some spectacular acrobatics close in shore.

## **White-sided Dolphin**

*Lagenorhynchus acutus*

*Scarce visitor, most records from July to October, usually in small groups*

There were no sightings in 'Fair Isle waters', but two or three were seen seven miles south of Sumburgh from the Good Shepherd on 8th September.



Plates 107–109. Risso's Dolphins, (Top and middle) Buness, 6th August 2015. © Lee Gregory. (Bottom): Dronger, 29th September 2015. © David Parnaby



## **White-beaked Dolphin** *Lagenorhynchus albirostris* *Regular visitor, most records from July to September, usually in small groups*

Unusually, there were no sightings during the year other than small groups seen from the Good Shepherd in 'Shetland waters' not far south of Sumburgh Head on 2nd July and 29th September.

## **Killer Whale** *Orcinus orca* *Annual visitor, often with several sightings of individuals or small groups during the year. Can occur in any month, but most regular between March and September*

There was only one sighting in the spring, when three, including two bulls, passed north up the east coast on 23rd April. One of the bulls had a collapsed fin and the suspicion it could have been the same animal that was seen off Fair Isle in June 2013 was seemingly confirmed when it reappeared off Yell (Shetland) five days later, where it was photographed. These images showed matching features with the animal seen two years earlier from Fair Isle, which has since been identified by Dr Andy Foote as an animal whose fin collapsed sometime between 2010 and 2012. It went on to linger in the Northern Isles until at least July before being seen in Iceland in October. An impressive run of autumn sightings began in September, with eight off North Light on 8th, seven off Bunness on 19th and eight from the Good Shepherd just off Da Nizz on 29th. October also saw several sightings, with two on 1st, five (including a calf) on 2nd, eight off Rippack on 13th, three off North Light on 16th, three small groups seen from a DirectFlight plane on 19th and two off Bunness on 25th.

## **Harbour Porpoise** *Phocoena phocoena* *Recorded in small numbers from May to October*

After one on 25th June, there were sightings of up to six (including a calf) daily from 24th–26th July and up to six on four dates in August. September saw records on seven dates (including a calf on 6th), with a maximum of 12, and sightings on four dates the following month peaked at 15 on 13th October.

In addition there were sightings on six dates from the Good Shepherd in 'Shetland waters' between 16th May and 8th September, including an impressive loose aggregation of around 70 on the latter date.

## **Unidentified cetaceans**

There were three unidentified dolphins on 19th April off Kirk Stack and two on 19th September.

In addition, two sightings of unidentified dolphins from the Good Shepherd in 'Shetland waters' included at least four on 15th August that were thought to be either Common or Striped Dolphins.

## Other Marine Wildlife

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### Grey Seal

*Halichoerus grypus*

The first pups were noted on 24th September when two were seen dead in Muckle Geo o'Hoini, with the next not seen until 10th October and the bulk being pupped later that month. A total of 57 pups were noted, an increase on recent years, with more than half of them being born in Gunnawark, Jivvy Geo and Kroga Geo.

### Common Seal

*Phoca vitulina*

There were two on 2nd and one on 23rd February, with one regularly in South Harbour from 7th April to 6th May and again on 22nd June. Sightings of a single from 19th September continued irregularly until the end of the year, usually in the Havens, with two on 20th September.

### Basking Shark

*Cetorhinus maximus*

In a good year for sightings of this species, the first was an individual estimated to be six metres in length that was seen close in to the west of North Light before drifting off towards the Stacks. Another was seen off North Light on 8th September, with what may have been the same animal on 10th in Furse (when it was estimated to be between three and four metres in length) and off Bunes on 19th September.

### Spotted Ray

*Raja montagui*

An egg-case of this species was found in South Haven on 2nd December.

### Thornback Ray

*Raja clavata*

The remains of a dead individual were washed up in South Haven on 27th November.

### Eel

*Anguilla anguilla*

There were three sightings in the Gilsetter and Gully area between 15th July and 4th November, all of animals up to 40cm in length. On the latter date a 30cm individual eventually managed to escape from the clutches of a determined Goosander that had trapped it in a small pool in the Gully!

## INSECTS AND OTHER NON-AVIAN HIGHLIGHTS

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Lee Gregory and Nick Riddiford



### Butterflies

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#### White sp.

The only 'white' recorded during the year was one on 16th May.

*Pieris* sp.

#### Painted Lady

A quiet summer for this species with the first on 23rd June and just four other singletons until 12th July. A good autumn passage started with singles on 8th, 10th and 16th August, with counts rising daily to 39 on 23rd then decreasing to one by the month's end. In September six singles were recorded, with the last record of the year being on 24th.

*Vanessa cardui*

#### Red Admiral

There were just three sightings in June with the first of the year on 6th then further singles on the 8th and 15th. July was slightly better with five on 2nd then three singles scattered throughout the month. A good showing in the autumn included records on 12 dates in August from 16th, with a peak count of 16 on 24th. There were records on eight dates in September, with a peak of four on 11th, and nine dates in October, including six on 13th, with the last of the year on 19th.

*Vanessa atalanta*

#### Peacock

A very poor showing for this species with the first of the year on the late date of 21st August followed by another on 28th, none in September then three singles in October from 11th–15th.

*Aglais io*

#### Small Tortoiseshell

Another species with low numbers recorded, with just three seen. The first of the year was on 30th August with others on 10th and 29th September.

*Aglais urticae*

Plate 110. 'Shetland Bee' on Meadow Vetchling and Spring Squill, Chapel, 7th June 2015. © Ian Andrews

## Moth Summary

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Moth traps were operated on all suitable nights from mid-summer to late autumn at the Observatory, Schoolton and Lower Stoneybrek. Sugaring was also conducted at Schoolton during that time.

The highlights from the moth trapping sessions at the Observatory were the first Dotted Clay *Xestia baja* for Fair Isle on 14th August and the third Thistle Ermine *Myelois circumvoluta* for Fair Isle and Shetland on 3rd July. The latter also extended the northernmost record for Britain by a kilometre or so, the last being at Barkland on 16th June 2002. A Dotted Rustic *Rhyacia simulans* attracted to sugar at Schoolton on 24th August was the second Fair Isle record. There have been no other Shetland records in the last 71 years.



Plates 111–113. (clockwise) Red Sword-grass, Autumn Green Carpet and Convolvulus Hawkmoth. © Lee Gregory



The Observatory moth trap ran on 49 dates between 15th June and 18th October, with a total of 1,370 moths of 34 species trapped (23 macro moths and 11 micro moths). The peak period was from mid-July until late August, with 215 moths of 14 species on 13th August representing the best catch of the year.

