

FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY.

BULLETIN No. 7, 1950.

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1. September Migrants.

September was a very rough month here, with more than its fair share of strong winds (mainly westerly) and rain. There were, however, a few brief spells of easterly weather which brought in some interesting birds. These fell on September 1st (SE, force 4-5), 11th-12th (E.NE. veering S.), the night of 16/17th (S.SE.), 20th (N. veering NE.), 24-25th (backing E. from S. and developing into a NE. gale on 25th), and 30th (S. backing to S.SE).

SISKIN. *Carduelis spinus*. Three came in on September 26th.

MEALY REDPOLL. *Carduelis flammea flammea*. Two arrived on 26th, and one was seen down to October 3rd.

GREATER REDPOLL. *Carduelis flammea rostrata*. Three redpolls of this Greenland-Iceland race were identified by their dark upper-parts and very marked flank-stripes on September 20th, following a day and night of W. and NW. winds at force 4.

SCARLET GROSBEEK. *Carpodacus erythrinus*. See Bull. No. 6, p. 2. Another female or immature bird was seen on September 21st.

CHAFFINCH. *Fringilla coelebs*. The ringed male which summered on the isle was seen daily to 17th. Two birds were recorded on 19th and two of each sex on 20th.

RED-HEADED BUNTING. *Emberiza bruniceps*. A male, with us from 19-22nd, is described in para. 3.

ORTOLAN BUNTING. *Emberiza hortulana*. One on September 12th.

LAPLAND BUNTING. *Calcaropus lapponicus*. One, September 1-3rd, and six on 11th, with smaller numbers irregularly afterwards.

SNOW BUNTING. *Plectrophenax nivalis*. Two on 16th and fifty on 19th with smaller numbers daily to the end of the month.

SKYLARK/

SKYLARK. *Alauda arvensis*. Noticeable increase on 20th and a marked diminution on 22nd.

MEADOW PIPIT. *Anthus pratensis*. Increases on 5th, 16th and 18th.

TREE PIPIT. *Anthus trivialis*. One on September 6th.

WHITE WAGTAIL. *Motacilla alba alba*. Twenty or so daily to 12th, and fewer afterwards to 23rd, with one on 26th.

PIED FLYCATCHER. *Muscicapa hypoleuca*. Four, September 2nd; two, 5th; twenty, 12th (five only next day); two, 18th; one, 22nd.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. *Muscicapa striata*. None during September, but the S.S.E. wind of 30th brought in a 1st Winter bird which was trapped on October 1st.

RED-BREADED FLYCATCHER. *Muscicapa parva*. An immature male was trapped on September 21st.

GOLDCREST. *Regulus regulus*. Six or more, 25th, with four next day and one on 27th.

WILLOW WARBLER. *Phylloscopus trochilus*. A dozen on September 12th, a few lingering until 15th. Eight on 21st and again on 24th, some remaining until 30th.

GREENISH WARBLER. *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*. One caught on September 19th is described in para. 4.

WOOD WARBLER. *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*. One, September 22nd.

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER. *Phylloscopus inornatus*. One, September 21st, and three on 24th, in the crops. One was trapped in the Gully on 26th, was released there, and entered the trap again October 1-2nd. Another stayed in a turnip-rigg September 29th to October 2nd.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER. *Locustella naevia*. One, very yellowish beneath, so probably a 1st Winter bird, was in the Burn of Gilly, September 1st; and an adult bird was caught at the Auld Haa, in turnips, on 19th.

REED WARBLER. *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. One haunting the Burn of Gilly, September 18-19th, was netted on the latter date/

date and identification confirmed.

MARSH WARBLER. *Acrocephalus palustris*. One trapped in the Gully on September 20th was released there and was twice retrapped on 20-21st.

BARRED WARBLER. *Sylvia nisoria*. Singly, September 3rd and 21st and again October 1st, all immature birds.

GARDEN WARBLER. *Sylvia borin*. Singly, September 7th and 11th; two, 16th; four, 18th; seven, 21st; two, 24th.

BLACKCAP. *Sylvia atricapilla*. Two females, September 18th; two of each sex, 20th, and singly to 24th.

WHITETHROAT. *Sylvia communis*. One, September 12th; two, 19th; one, 21st.

