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# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY BULLETIN



Edited by  
**KENNETH WILLIAMSON**  
Director

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Fair Isle Bird Observatory Bulletin, Vol. 2, No. 5,  
December 1954.

## EDITORIAL.

AS WE take stock at the end of another autumn migration season, one of the most interesting results is that five new species - perhaps six - have been gained for the British List. The fact that three of these newcomers are American, and two - perhaps three - Siberian, once more emphasises the astonishing distances some birds will travel in the "wrong" direction, probably never to find their true wintering-area, and never to return to their native home. It emphasises, too, the good fortune of British bird-watchers in the geographical position of their homeland, the last bulwark of the great Eurasian Continent in the west, and the first landfall of North American voyagers to the east.

THE FIRST two "new British" birds were Nearctic waders which crossed the Atlantic Ocean at the end of August or beginning of September. They were a STILT SANDPIPER Micropalama himantopus which was carefully identified by several Yorkshire bird-watchers at Spurn Point Bird Observatory, and a WILSON'S PHALAROPE Steganopus tricolor found and identified by members of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club at Rosyth, on the Forth.

OF THE Siberian wanderers, a young YELLOW-HEADED WAGTAIL Motacilla citreola was trapped at Fair Isle on September 20th, and at the beginning of the next month a second appeared, - simultaneously with an adult male SIBERIAN THRUSH Turdus sibirica at the Isle of May. Both were captured. We would like to think that the BAIKAL TEAL Anas formosa which was found at Fair Isle at the same

time was also a victim of whatever circumstances brought this excellent company to our shores. This species is often kept in captivity, and often escapes: but it seems doubtful if the Baikal Teal will ever present better credentials to British ornithology than in this case. Later in the autumn a third American, the YELLOW-THROAT Geothlypis trichas, was captured by Miss B. Whittaker at Lundy Bird Observatory.

THIS Bulletin begins with descriptions of the Siberian visitors to Fair Isle, together with notes on a few other eastern rarities seen during the autumn. And then, this excitement over, we get down to brass tacks with articles on the August and September movements as observed at various points in northern Scotland. There is a most interesting account by James MacGeogh of passage migrants in August on the remote isle of Sula Sgeir, an account of a watch kept by D.I.M. Wallace and his father W. Jackson Wallace at the Kyle of Durness, and, of course, the usual report of migration at Fair Isle. In the next issue we hope to deal with more aspects of the autumn migration at Fair Isle and Foula in the north, at Great Saltee in the south Irish Sea, at Tory Island off the north-west coast of Ireland, and at Blaavandshuk on the North Sea shore of Denmark.

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64. Yellow-headed Wagtails at Fair Isle: a  
New British Bird.

KENNETH WILLIAMSON.

Two 1st-winter specimens of the Yellow-headed Wagtail Motacilla citreola, a marsh-loving Siberian species not previously recorded in the British Isles, were trapped at Fair Isle on September 20th and October 1st 1954.

The first, ringed B 88594, was caught in the Gully Trap in the late evening. It was examined in the laboratory in a failing light by H.G. Alexander, Miss M. Haydock, H. Mayer-Gross, Mrs. A.W. Thom, Miss V. Thom and myself. It appeared to be a young flava wagtail, except that the mantle looked entirely grey. However, the light was so poor for plumage study that I decided to roost the bird in the laboratory pending a detailed examination next morning.

The impression gained the previous evening was then confirmed: the mantle was altogether too grey for Motacilla f. flava or the British flavissima, and in fact was as grey as in a White Wagtail Motacilla a. alba. This and other features of the plumage suggested the Yellow-headed Wagtail; but as the comparable plumage of the Grey-headed race M.f. thunbergi is not described in "The Handbook," H.F. Witherby having been unable to find authentic specimens, we felt we could only regard this identification as provisional. We were all agreed, however, that the plumage of our bird most closely matched the descriptions of 1st-winter citreola given by Hartert, Dresser and other authorities.

It is not proposed to give here the detailed note we made on the bird's plumage, since the record will be published in full in an early number of British Birds.

A field description, made under excellent conditions of light on the morning of 22nd, will suffice to give a good general impression of the bird's appearance. I wrote: "Flava wagtail from in front, alba wagtail from behind. The blue-grey of back uniform and pure, contrasting with a darker rump and black tail-feathers. The bird often carried the wing-tips below the level of the tail, showing the rump well. More sedate than an alba wagtail, with less tail-flicking and head-movement. Considerable white showed in the outer tail-feathers and secondary wing-feathers, and the tips of greater and median wing-coverts made a striking double white wing-bar. The breast was distinctly buff and a buffish wash was noticeable on face and superciliary stripe. The forehead and fore-part of crown appeared brownish, and there was a strong greyish wash along the sides of the underparts from breast to flanks."

A new party arrived on 23rd, comprising W. Conn, W.J. Eggeling, I.J. Ferguson-Lees, G. Mountfort, D.I.M. Wallace and W.J. Wallace. They were out searching for the bird early next morning, and might well have found it had not one of the hostel staff caught it in the Observatory trap and put it in the laboratory to await my return from the traps! However, all were able to examine it closely, and before it was released several photographs were taken by Guy Mountfort. It was seen on several occasions later that day and the next, and an excellent sketch was made by D.I.M. Wallace for the "Notes on Species" Book.