**Table 1.** Summary of moths trapped at FIBO in 2015.

Macro Moths							
Name	Scientific name	First date	Last date	No. of nights trapped	Max. catch	Max. catch date	Total individuals
Map-winged Swift	<i>Hepialus fusconebulosa</i>	19th Jun	23rd Aug	17	4	3rd July	31
Silver-ground Carpet	<i>Xanthorhoe montanata</i>	27th Jun	19th Sep	6	1		6
Garden Carpet	<i>Xanthorhoe fluctuata</i>	13th Aug	16th Aug	3	2	14th Aug	4
Autumn Green Carpet	<i>Chloroclysta miata</i>	17th Oct		1	1		1
Magpie Moth	<i>Abraxas grossulariata</i>	14th Jul	1st Aug	5	1		5
Dark Sword-grass	<i>Agrostis ipsilon</i>	15th Aug	17th Oct	5	1		5
Northern Rustic	<i>Standfussiana lucerneae</i>	14th Jul	20th Sep	18	3	"5 dates 19th Jul–22nd Aug"	32
Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	14th Jul	16th Oct	17	6	22nd Aug	28
Autumnal Rustic	<i>Eugnorisma glareosa</i>	13th Aug	17th Sep	8	7	23rd Aug	22
True-lover's Knot	<i>Lycophotia porphyrea</i>	5th Jul	22nd Aug	25	74	10th Aug	439
Ingrailed Clay	<i>Diarsia mendica</i>	15th Jul	14th Aug	14	21	13th Aug	76
Small-square Spot	<i>Diarsia rubi</i>	16th Jul	22nd Aug	16	10	30th Jul	49
Dotted Clay	<i>Xestia baja</i>	14th Aug		1	1		1
Square-spot Rustic	<i>Xestia xanthographa</i>	9th Aug	19th Sep	10	3	14th Aug	16
Marbled Coronet	<i>Hadena confusa</i>	14th Jul	1st Aug	7	2	14th & 19th Jul	9
Antler	<i>Cerapteryx graminis</i>	27th Jul	23rd Aug	13	18	22nd Aug	100
Red Sword-grass	<i>Xylota vetusta</i>	16th Oct		1	1		1
Angle Shades	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>	17th Sep	17th Oct	4	1		4
Dark Arches	<i>Apamea monoglypha</i>	9th Jul	19th Sep	29	82	13th Aug	343
Confused	<i>Apamea furva</i>	6th Aug	14th Aug	2	1		2
Common Rustic	<i>Mesapamea secalis</i>	21st Aug	22nd Aug	2	3	22nd Aug	5
Rosy Rustic	<i>Hydraecia micacea</i>	16th Aug	18th Oct	12	14	19th Sep	40
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gama</i>	15th Jun	17th Oct	6	1		6
Micro Moths							
Name	Scientific name	First date	Last date	No. of nights trapped	Max. catch	Max. catch date	Total individuals
	<i>Coleophora discordella</i>	14th Aug		1	1		1
Diamond-back Moth	<i>Plutella xylostella</i>	4th Jul	22nd Aug	4	2	22nd Aug	5
	<i>Eana osseana</i>	8th Aug	23rd Aug	6	24	13th Aug	67
	<i>Eana penziana</i>	19th Jul	23rd Aug	13	3	23rd Aug	19
	<i>Acleris aspersana</i>	12th Aug	23rd Aug	3	4	13th Aug	8
	<i>Acleris hyemana</i>	16th Oct		1	1		1
	<i>Lobesia littoralis</i>	7th Aug	10th Aug	2	2	10th Aug	3
Thistle Ermine	<i>Myelois circumvoluta</i>	3rd Jul		1	1		1
	<i>Scoparia ambigualis</i>	6th Jul		1	1		1
	<i>Crambus lathoniellus</i>	19th Jul		1	5	19th Jul	5
	<i>Agriphila staminella</i>	24th Jul	22nd Aug	9	14	13th Aug	34

Find of the year, however, was away from the traps. On 20th August a colourful micro was intercepted on low heath near the school. It required two months and the opinion of a Swedish expert to identify it as *Phyllonorycter apparella*. This constitutes the first record for the British Isles of this leaf-mining moth and follows two years of explosive abundance in southern Scandinavia. It is unlikely to breed on the isle because its host plant, Aspen *Populus tremula*, is not present. Population pressure presumably prompted it to disperse across the North Sea.

The Silver Y *Autographa gamma* is a much more familiar migrant, only a tiny proportion of which enter the traps. The first of the year was on 29th May. It was recorded on twelve dates in June with a peak of six on 6th, nine dates in July with a peak of at least 20 on 2nd (and one found hitching a lift on the Good Shepherd on the 18th!), fifteen dates in August with peak of 176 on 23rd dropping slightly to 161 the next day, then back to more normal numbers of 11 on 25th. In September it was noted on seventeen dates with a peak of seven on 25th, on thirteen dates in October 13 with a peak of ten on 25th and just one November record on 3rd.

The Diamond-back Moth *Plutella xylostella*, another migrant day-flying moth, had a very poor showing compared to 2014 with just one seen on 2nd July and only a few attracted to the moth trap.

In recent years the Magpie *Abraxas grossulariata* has become a familiar late July–early August migrant in growing numbers. However, that trend may be at an end. In 2015 it was recorded on seven dates beginning with just two individuals on 14th July, then singles on five dates to 8th August.

Other species of interest recorded away from the moth traps included Netted Pug *Eupithecia venosata* (Obs 24th June), Yellow Shell *Camptogramma bilineata* (Pietron 2nd July, Obs 21st July and 11th August), Hummingbird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum* (Quoy 11th July, Setter 29th September) and Convolvulus Hawk-moth *Agrius convolvuli* (Schoolton, 15th September).

As observers become more skilful in the identification of micro moths (helped by recent field guides) more attention is being paid to this group. The Bilberry Tortrix *Aphelia viburnana* is super abundant and given to a tightly synchronised emergence of many thousands over a period of just a few days in all heath and moorland areas. The mass emergence in 2015 peaked on 15th July from ten or so on 5th July. Another species with a synchronised emergence is *Phaulernis fulvigtella*, out in force on 27th July with records through to 7th August. *Udea lutealis* is the most familiar day-flying micro in the south of the isle with a liking for damp, rough grassland and gardens. It has a much longer flight period which spans mid-July to end of August. A *Rhigognostis senilella* was noted at Barkland on 23rd August (and another trapped at Schoolton on 12th) and Rush Veneers *Nomophila noctuella* at Schoolton (trapped, 18th July), Hoini (17th August) and Da Water. The last is one of the commonest migrant micros throughout Europe but few stray as far north as Fair Isle.

## Other Notable Insects

### 'Shetland Bee'

*Bombus muscorum agricolae*

The first individual was seen on 24th May then recorded regularly until 4th October.

### Green Lacewing

*Chrysoperla carnea* agg.

Just three individuals were recorded; 14th April, 5th July and 13th October.

### Migratory Locust

*Locusta migratoria*

One flushed at Burkle on 29th September was then amazingly relocated and trapped at the School. It was fed in captivity at Schoolton until its eventual demise on 27th October. This remarkable first for Fair Isle arrived on the back of winds that originated from a long way east in the preceding days, suggesting it may have originated in central Asia. There are only two previous records for Shetland, the last in October 1939, and this was the first for Fair Isle.



Plates 114–115. Nick Riddiford with Migratory Locust, School, 29th September 2015. © Ian Andrews

### Leaf-miner Fly

*Chromatomyia horticola*

Two leaf-miner occupied leaves were collected from a marsh ragwort *Senecio aquaticus* outside the Obs on 15th August and retained until two small flies emerged eight and nine days later. These were identified by John Deeming (Univ. Wales Museum) as the Agromyzid *Chromatomyia horticola*.

## A few more firsts for Fair Isle

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### Black Horehound

*Ballota nigra*

A clump of Black Horehound, a plant not known from Shetland, was found in a 'wildlife' part of Setter garden. It was growing in the shade of recently planted shrubs, including apple *Malus*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, and is thus clearly a casual arriving (presumably as seed) with the shrubs.

### Fungi

Three newcomers were recorded during the year. A small number of the bracket fungus *Melanotus horizontalis* have appeared on a rung of the ladder accessing the Gully bird trap, while at Quoy a whole colony of another bracket fungus, the Split Gill *Schizophyllum commune* emerged from a tree trunk found floating on the sea and brought ashore only a few months earlier. In October, two small colonies of the Eyelash Fungus *Scutellinia kerguelensis* were found on a muddy footpath behind the Houll.

They all have their story. The *Scutellinia* was first described from a south Pacific island but is now known to be widespread. The *Melanotus* has been spreading in the UK in recent years. Split Gill was rare before expanding its range after the Second World War. Both the bracket fungi may have colonised from wind-borne spores. However, the occurrence of split gill on a tree trunk pulled from the sea raises the possibility that spores had survived prolonged exposure to the sea. Wind-borne spores may also explain the *Scutellinia* appearance. However, the track is used by numerous birdwatchers and it is feasible that the fungus came as spores on their boots!

### Lichens

The lichens received their first expert attention since Ursula Duncan's visit in 1961. In a week's intensive investigation, Steve Price of the British Lichen Society added no fewer than 49 species to the Fair Isle list. The British Lichen Society is bringing a group to Fair Isle in 2016 and it is hoped there will be a more detailed write-up of Fair Isle's lichens in that year's Annual Report.

### Acknowledgements

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Help with identifications and provision of further information was provided by Prof. Roy Watling (fungi), Dr John Deeming (fly), Shetland Wildlife Club (locust), Steve Price (lichens), Dr Mark Young & Dr Bengt Bengtsson (moths).