LESSER WHITETHROAT. *Sylvia curruca*. One, 12th; three, 21st; singly, 24th and 30th.

SONG THRUSH. *Turdus ericetorum*. Two, September 26th.

REDWING. *Turdus musicus*. Singly, 22-25th, and three on 26th; five, 27th.

WHEATEAR. *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Numbers were down to a score on 22-23rd, eleven only next day, and a few each day afterwards.

REDSTART. *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Males on 19-20th, 22nd and 24th.

WHINCHAT. *Saxicola rubetra*. Almost daily to September 26th.

BLUETHROAT. *Luscinia svecica*. A 1st Winter male was trapped on September 21st.

SWALLOW. *Hirundo rustica*. One, 14th; two, 23rd.

HOUSE MARTIN. *Delichon urbica*. One, 14th, three next day, and one on 20th.

SAND MARTIN. *Riparia riparia*. Two, September 5th, and three next day; five on 15th, two 16th, singly 18th and 20th.

SWIFT/

SWIFT. *Apus apus*. The last were three on September 1st.

MELIN. *Falco columbarius*. Daily, sometimes one, more often two birds.

KESTREL. *Falco tinnunculus*. Two, September 6th; singly on 10th and from 26-28th.

HERON. *Ardea cinerea*. Six on 25th and eight next day, otherwise one or two regularly.

MALLARD. *Anas platyrhynchos*. Occasional; three on 27th-28th.

TEAL. *Anas crecca*. Four on 1st and 17th, otherwise one or two regularly.

WIGEON. *Anas penelope*. Singly, 7-10th and 25-26th.

TUFTED DUCK. *Aythya fuligula*. Singly, 21-22nd, 26th and an immature drake from 29th.

GOLDENEYE. *Bucephala clangula*. One on September 3rd.

VELVET SCOPER. *Melanitta fusca*. One on September 1st.

CORMORANT. *Phalacrocorax carbo*. A few on most days from August 31st. Flock of eleven going south, September 23rd, and flock of twenty next day.

FULMAR. *Fulmarus glacialis*. Only eight were counted on 7-8th following a marked decrease coinciding with a strong NW. gale, but when the weather moderated birds returned to the cliffs and were in strength on 11th. Decreases took place on 16th, 22nd and practically all had left on 25th, when a NE. gale was raging. Afterwards a few birds were to be seen at sea daily until the end of the month.

TURTLE DOVE. *Streptopelia turtur*. Singly, September 20th and 25th.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT. *Limosa lapponica*. One, September 6th.

CURLEW. *Numenius arquata*. Frequent on passage down to 20th, few afterwards.

WHIMBREL/

WHIMBREL. *Numenius phaeopus*. One only, September 2nd.

WOODCOCK. *Scelopax rusticola*. One, September 25th.

SNIPE. *Capella gallinago*. A few regularly from mid-September.

COMMON SANDPIPER. *Actitis hypoleucos*. One, September 5th.

GREEN SANDPIPER. *Tringa ochrophus*. One, September 1st.

REDSHANK. *Tringa totanus*. Twenty on 6th, fifty on 7th. A few regularly, with influx of twenty-five on 19th and over forty on 28th.

RINGED PLOVER. *Charadrius hiaticula*. Fifty on 13th; a small number on most days to the middle of the month.

GOLDEN PLOVER. *Pluvialis apricaria*. Small parties on the move throughout the month.

LAPWING. *Vanellus vanellus*. Occasional small parties.

2. Weights of some September Migrants.

SISKIN. Two females, 9.96 g. (9.61 g. forty-eight hours later) and 11.8 g.

TREE PIPIT. One on September 6th gave 22.75 g., our heaviest initial weighing for an Autumn bird. See Bull. No. 6, p. 8.

WHITE WAGTAIL. Three 1st Winter females were trapped August 17-18th and a further nine birds were taken between September 8-20th. Forty initial weighings during the two seasons 1949-50 are distributed as follows:

Sex and Age Group.	Autumn.			Spring.		
	Average	Heavy	Light	Average	Heavy	Light
Adult males.	22.1	24.7	20.1	27.7	28.6	25.9
Adult females.	20.2	23.7	16.7	21.6		
1st Winter males.	23.4	26.2	19.5			
1st Winter females.	23.3	27.9	19.1			

(Ad. males, 5 Autumn, 4 Spring; ad. females, 12 Autumn, 1 Spring; 1st/

1st Winter males, 11; 1st Winter females, 7).