# BATS ON FAIR ISLE IN 2015 AND A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF BAT RECORDS

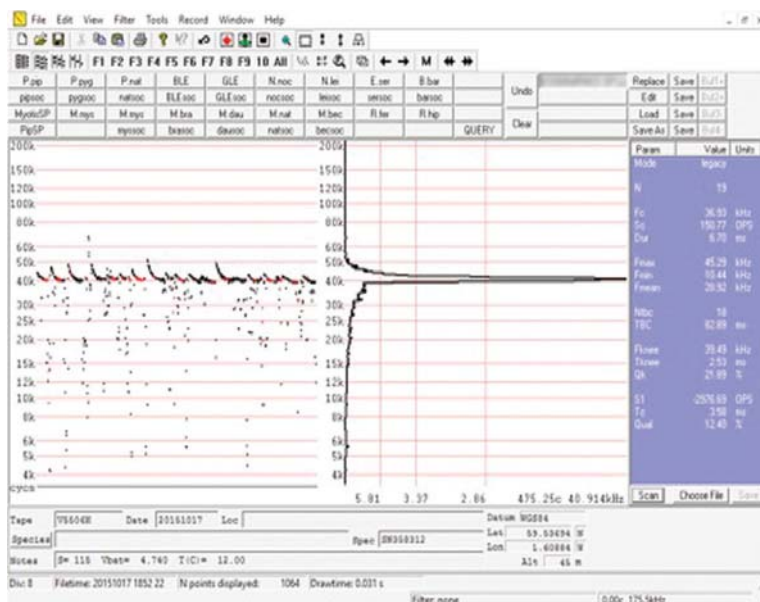
Andrew Chick and David Parnaby

During 16th–21st October, a single Anabat Express (a passive bat recorder that records any sounds detected within the range of bat calls) was left recording between dusk and dawn on Fair Isle by Andrew Chick, a visitor to the Obs. It was located at the Obs every night except 19th, when it was placed at Chalet. Although bats are known from Fair Isle only as rare vagrants, their largely nocturnal behaviour means that they may be under-recorded. Remarkably, this speculative effort resulted in three bat calls being recorded on the night of 17th October, two from a Nathusius' Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii* and a single Common Pipistrelle *P.pipistrellus*, the latter being the first confirmed record from Fair Isle. There were no other bat calls recorded during the period (nor were any recorded during two nights' effort in Lerwick on 15th and 22nd October).

Data collected from the static Anabat Express was analysed with the aid of Anabat software and produced the following results:

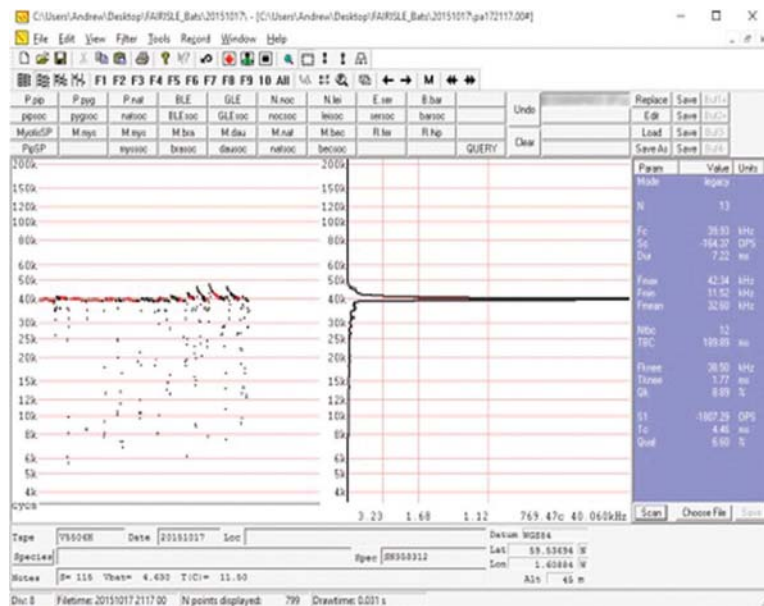
## Nathusius' Pipistrelle

The call range frequency for this species is 35.5–41.9 kHz (Russ, 2012). Two calls were recorded within this frequency, at 18:52hrs (Figure 1) and 21:17hrs (Figure 2).



**Figure 1.** Call of Nathusius' Pipistrelle recorded at Fair Isle Bird Observatory at 18:52hrs on 17th October 2015; the frequency for this call is 39.49 kHz.

**Figure 2.** Call of Nathusius' Pipistrelle recorded at Fair Isle Bird Observatory at 21:17hrs on 17th October 2015; the frequency for this call is 38.50 kHz.

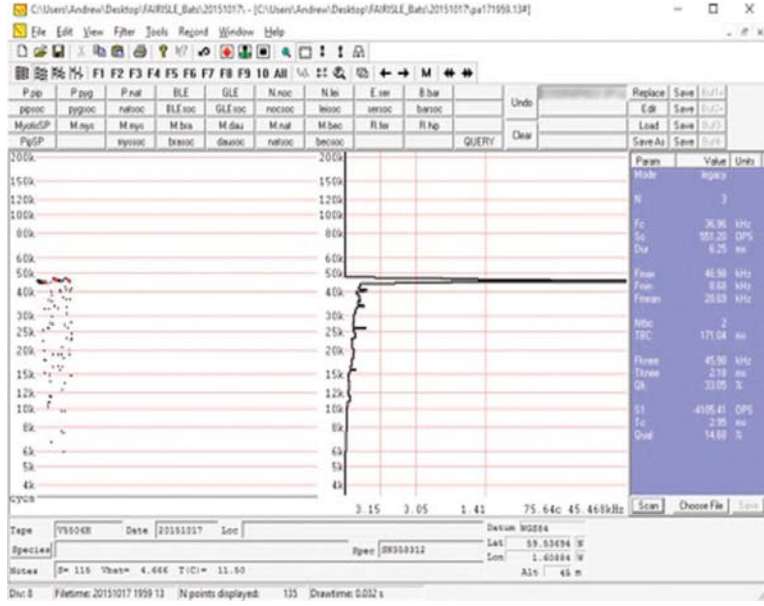


Both of these calls are presumed to relate to the same individual, given the rarity of bat records on Fair Isle. This species was confirmed as resident in the UK as recently as 1997 ([www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)) but is also a strongly migrant species. Although specific identification is difficult unless it is caught or its call is recorded, it is thought to be the species that occurs most frequently in Shetland ([www.nature-shetland.co.uk](http://www.nature-shetland.co.uk)).

## Common Pipistrelle

The call range for this species is 43.3–49.9 kHz (Russ, 2012) and a call within this frequency was recorded at 19:59hrs.

**Figure 3.** Call of Common Pipistrelle recorded at Fair Isle Bird Observatory at 19:59hrs on 17th October 2015; the frequency for this call is 45.98 kHz.



This remarkable record represents the first proven occurrence of this species on Fair Isle and Shetland. Although it is possible that some of the earlier unspecified pipistrelles may have been this species, it is notable that all those examined in the hand have proved to be Nathusius' Pipistrelle.

To put the night of 17th October 2015 into context, all other bat records from Fair Isle are collated below:

### **Nathusius' Pipistrelle**

3rd May 1989	flown to Aberdeen and released
26th October 2011	found exhausted at Barkland during strong easterly winds and rain, later released on Fair Isle after a short period of recuperation.

### **Pipistrelle sp.**

27th September 1973	found roosting in a wall at Skerryholm but later died
3rd June 2006	seen in South Ramnigeo in flight, considered 'almost certainly <i>Pipistrellus</i> sp'
31st May 2009	one seen in flight at Chalet, considered to be probably a pipistrelle sp

### **Bat sp.**

23rd May 1968	one seen in flight in Kroga Geo
22nd August 1996	a 'small bat' seen in flight at Field
13th October 2004	one seen in flight at the Chapel
11th June 2011	one in flight over the Vaadal, described as 'rather pale and larger than a pipistrelle'

It is possible that some earlier records were not documented, but it is clear that bats have always been very rare visitors to Fair Isle, although this year's records hints at further discoveries to be made.

A detailed review of all Shetland bat records up to the end of 2013 by Paul Harvey can be found at <http://www.scottishbats.org.uk/documents/volume-6/the-occurrence-of-bats-in-shetland-paul-harvey.pdf> .

Many thanks to Nick Riddiford and Paul Harvey for help in collation of the Fair Isle bat records and to Micky Maher for commenting on the identification of the Common Pipistrelle.

### **References:**

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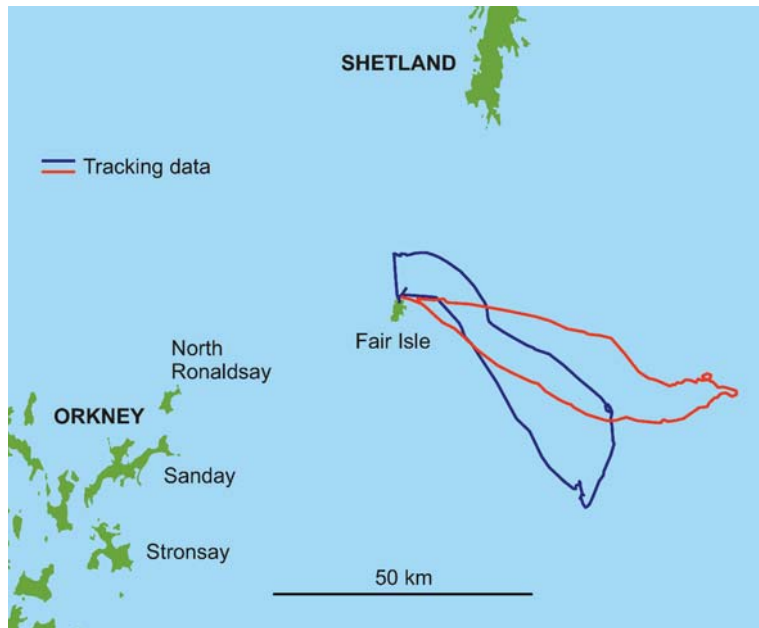
Russ, J. 2012. British Bat Calls: A Guide to Species Identification, Pelagic Publishing.

# RSPB (STAR) SEABIRD TRACKING PROJECT

## Jodie Crane

Data collection for the RSPB Seabird Tracking and Research project (previously FAME) continued for the sixth consecutive year on Fair Isle in 2015. Fair Isle is one of a number of important sites around the UK where the RSPB uses GPS technology to track the movements of breeding seabirds whilst they forage at sea. Such data are vital to understand which at-sea areas are utilised by seabirds, and to inform conservation and management strategies, thus helping to minimise the impact of human activities on breeding seabirds.

**Figure 1.** GPS foraging tracks for two incubating Guillemots from the Easter Lothar colony.



This year, the Fair Isle STAR team consisted of Jodie Crane (Senior Research Assistant), and Jessica Walkup (Research Assistant). Tracking efforts were focused on Razorbills and Guillemots at three breeding colonies around Fair Isle: Easter Lothar, Gunnawark, and South Ramnigeo. The study used miniature GPS loggers, which were temporarily attached to the birds' dorsal feathers to track their foraging movements. We continued to use 'IgotU' GPS loggers, which require the individual bird being tracked to be recaptured in order to download the data, but also trialled new 'Mataki' tags, that allow data to be retrieved remotely. Despite limited site access for several weeks due to an unusually wet spring, 16 foraging tracks from 12 individuals were recorded: four from Guillemots and 12 from Razorbills. Breeding productivity was generally good for both species. All Razorbills were found to travel south-west from Fair Isle, with major foraging sites located around north-east Orkney





Plate 116. Ringing Razorbills, Mavers Geo, 14th July 2015. © Lee Gregory

and the Pentland Firth, over 130km away. Guillemots were found to be travelling to a site ~80km south-east from Fair Isle that has never previously been recorded (Figure 1), suggesting a possible change in prey availability.

The team was joined once again by Aberdeen University student Marianna Chimienti, who is undertaking a PhD in collaboration with the RSPB and Marine Scotland. Her work aims to characterise the foraging behaviour of different species of diving seabirds in order to understand the potential impact of renewable energy developments. To do this, accelerometers were deployed in conjunction with GPS tags. Two accelerometers were successfully retrieved from Guillemots, revealing dives to depths of over 150m.

Data from STAR are publicly available and can be accessed by emailing RSPB's conservation data management unit ([cdmu@rspb.org.uk](mailto:cdmu@rspb.org.uk)); the unit also holds an up-to-date list of all the tracking data they have available.

We are very grateful to Fair Isle Bird Observatory for their generosity in providing us with food and accommodation throughout the field season, and assisting in the access to South Ramnigeo by boat. Thanks again to David and Susannah Parnaby and the rest of the Observatory's staff and volunteers for their kind hospitality.

## ENCOURAGING THE NEXT GENERATION AT FIBO

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Fair Isle Bird Observatory has inspired and educated many visitors over the years and many leading ornithologists cite a visit to FIBO as an important part of their formative years. To keep that trend going, FIBO aims to support younger visitors in a number of ways and we encourage anybody who is interested in visiting the Observatory in any capacity to get in touch.

### **Simon Aspinall Bursary Fund (SABF) & John Harrison Memorial Fund (JHMF)**

These two funds provide financial assistance in the form of grants to anyone between the ages of 16 and 24 (inclusive) to enable them to visit Fair Isle and take part in the daily work schedule of the Observatory. The JHMF was established in 1968 by Richard Richardson in memory of John Harrison who visited Fair Isle three times before he died at the early age of 19. The SABF was established in 2015 by Jack and Sylvia Aspinall to honour the memory of their son Simon who was an assistant warden at FIBO in 1987, revisiting the island in subsequent years with his brother Richard to undertake research on the 'Fair Isle Wren'. Simon died in 2011, aged 53, from motor neurone disease.



Plate 117. Simon Aspinall (1958–2011). © Sharif Jbour

Grants normally cover the cost of travel by the most economical means possible to the Observatory and back home. Whilst at the Observatory awardees are required to pay £14 per night, which covers full board and lodgings. Volunteers who gain these grants are a full part of the wardening team whilst staying at the Obs and may end up helping out with any of the work that the Observatory undertakes and full details can be found on the FIBO website.

### **Ornithological Volunteers**

For £14 a night, visitors of any age can join the wardening team in their duties when space at the Obs allows. The Obs also regularly takes domestic and bar volunteers (who stay for free in return for working at the Obs), who get spare time to enjoy the island and are often able to help out with the wardening team's work.

### **Young Person Discount**

For anyone aged 25 or under, there is a special rate of £35 per night (full board) for staying at the Obs as a visitor throughout the year (possibly sharing a single-sex room). From 2017, the discount will apply for the whole year, including the peak autumn migration period.

## MY FAIR ISLE EXPERIENCE 7th–29th August

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### Tom Gale - recipient of JHMF grant

In December 2014, I received the much anticipated email regarding my JHMF application. Success - I was going to Fair Isle! The idea of staying in one of the most remote locations in Britain led me to spend the next seven months in uncontrollable excitement, constantly looking through photographs and reports of the wildlife and scenery of Fair Isle and wondering what experiences were in store for me. That was a great thing to look forward to whilst doing my GCSE exams.

Simply getting to Fair Isle was enough of an adventure itself, especially since it was about as far away in the British Isles as I could possibly get from my home in Devon. The journey involved a flight, two ferry crossings and countless bus and taxi journeys. However, this was all worth it by the time I arrived at Fair Isle on board the Good Shepherd IV amidst hundreds of Puffins and an array of other seabirds. As I stepped off onto the quay at the North Haven, I was greeted by the ranger who took me up to the observatory in the perfect sunshine. Despite what I had heard about the weather in the Northern Isles, most of the days to follow were similar, with persistent rain on only two or three of the days during my stay.