The table suggests that (a) adults in Spring are distinctly heavier than Autumn birds, and (b) 1st Winter birds tend to be heavier than adults. A male with only one leg, trapped on September 11th, weighed 20.48 g.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. Five 1st Winter birds average 14.23 g. Our only Spring record, June 4th, is 11.66 g. A bird caught at 13.65 g. on September 22nd, 1949, (1630 hrs.) weighed 12.95 g. at 1530 hrs. two days later.

PIED FLYCATCHER. See Bulletin No. 6, pp. 8-9. Thirteen additional trappings in September show a range from 11.49 g. to 15.06 g. and the average weight of forty Autumn examples is 12.94 g.

RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER. A 1st Winter male on September 21st weighed 10.17 g. Two 1st Winter birds trapped on this date in 1949 weighed 8.5 g. and 9.6 g.

WILLOW WARBLER. Four trapped on September 12th were 8.77 g., 10.09 g., 9.55 g. and 9.39 g., all well above average weight for arriving migrants (see Bulletin No. 6, p. 9).

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER. Two birds scaled 6.69 g. and 6.05 g.

GREENISH WARBLER. The example trapped September 19th weighed 7.15 g. The bird trapped June 2nd, 1949, was 6.63 g.

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER. An adult on September 19th was 12.86 g. The Spring example on May 2nd was 13.17 g.

REED WARBLER. An adult on September 19th was 10.01 g. One captured September 1st, 1949, was 13.35 g.

MARSH WARBLER. Weighings of the September bird were: 20th, (0630 hrs.) 10.44 g., (1400 hrs.) 10.5 g., 21st (1415 hrs.) 10.98 g. The one captured on June 10th gave 11.56 g. at 1600 hrs., and 11.48 g. at the same time next day.

GARDEN WARBLER. See Bulletin No. 6, p. 9. The last bird of the season, September 24th, was our heaviest yet at 20.68 g.

BLACKCAP. Thirteen males in Autumn average 17.19 g. and fifteen females 19.8 g. The lightest was a 1st Winter male at 15.2 g. and the heaviest a female at 21.2 g. Only one other female was/

was above 20 g. A male from mid-November 1949 with an abnormally low weight of 13.75 g. is omitted from these figures.

BLUETHROAT. 1st Winter male, September 21st, 17.89 g. Two May birds weighed; 1st Summer male, 15.98 g., on May 11th, increasing to 17.77 g. on 13th; adult male, 19.1 g. on 24th.

3. Field-notes on a Red-headed Bunting.

The bird was watched, sometimes for long periods, by Ian Munro, Dougal Andrew, M. J. Wotton, Ian Mackay, W. Bird and Ian Walker. Notes were made in the field by the four first-named, and the following description was put into shape by Munro, with the assistance of the other observers. The bird was seen for a few minutes by KW. and EW. on September 21st.

The bird, being a male in good plumage, was not at all difficult to identify. The immediate impression upon sighting it was of a large strikingly-coloured bunting with bright yellow underparts and reddish head and bib. On a close approach the massive steely-blue bill was a prominent feature. The bird was certainly larger than a Yellow-hammer, but was not quite so plump as a Corn-bunting. The following plumage description was made from notes taken in the field, observing at various ranges through x 8 binoculars, and also at about ten yards range through a x 25 telescope.

Forehead and crown dark chestnut, finely streaked with dark brown; the colour varied as the bird altered its position, the brighter feather-bases being sometimes visible. Nape, upper sides of neck and ear-coverts greenish-brown shading into the crown, flecked yellow on sides of neck and ear coverts, and with fine dark striations on nape and sides of neck. Mantle feathers nigger-brown with fawn margins and tips, though greenish flecking was visible on one occasion when the feathers were wind-ruffled, showing their bases. Lower mantle greenish-yellow shading into a canary-yellow rump (which, however, looked more greenish-yellow when the bird was in flight). Tail feathers dark nigger-brown with fawn margins and tips: the tail was moderately forked and showed no signs of abrasion, and was dull white beneath when viewed at close range.

Throat, upper breast and lores dark chestnut, a little brighter than the crown, and brighter still when the feathers were wind-ruffled. The feathers of throat and breast had pale brown tips, and the bib was not so extensive as shown in "The Handbook" plate/

plate. Lores and ear-coverts were separated from the breast by a malar band of drab chestnut flecked with yellow. Lower sides of breast, belly, flanks and under tail-coverts a uniform canary-yellow merging with the greenish-brown of ear-coverts and sides of neck.

Most of the scapular feathers were greenish-brown with small dark centres, creating the effect, when the bird was at rest, of a greenish-brown "V" with its apex at the rump (a very noticeable character in the field - KV.). The lesser coverts and bastard-wing appeared to be similar. The primaries were nigger-brown with fawn tips and margins, and the secondaries and greater coverts were similar but with broader margins. The median coverts were dark and formed a definite band across the closed wing. The underside of the wing showed dull white.

The bill was massive and in cross-section roughly triangular, as the lower mandible was broader than the upper. It was steely-blue in colour, and the legs were brownish-pink.

During its four days' stay (September 19-22nd) the bird frequented the same small area of marshy pasture bordered by a clover field, a cabbage garden, a field of turnips and a stubble field. It resorted to the cabbages and turnips not infrequently for cover, and despite its brilliant plumage it was difficult to see once it entered the roots, its colours blending perfectly with the reds and yellows of the withered leaves. It repaired to the oat-stocks in the stubble for feeding purposes.

The flight was strong and undulating, and the bird appeared very elongated when on the wing. The wing-feathers then, in certain lights, could appear blue-grey and the contrast of this colour with the bright yellow underparts strongly recalled the colour-scheme of the Grey Wagtail. In flight at a distance and in silhouette it was easy to confuse with the Skylarks on the wing at the same time. A low call, rendered "tchup", was heard on a number of occasions, usually when the bird flew up.

When on the alert, or immediately upon alighting, the bird assumed an upright, elongated pose, later relaxing into a more nearly horizontal attitude. It was seen to perch on walls, fences, and sometimes "sideways" on corn-stocks. It generally sat motionless for long periods with the wing-points slightly drooped below the tail. It was possible to get within ten yards of the bird when in concealment, but an approach to nearer than twenty yards in the open was difficult.

4. Field-notes on a Greenish Warbler.

This bird appeared very grey in the field, and was at first mistaken for a Northern Willow-warbler, until the single wing-bar was seen.

The upper-parts appeared to be a uniform olive-grey, with the tail and primaries darker. The underparts were a uniform greyish-white, as were also the wing-bars and superciliary stripes. The bill seemed small for the size of the bird, and the pale colour of the lower mandible was clearly seen on one occasion. The bird was stockily built, and appeared slightly smaller than a Willow Warbler.

When discovered, it was feeding among the turnip-plants, rarely appearing among the upper leaves, and rarely remaining motionless. It flew only occasionally, usually to pass round the observers and settle in the crop behind them. These skulking habits led to its capture in the Yeoman net.

In comparison with the other two *Phylloscopi* with wing bars observed here this Autumn, the Eversmann's (*Ph. borealis*) and Yellow-browed Warblers (*Ph. inornatus*), some distinctive points were noted. The most important field-character of the bird was its general greyness, contrasting with the greenish hue of the other two species. In size it was intermediate, in behaviour more active than *borealis* but less so than *inornatus*, which it resembled, however, in its habit of remaining largely concealed among the roots. The single wing-bar was conspicuous when the wing was seen clearly, and it was whitish in contrast with the yellowish bars of the other species. The eye-stripe, although very prominent, was less so than in Eversmann's Warbler, and much less so than in the Yellow-browed.

The bird was watched by Ian Munro, Dougal Andrew, M. J. Wotton, Pamela McMorran and M. Abraham, and the notes were compiled by Ian Munro in consultation with the other observers.

The bird was examined in the hand by KW. The unabraded greater coverts and practically unworn remiges and retrices indicate that it was a first-year bird. The outermost greater covert had a small light tip on the outer web, and the next four had broader white tips on the outer webs. Upper mandible dark brown, lower light pinkish-brown. Tarsi dark greyish-brown. The yellow in the supercilium and yellowish wash on the underparts were only faintly indicated and apparently not obvious in the field. Diagnosis of race is based on wing-formula (2nd primary between 7th and 8th) combined with single wing-bar. Wing 57/

57 mm., bill from skull 11.5 mm., tarsus 20 mm.