On each day for the next three weeks, I would accompany one of the wardening team around their allocated area (each of which covers a third of the island), as they completed the daily census. It was their job to record all sightings of each species of bird seen, excluding some of the resident birds and seabirds, and report their sightings at the daily Log in the evening. On some days, there were considerable falls of birds and it was wonderful to experience movements of more common migrants, such as Pied Flycatchers and Willow Warblers, as well as witnessing a passage of waders. Fair Isle is renowned for the incredible number of rarities that make landfall there and during my stay it certainly lived up to this reputation, despite being very early on in the autumn. Perhaps the most memorable moments for me were being shown a very confiding Thrush Nightingale by one of the assistant wardens whilst out on census and finding a Greenish Warbler in the Observatory garden.

On most mornings, I would get up at 6:30am to participate in the morning trap round. It was very interesting to see the Helgoland traps and witness them in action, as they were a completely different concept to using mist nets, which is the most common method used on the mainland and by the group that I go ringing with. During my stay, I witnessed a wide variety of birds caught and ringed with the traps and also got the opportunity to ring some exciting birds, such as an Icterine Warbler, which was the first bird I caught using the traps. One thing in particular that Fair Isle is renowned for is Storm Petrel ringing. Although we only had the chance to do this once due to the wind conditions, it was an incredible thing to take part in. Between 23:00 hrs and



Plate 118. Aquatic Warbler.  
© Tom Gale

around three in the morning, we caught 226 Storm Petrels. Despite limiting the amount of petrel ringing we could do, the stormy nights did provide perfect conditions to go 'dazzling', with the aim to catch waders and ducks. On two occasions we caught a huge variety of waders, such as Redshanks, Dunlins, and even a Little Stint. Being able to participate in these ringing sessions was one of the things that made my visit to Fair Isle so unforgettable.

Apart from the migrant bird census and ringing work, there were plenty of other jobs to be getting on with whilst I was on Fair Isle. A considerable amount of my time working was spent digging a wader scrape at Utra, which for some reason I found quite fun, as well as untangling chicken wire whilst repairing fences around the Observatory garden. I also spent some days searching through years' worth of ringing data to find information about birds that had been recovered either dead or retrapped elsewhere. Arriving in early August, I was just in time to catch the last trip to Greenholm to monitor nest productivity of Fulmars and Puffins. We took a Zodiac round the east coast of the isle (and through Sheep Rock!) to the small 'island' where we scrambled up the rocks to face the Fulmars' artillery of regurgitated fish oil. I warn you, they have remarkably good aim!

On a similar theme, another seabird related job was monitoring Bonxie nest productivity which involved dodging the bombardments of the adults and counting the number of chicks in different areas. After spending three and a half weeks with these birds, seeing their impressive display flights and watching their little disputes (and trying not to be involved in them myself), I developed a completely new perspective on a bird that I had previously only seen miles out at sea through a telescope off a headland.

Aside from all of the birds and work at the Observatory, one of the most wonderful parts of Fair Isle was experiencing such a happy community on one of the smallest and most remote places in the British Isles. All the islanders are extremely friendly and make you feel at home within hours of arriving on the isle. My most memorable example of this was the Obs space party. All of the islanders and guests gathered together in a splendid selection of space-themed costumes for an evening at the Bird Observatory. I managed to salvage an R2-D2 costume out of a few cardboard boxes and permanent markers, although it wasn't quite on a par with the costumes of the islanders and Observatory staff, which featured tin-foil hats, trumpets, and even fishing buoys, I did wonder exactly how much time they had spent thinking about their costumes! On that night we saw a perseid meteor shower (which was the reason for having a space party) and the Northern Lights showed shortly after I went to sleep.

All too soon, the three weeks passed and it was time for me to go home. During this time I saw some amazing birds and gained some valuable experience of conservation work and ringing. This, along with simply being part of the Bird Observatory and getting to know the people who run it, made my time of Fair Isle one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life. I have no doubt that one day I will make the long journey back to this wonderful island.



## MY FAIR ISLE EXPERIENCE 2nd–21st July

### Suzanne Rex - recipient of JHMF grant

I volunteered to work at the Fair Isle Bird Observatory for two and half weeks in July in order to find out more about conservation work with birds. The ferry crossing to get there was an unpleasant experience for someone who apparently gets sea sick! However, as soon as I arrived many of the islanders were there to help me off the boat and were asking how I was - what friendly people live on Fair Isle. I arrived in the evening and so I was given time the following morning to wander around the island. I must have taken at least 100 pictures of all the birds, funny-looking sheep and spectacular views that I saw. The sparsely laid out houses were very different to what I'm used to in city life.

A lot of the work I did at the Observatory was incredibly rewarding. Where else would you get the chance to try ringing Great Skua, Puffin or Shag chicks? The diversity of bird species on the island is incredible. In order to help out at the Observatory other work was also required such as fence building, weeding or my personal favourite - clearing the pond of plants for the migrating birds to use! Most of this work was done when the mist was too thick to do bird monitoring work.

Some of the bird monitoring work I did included checking Gannet and Shag nests for the presence of parent birds and the size of the chicks. There were also quite a few nights that we caught Storm Petrels to be ringed, measured and released. This was another species, along with numerous others, which I had never seen before. Another day my volunteer buddy and I went looking for Great Skua pellets to later dissect in order to find out about their diets. It turned out they are not very fussy eaters and prey included a variety of fish and birds, including Puffins! While in the Great Skua territory, the parent birds will try and attack from above as they are protecting their chicks sitting amongst the heather. The nearby Arctic Skuas can be even more vicious! It definitely keeps you alert though and makes for a good story. I was only hit once when I didn't see the bird coming at me and found out that their feet give an impressive slap!

My favourite part of my time on Fair Isle were both times I went in the Zodiac boat to Greenholm where there are Puffin burrows. Here the chicks are taken out of the burrows in order to measure their wing length, general size and weight. It was amazing to be able to hold and measure the Puffin chicks, and the second time was on my last day which was a perfect end to the trip. The group of people I worked with at the Observatory are great and make it more fun, and overall I would say my time there was a unique experience which I am glad I did.



Plate 119. Suzanne Rex, Obs, 4 July 2015. © David Parnaby

# FIBOT FINANCIAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR 2015

Mike Wood

2015 was yet another excellent year for the FIBO as a business, with a record figure for guest-house income and a similar number of guest bed-nights to our record in 2014. The guest bed-nights and guest-house income figures for the years since 2004 (excluding the 'Observatory rebuild' years) are below.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Bednights	2,567	2,739	2,610	3,047	2,977	2,972	2,905	3,147	3,277	3,247
Income (£)	94,343	101,388	99,328	119,400	111,897	146,977	164,011	181,262	191,467	192,102

Our target is to maintain the number of revenue-earning guest-nights at around 3100 per year, so the recent years are encouraging steps against that objective. Key to achieving the target is the value-for-money, comfort and hospitality enjoyed by our guests. Approximately 96% of our recent guests rate the Observatory as "Excellent" or "Very Good" according to Trip Advisor. Many guests have commented favourably on the quiet, warm and comfortable accommodation, excellent food including special dietary requirements, brilliant scenic views, well-stocked bar and the unique, friendly ambience of the Observatory. More than that, they have enjoyed a range of different experiences within a few days that is arguably unique.

With flights to and from the Shetland mainland every day except Sunday during the summer, together with three days on which the Good Shepherd sails between Fair Isle and Shetland, getting to and from the island is much easier and more predictable than in past years.

We have also continued to receive valuable grant income from the JNCC and Scottish National Heritage for Seabird Monitoring work and the provision of a Fair Isle Ranger Service respectively. This income is important for the continued financial health of FIBOT and we are working hard to ensure we continue to fulfil their requirements.

Please be aware of the generous grants available from FIBOT through the John Harrison Memorial Fund and the Simon Aspinall Bursary Fund and encourage any young birdwatchers you know to consider applying for one or other of these grants.

My personal thanks go to David, Susannah and our seasonal staff for their hard work and skill in making the Observatory such a brilliant place to stay. It is not just the comfort of the new building and excellent food that determines whether or not a guest has an enjoyable stay at the Observatory, it is the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff that contributes massively to the high levels of visitor satisfaction.

Whilst our finances continue to be in a satisfactory state, any readers wishing to make a specific or non-specific donation to support the Observatory can be assured it would be gratefully received and effectively used. A summary of FIBOT's draft accounts for the year ended 31st October 2015 appears on the following page. The full statutory accounts can be seen at the Observatory on Fair Isle.

**Mike Wood**  
Finance Director

# Income and Expenditure Report

## for the year ended 31st October 2015

<b>Sales Income</b>	<b>2015 (£)</b>	2014 (£)	<b>Balance Sheet as at 31st October 2015</b>		
Accommodation & Meals	156,424	160,627	<b>Fixed Assets</b>	<b>31/10/15 (£)</b>	31/10/14 (£)
Shop Sales	12,535	9,199	Tangible assets	3,665,268	3,752,226
Bar Sales	23,143	21,641	Investments	0	0
	192,102	191,467		3,665,268	3,752,226
<b>Cost of Sales</b>					
Purchases	73,483	70,884	<b>Current Assets</b>		
Wages & Salaries	69,957	55,108	Stocks	21,244	24,227
	143,440	125,992	Debtors	42,679	35,562
<b>Trading Profit</b>	<b>48,662</b>	65,475	Cash at bank and in hand	56,610	56,722
				120,533	116,511
<b>Other Income</b>					
Interest Received	6,141	6,518	<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	(32,883)	(54,270)
Deferred Grant Income released	112,000	112,000	<b>Net Current Assets/(Liabilities)</b>	87,650	62,241
Subscriptions	6,143	6,989	<b>Total Assets less Current Liabilities</b>		
Donations	5,934	2,713	<b>Current Liabilities</b>	3,752,918	3,814,467
Grants Received	22,950	21,110	<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	( 0)	( 0)
Other Income	0	0		3,752,918	3,814,467
	153,168	149,330			
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>201,830</b>	214,805	<b>Representing:</b>		
			<b>Accumulated Surplus</b>	3,752,918	3,814,467
<b>Other Expenses</b>			<b>Appeal Reserve</b>	0	0
Administration	13,544	11,347		3,752,918	3,814,467
Establishment	54,627	58,408			
Sales & Marketing	6,351	5,706			
Financial & Legal	7,160	6,102			
Depreciation	127,324	125,689			
	209,006	207,252			
<b>Surplus/(Deficit) for the year</b>	<b>(7,176)</b>	7,553			

## WATER FEATURES

BM Boini Mire  
DW Da Water  
ELW Easter Lother Water  
FD Field Ditch  
G Gilsetter  
GB Gilly Burn  
GW Golden Water  
H Homisdale  
HB Hegri Burn  
KM Kirki Mire  
MB Meadow Burn  
MV Mire o' Vatnagard  
OS Obs Scrape  
SM Suka Mire  
US Utra Scrape  
V Vaadal  
WB Wirvie Burn  
W Walli Burn

## MAIN OBS TRAPS

DD Double Dyke  
G Gully  
HD Hjon Dyke  
SD Single Dyke  
RS Roadside  
P Plantation  
V Vaadal  
NG North Grind

## TOILETS

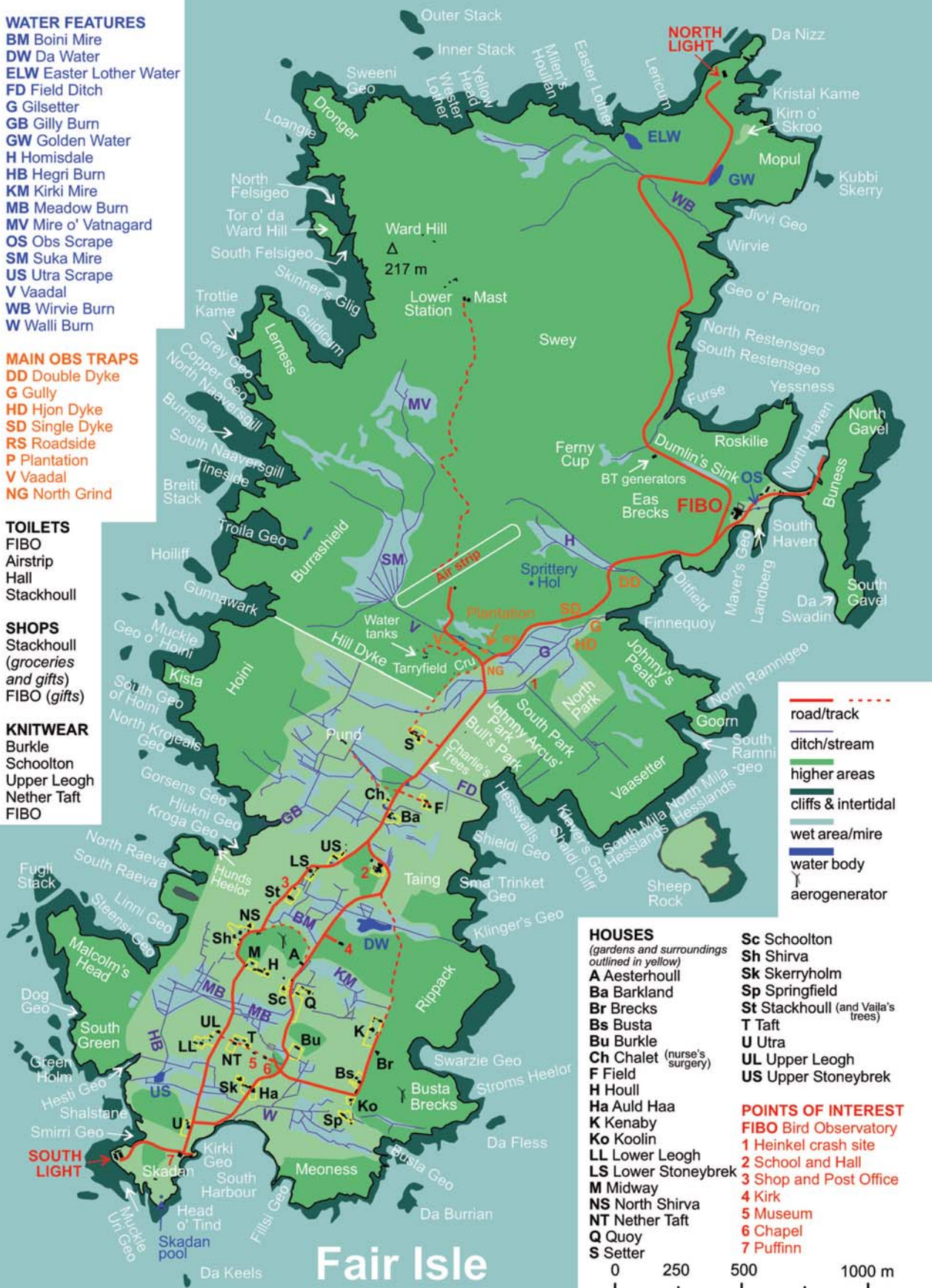
FIBO  
Airstrip  
Hall  
Stackhoull

## SHOPS

Stackhoull  
(groceries  
and gifts)  
FIBO (gifts)

## KNITWEAR

Burkle  
Schoolton  
Upper Leogh  
Nether Taft  
FIBO



## HOUSES

(gardens and surroundings  
outlined in yellow)

A Aesterhoull  
Ba Barkland  
Br Brecks  
Bs Busta  
Bu Burkle  
Ch Chalet  
F Field  
H Houll  
Ha Auld Haa  
K Kenaby  
Ko Koolin  
LL Lower Leogh  
LS Lower Stoneybrek  
M Midway  
NS North Shirva  
NT Nether Taft  
Q Quoy  
S Setter

## Sc Schoolton

Sh Shirva  
Sk Skerryholm  
Sp Springfield  
St Stackhoull (and Vaila's trees)  
T Taft  
U Utra  
UL Upper Leogh  
US Upper Stoneybrek

## POINTS OF INTEREST

FIBO Bird Observatory  
1 Heinkel crash site  
2 School and Hall  
3 Shop and Post Office  
4 Kirk  
5 Museum  
6 Chapel  
7 Puffinn



# SYSTEMATIC CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF FAIR ISLE

David Parnaby

The table below is a checklist of the birds of Fair Isle at the end of 2015. All decisions follow those of the BBRC and BOURC (although note that the totals include all 2015 records, which may remain subject to ratification by the relevant committee), with the main list comprising all species on the Categories A–C, with those species on Category D (uncertain origin) and E (presumed escapes), along with one extinct species and one species not identified to species level, included at the end of the list for completeness.