This is the second occurrence of the species on Fair Isle: for observations on the bird of June 2-3rd, 1949, see Scot. Nat. 62: 18-20. There have now been four records of this species in Britain since 1945, a fact which may suggest that the westwards extension of its range, noted by C. B. Ticehurst ("The Genus Phylloscopus", p. 138) is still proceeding.

5. Analysis of Wing-formula of Pied Flycatcher.

According to "The Handbook" (i, pp. 309, 312) the Pied and Collared Flycatchers, Muscicapa hypoleuca and M. albicollis, are separable on differences in the wing-formula. During the present Autumn 31 specimens of M. hypoleuca have been examined at Fair Isle, and as the variation in the relative positions of the tips of the primary feathers is somewhat wider than "The Handbook" indicates, it is evident that the wing-formula must be used with caution as a criterion for separating females and young of the two species. Fortunately, slight but recognisable plumage differences are also involved.

"The Handbook" gives the following data on wing-formulae:

Primary.	<u>M. hypoleuca.</u>	<u>M. albicollis.</u>
1st.	2-4 mm. longer than p. coverts.	Equal or 1-3 mm. longer than primary coverts.
3rd and 4th.	longest.	longest.
2nd.	4-7 mm. shorter.	2-6 mm. shorter.
5th.	2-5 mm. shorter. (Usually longer and never shorter than 2nd, occasionally equal).	4-6 mm. shorter. (Equal or shorter than 2nd, in one case a shade longer)
6th.	3-10 mm. shorter.	10-12 mm. shorter.

Analysis of the 31 records obtained at Fair Isle gives the following results:

1st/

- 1st primary equal to primary coverts in one case; between 2 and 5 mm. longer in 29 cases; 8.5 mm. longer in one case.
- 3rd and 4th primaries longest and equal in 14 cases; 3rd longest in 50% (mostly by less than 1 mm., once 1.5 mm.); 4th longest by 0.5 mm. in one example.
- 2nd primary shorter than 5th in 27 birds; 2nd equals 5th in two, and 2nd longer than 5th (by 0.5 mm. and 1 mm.) in two birds.
- 5th primary mostly 4-6 mm. shorter than wing-point (once 3.5 and once 7 mm.).
- 6th primary 7-11 mm. shorter (normally 8-10 mm. shorter).

6. Trapping and Ringing.

The season's total of ringed birds at October 15th was 2033 of 71 different species. September was not a very good trapping month, there being nearly a hundred fewer captures than in September 1949.

A new trap, roofing the narrowest part of the small gully called Vaadal, was completed towards the end of the month. Its captures, although few so far, included two Snipe within a few hours on the morning of September 21st, a young Merlin on October 8th, and two Water Rails on October 15th.

The Yeoman Trap, which consists of a net made for us by Comdr. Tom Yeoman during last Winter (see Bulletin No. 1), has had success in the crops. It is laid out over the tops of the plants, the entrance being propped up with wooden sticks about 2½ ft. long, and the sides and rear held down by stones, and the prospective victims are driven underneath it. Captures during September were the Grasshopper, Reed and Greenish Warblers on 19th and a Yellow-browed Warbler on 21st. A British Robin (only the second for Fair Isle) was caught in it on October 6th. It has been used unsuccessfully against another Yellow-browed, a probable Northern Willow Warbler and two Lapland Buntings which, in a manner quite unusual for their kind, were skulking in a turnip field.

7. Miscellaneous.

No recent reports have been received from other stations. It is believed that September was a bad month generally on the eastern seaboard.

Holger Holgersen, Erling Holst, C. K. Mylne, J. H. Hyatt, and E. D. Williams have sent greetings from "the barren isle of Utsira. We trust that the southerly gales have done you better than they have done us!"

Lt. Col. H. G. Brownlow has now returned to this country from Egypt and his address is Heathcote Hotel, Unthank Road, Norwich, Norfolk.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory.

15th October, 1950.

K. Williamson.

Director.