With the addition of Great White Egret, the Fair Isle list stands at 385 at the end of 2015.

## Status Categories:

Vagrant	V (no. of records)	ten records or less in the past 20 years
Rare	R (no. of records)	11–40 records in the past 20 years
Scarce	S	averaging 10 records or less per annum
Regular Migrant	RM	averaging 11–40 records per annum
Frequent Migrant	FM	averaging 41–500 records per annum
Common Migrant	CM	averaging more than 500 records per annum

## Breeding Categories:

Small Numbers	BS	on average less than 100 pairs per annum
Moderate Numbers	BM	on average 101–1,000 pairs per annum
Large Numbers	BL	on average more than 1,000 pairs per annum

No.	Species	Status	(individuals)	No.	Species	Status	(individuals)
1	Mute Swan	V	(13)	29	King Eider	V	(17)
2	Bewick's Swan	V	(17)	30	Steller's Eider	V	(1)
3	Whooper Swan	FM		31	Harlequin Duck	V	(2)
4	Bean Goose	R	(c208)	32	Long-tailed Duck	RM	
5	Pink-footed Goose	CM		33	Common Scoter	RM	
6	White-fronted Goose	S		34	Surf Scoter	V	(2)
7	Greylag Goose	CM		35	Velvet Scoter	R	(177)
8	Greater Canada Goose	R	(79)	36	Goldeneye	RM	
9	Barnacle Goose	FM		37	Smew	V	(7)
10	Brent Goose	R	(c235)	38	Red-breasted Merganser	RM	
11	Shelduck	S		39	Goosander	R	
12	Mandarin Duck	V	(2)	40	Quail	S	
13	Wigeon	FM		41	Red-throated Diver	RM	
14	American Wigeon	V	(1)	42	Black-throated Diver	V	(7)
15	Gadwall	R	(80)	43	Great Northern Diver	S	
16	Teal	FM		44	White-billed Diver	V	(4)
17	Green-winged Teal	V	(3)	45	Fulmar	CM	BL
18	Mallard	RM	BS	46	Cory's Shearwater	V	(3)
19	Black Duck	V	(1)	47	Great Shearwater	V	(16)
20	Pintail	S		48	Sooty Shearwater	RM	
21	Garganey	V	(23)	49	Manx Shearwater	S	
22	Shoveler	S		50	Storm Petrel	CM	BS
23	Pochard	R		51	Leach's Petrel	SM	
24	Ring-necked Duck	V	(1)	52	Swinhoe's Petrel	V	(2)
25	Tufted Duck	RM		53	Gannet	CM	BL
26	Scaup	S		54	Cormorant	RM	
27	Lesser Scaup	V	(1)	55	Shag	CM	BL
28	Eider	FM	BS	56	Little Bittern	V	(1)

No.	Species	Status	(individuals)	No.	Species	Status	(individuals)
57	Night-heron	V	(2)	115	Red-necked Stint	V	(1)
58	Great White Egret	V	(1)	116	Temminck's Stint	V	(19)
59	Grey Heron	FM		117	Sanderling	FM	
60	Purple Heron	V	(3)	118	Dunlin	FM	
61	White Stork	V	(4)	119	Purple Sandpiper	FM	
62	Glossy Ibis	V	(6)	120	Baird's Sandpiper	V	(4)
63	Little Grebe	R	(41)	121	Little Stint	S	
64	Great Crested Grebe	V	(14)	122	White-rumped Sandpiper	V	(5)
65	Red-necked Grebe	V	(22)	123	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	V	(16)
66	Slavonian Grebe	S		124	Pectoral Sandpiper	R	(34)
67	Honey-buzzard	R	(58)	125	Semipalmated Sandpiper	V	(3)
68	Black Kite	V	(1)	126	Red-necked Phalarope	V	(25)
69	Red Kite	V	(8)	127	Grey Phalarope	R	(50)
70	White-tailed Eagle	V	(14)	128	Terek Sandpiper	V	(1)
71	Marsh Harrier	R	(47)	129	Common Sandpiper	FM	
72	Hen Harrier	S		130	Spotted Sandpiper	V	(1)
73	Pallid Harrier	V	(5)	131	Green Sandpiper	RM	
74	Montagu's Harrier	V	(3)	132	Solitary Sandpiper	V	(1)
75	Goshawk	V	(6)	133	Spotted Redshank	R	
76	Sparrowhawk	RM		134	Greenshank	RM	
77	Buzzard	R		135	Lesser Yellowlegs	V	(3)
78	Rough-legged Buzzard	V	(49)	136	Wood Sandpiper	S	
79	Golden Eagle	V	(1)	137	Redshank	CM	
80	Osprey	S	(127)	138	Jack Snipe	FM	
81	Water Rail	RM		139	Long-billed Dowitcher	V	(2)
82	Spotted Crake	R	(48)	140	Woodcock	FM	
83	Little Crake	V	(1)	141	Snipe	CM	BS
84	Baillon's Crake	V	(2)	142	Great Snipe	R	(45)
85	Corncrake	S		143	Collared Pratincole	V	(1)
86	Moorhen	S		144	Black-winged Pratincole	V	(1)
87	Coot	R	(91)	145	Pomarine Skua	R	(121)
88	Crane	R	(36)	146	Arctic Skua	FM	BS
89	Sandhill Crane	V	(1)	147	Long-tailed Skua	R	(107)
90	Little Bustard	V	(1)	148	Great Skua	FM	BM
91	Great Bustard	V	(1)	149	Puffin	CM	BL
92	Stone-curlew	V	(8)	150	Black Guillemot	FM	BL
93	Avocet	V	(1)	151	Razorbill	CM	BL
94	Oystercatcher	FM	BS	152	Little Auk	RM	
95	Grey Plover	R		153	Guillemot	CM	BL
96	Golden Plover	FM		154	Brännich's Guillemot	V	(1)
97	American Golden Plover	V	(11)	155	Bridled Tern	V	(1)
98	Pacific Golden Plover	V	(2)	156	Gull-billed Tern	V	(1)
99	Dotterel	S		157	Caspian Tern	V	(2)
100	Ringed Plover	FM	BS	158	Black Tern	V	(2)
101	Little Ringed Plover	V	(3)	159	White-winged Black Tern	V	(3)
102	Lapwing	FM	BS	160	Sandwich Tern	S	
103	Caspian Plover	V	(1)	161	Common Tern	RM	
104	Kentish Plover	V	(1)	162	Roseate Tern	V	(5)
105	Upland Sandpiper	V	(2)	163	Arctic Tern	FM	BM
106	Hudsonian Whimbrel	V	(2)	164	Ivory Gull	V	(2)
107	Whimbrel	FM		165	Sabine's Gull	V	(7)
108	Curlew	FM	BS	166	Kittiwake	CM	BM
109	Black-tailed Godwit	S		167	Black-headed Gull	FM	
110	Bar-tailed Godwit	S		168	Little Gull	R	(32)
111	Turnstone	CM		169	Laughing Gull	V	(2)
112	Knot	RM		170	Mediterranean Gull	V	(1)
113	Ruff	RM		171	Common Gull	CM	BS
114	Curlew Sandpiper	R		172	Ring-billed Gull	V	(4)

No.	Species	Status	(individuals)	No.	Species	Status	(individuals)
173	Lesser Black-backed Gull	FM	BS	231	Skylark	CM	BS
174	Herring Gull	CM	BS	232	Crested Lark	V	(1)
175	Iceland Gull	S		233	Shore Lark	R	
176	Glaucous Gull	RM		234	Short-toed Lark	S	(177)
177	Great Black-backed Gull	CM	BS	235	Bimaculated Lark	V	(1)
178	Pallas's Sandgrouse	V	(40)	236	Calandra Lark	V	(5)
179	Rock Dove	FM	BS	237	Sand Martin	RM	
180	Stock Dove	S		238	Swallow	FM	
181	Woodpigeon	FM		239	House Martin	FM	
182	Collared Dove	FM		240	Red-rumped Swallow	V	(9)
183	Turtle Dove	S		241	Greenish Warbler	R	(49)
184	Rufous Turtle Dove	V	(1)	242	Arctic Warbler	R	(91)
185	Cuckoo	SM		243	Pallas's Warbler	V	(40)
186	Barn Owl	V	(6)	244	Yellow-browed Warbler	RM	
187	Scops Owl	V	(2)	245	Hume's Warbler	V	(3)
188	Snowy Owl	V	(24)	246	Radde's Warbler	V	(7)
189	Long-eared Owl	RM		247	Dusky Warbler	V	(16)
190	Short-eared Owl	RM		248	Western Bonelli's Warbler	V	(3*)
191	Nightjar	V	(29)	249	Wood Warbler	RM	
192	Swift	FM		250	Chiffchaff	FM	
193	Pallid Swift	V	(1)	251	Willow Warbler	CM	
194	Alpine Swift	V	(7)	252	Blackcap	CM	
195	Little Swift	V	(1)	253	Garden Warbler	FM	
196	Hoopoe	R	(40)	254	Barred Warbler	RM	
197	Bee-eater	V	(8)	255	Lesser Whitethroat	FM	
198	Roller	V	(1)	256	Sardinian Warbler	V	(2)
199	Kingfisher	V	(1)	257	Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler	V	(2)
200	Wryneck	RM		258	Subalpine Warbler	R	(90)
201	Great Spotted Woodpecker	S		259	Whitethroat	FM	
202	Lesser Kestrel	V	(1)	260	Dartford Warbler	V	(1)
203	Kestrel	RM		261	Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler	R	(24)
204	American Kestrel	V	(1)	262	Lanceolated Warbler	S	(91)
205	Red-footed Falcon	V	(5)	263	Grasshopper Warbler	RM	
206	Merlin	RM		264	River Warbler	V	(17)
207	Hobby	R	(60)	265	Savi's Warbler	V	(7)
208	Gyr Falcon	V	(13)	266	Thick-billed Warbler	V	(2)
209	Peregrine	RM		267	Booted Warbler	V	(14)
210	Red-eyed Vireo	V	(1)	268	Sykes's Warbler	V	(3)
211	Golden Oriole	R	(47)	269	Eastern Olivaceous Warbler	V	(3)
212	Brown Shrike	V	(1)	270	Icterine Warbler	RM	
213	Isabelline Shrike	V	(4)	271	Melodious Warbler	V	(18)
214	Red-backed Shrike	RM		272	Aquatic Warbler	V	(39)
215	Lesser Grey Shrike	V	(21)	273	Sedge Warbler	FM	
216	Great Grey Shrike	S		274	Paddyfield Warbler	R	(24)
217	Southern Grey Shrike	V	(2)	275	Blyth's Reed Warbler	R	(42)
218	Woodchat Shrike	V	(29)	276	Marsh Warbler	S	
219	Magpie	V	(1)	277	Reed Warbler	RM	
220	Jackdaw	S		278	Great Reed Warbler	V	(14)
221	Rook	RM		279	Waxwing	S	
222	Carrion Crow	FM		280	Treecreeper	V	(9)
223	Hooded Crow	RM	BS	281	Wren	RM	BS
224	Raven	RM	BS	282	Starling	CM	BM
225	Goldcrest	FM		283	Rose-coloured Starling	R	(44)
226	Firecrest	V	(8)	284	Dipper	R	(37)
227	Blue Tit	V	(13)	285	White's Thrush	V	(14)
228	Great Tit	R	(c51)	286	Hermit Thrush	V	(3)
229	Coal Tit	V	(7)	287	Swainson's Thrush	V	(2)
230	Woodlark	V	(56)	288	Grey-cheeked Thrush	V	(5)

No.	Species	Status	(individuals)	No.	Species	Status	(individuals)
289	Siberian Thrush	V	(2)	347	Twite	FM	BS
290	Ring Ouzel	FM		348	Lesser Redpoll	S	
291	Blackbird	CM		349	Common Redpoll	FM	
292	Eyebrowed Thrush	V	(2)	350	Arctic Redpoll	R	(89)
293	Dusky Thrush	V	(1)	351	Two-barred Crossbill	R	(58)
294	Black-throated Thrush	V	(13)	352	Common Crossbill	RM	
295	Fieldfare	CM		353	Parrot Crossbill	V	(68)
296	Song Thrush	CM		354	Goldfinch	S	
297	Redwing	CM		355	Citril Finch	V	(1)
298	Mistle Thrush	RM		356	Serin	V	(3)
299	Brown Flycatcher	V	(2)	357	Siskin	FM	
300	Spotted Flycatcher	FM		358	Snow Bunting	FM	
301	Robin	CM		359	Lapland Bunting	FM	
302	Rufous-tailed Robin	V	(1)	360	Savannah Sparrow	V	(2)
303	Thrush Nightingale	R	(62)	361	Song Sparrow	V	(3)
304	Nightingale	R	(54)	362	White-crowned Sparrow	V	(1)
305	Bluethroat	RM		363	White-throated Sparrow	V	(5)
306	Siberian Rubythroat	V	(6)	364	Black-headed Bunting	V	(25)
307	Red-flanked Bluetail	V	(12)	365	Corn Bunting	R	
308	Red-breasted Flycatcher	S		366	Chestnut-eared Bunting	V	(1)
309	Collared Flycatcher	V	(6)	367	Cretzschmar's Bunting	V	(3)
310	Pied Flycatcher	FM		368	Ortolan Bunting	S	
311	Black Redstart	RM		369	Yellowhammer	RM	
312	Redstart	FM		370	Pine Bunting	V	(9)
313	Rock Thrush	V	(1)	371	Pallas's Reed Bunting	V	(2)
314	Whinchat	FM		372	Reed Bunting	FM	
315	Siberian Stonechat	V	(42)	373	Yellow-breasted Bunting	R	(103)
316	Stonechat	S		374	Yellow-browed Bunting	V	(1)
317	Wheatear	CM	BS	375	Little Bunting	S	
318	Isabelline Wheatear	V	(1)	376	Rustic Bunting	R	(131)
319	Desert Wheatear	V	(5)	377	Black-faced Bunting	V	(1)
320	Black-eared Wheatear	V	(5)	378	Bobolink	V	(1)
321	Pied Wheatear	V	(1)	379	Brown-headed Cowbird	V	(1)
322	Alpine Accentor	V	(2)	380	Baltimore Oriole	V	(1)
323	Dunnock	FM		381	Tennessee Warbler	V	(2)
324	House Sparrow	BS		382	Magnolia Warbler	V	(1)
325	Tree Sparrow	S		383	Blackburnian Warbler	V	(1)
326	Yellow Wagtail	RM		384	Blackpoll Warbler	V	(2)
327	Citrine Wagtail	S	(76)	385	Yellow-rumped Warbler	V	(2)
328	Grey Wagtail	S					
329	Pied Wagtail	FM	BS				
330	Richard's Pipit	S					
331	Blyth's Pipit	V	(4)				
332	Tawny Pipit	V	(18)				
333	Olive-backed Pipit	S	(104)				
334	Tree Pipit	RM					
335	Pechora Pipit	R	(43)				
336	Meadow Pipit	CM	BS				
337	Red-throated Pipit	R	(82)				
338	Rock Pipit	FM	BS				
339	Buff-bellied Pipit	V	(4)				
340	Brambling	FM					
341	Chaffinch	FM					
342	Hawfinch	S	(126)				
343	Common Rosefinch	RM					
344	Bullfinch	S					
345	Greenfinch	RM					
346	Linnet	RM					

#### Category D: Daurian Starling, Red-headed Bunting

**Category E:** Black Swan, Bar-headed Goose, Red-breasted Goose, Wood Duck, Lanner Falcon, Saker Falcon, White-shouldered Starling, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Lazuli Bunting, Indigo Bunting, Painted Bunting, Varied Bunting, House Finch, Pallas's Rosefinch, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Chestnut Bunting, Red-headed Bunting, Yellow-billed Grosbeak, Black-headed Grosbeak

**Extinct:** Great Auk

**Unidentified to species:** Albatross sp.

*\*Note, also one Western Bonelli's/Eastern Bonelli's Warbler*



# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY & GUESTHOUSE

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