The second example rudely interrupted our study of the Baikal Teal on the afternoon of October 1st. It was feeding on a beach at the south end of the isle, and occasionally hawking for flies above the wrack. Soon it flew to the marshy area between Gaila and Springfield.

This wet ground seemed much to its liking, and on several occasions the bird took shelter in the drainage ditches, remaining in them to feed. There seemed a good chance of catching it if it persisted in this habit, so the Yeoman trap was brought from the Haa and erected over the deepest drain. Within five minutes we had the bird in the catching-box.

The chief differences from wagtail B 88594 were a less strongly marked superciliary stripe, a suggestion of greenish-brown in the mantle, and a less pure grey wash on the sides of breast and belly. The plumage of upper and under-parts did not seem so contrasting in the field, and the eyestripe was only obvious at a moderate distance as a pale buffish-white mark behind the eye. The bird's manner when on open ground was very similar, and the call-note was exactly the same. This struck us as being very different from that of the flava wagtails, and there was agreement that it could best be described as a slurred monosyllabic and high-pitched "sweep".

It was examined in the laboratory by H.A. Craw, W. Craw, W.J. Eggeling, I.J. Ferguson-Lees and myself, and later seen in the field by K. Allsop and J. Chillingworth of "Picture Post". The detailed description of this bird, ringed B 88633, will also be found in British Birds. Its weight was only 15.35 gm., as against the weight when first trapped of 18.09 gm. in the case of B 88594 (increased to 18.78 gm. by the early morning of 23rd). B 88633, like its predecessor, remained close to the Observatory following its release, and it was last seen on October 5th.

It only remains to add that, as a result of a comparison of our descriptions with study material of M. citreola and M.f. thunbergi at the British Museum, we are absolutely satisfied that the Fair Isle birds were 1st-winter Yellow-headed Wagtails.

65. A Baikal Teal at Fair Isle.

KENNETH WILLIAMSON.

When bird-watching in the south on September 30th H.A. and W. Craw, W.J. Eggeling, I.J. Ferguson-Lees and myself put up three ♀♀ Teal from the sea near Hestigeo, and our suspicions were aroused because one of the birds was noticeably bigger than its companions on the wing. We followed them about for some time, but without getting a good view, or noting any other difference apart from the fact that the "odd" Teal showed more white in the speculum. Eventually we manoeuvred them into a bay where we could watch them from the cliff-top; and although the light was then poor we could see that the bird was quite different from the ♀♀ Common Teal Anas c. crecca it was with. Fortunately, we were able to supplement such notes as we then made when we found the birds in the same bay on the following afternoon.

The bird was obviously a ♀ Teal but bigger and brighter in plumage than the others. It was decidedly broader in the beam and had a bigger head, with a high forehead and very fine (apparently greyish) bill, - the whole presenting a marked retrousée effect in profile. Seen from above, the top of the head and nape were a warm brown colour, richer than in the Common Teal, and the feathers of mantle and scapulars appeared longer and had the outer webs edged with buff, these forming a pattern of "V" markings on the back. The breast was brown, mottled darker, and the belly white, and when the bird rose up in the water to wing-flap we saw that there was a distinct line of demarcation between the two. The flanks were more heavily marked than in Common Teal, this being due to close dark brown blotching. The tail was blackish-brown, darker than the mantle, and the under tail-coverts were white. The closed wing showed a green speculum bounded on the inside by a narrow



white line, and when the bird was flying this white was more extensive than in the Common Teal. When the bird swam towards us the face showed two conspicuous white marks on the lores; the sides of the head were greyish-white, and there was a narrow dark line through the eye.

The bird was discussed with Hugh Boyd, of the Wildfowl Trust, over the telephone on the evenings of September 30th and October 1st, and we are grateful to him for his help in establishing identification. It was unquestionably a ♀ Baikal Teal Anas formosa, an east Siberian species which (according to Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom's "Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe") is accidental in Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Italy. As it is a common species in captivity, there must be a suspicion that the Fair Isle bird was an "escape". On the other hand, it is to be noted that there were several eastern vagrants at Fair Isle about this time (as well as an adult ♂ Siberian Thrush at the Isle of May), and the bird's appearance in such company is at least suggestive of a wild origin.

#### 66. Siberian Lesser Whitethroats at Fair Isle.

Three examples of the Eastern Lesser Whitethroat Sylvia curruca blythi were trapped during the autumn, two on September 21st and 22nd respectively (when there were others whose race could not be determined), and one on October 15th. In the September birds the 2nd primary was 1 mm. shorter than the 6th, and in the October example 2 mm. shorter: in no case was there any sign of uncompleted wing-moult (see Bull. No.12, para 148). Measurements were: wing, 64-65 mm., tail 58-59 mm. (it is usually longer than in S.c. curruca), bill 12 mm. and tarsus 20-21½ mm. They weighed 10.52 gm., 10.19 gm., and 11.51 gm. respectively.

67. Eversmann's Warblers at Fair Isle.

A bit of bird observatory history was made at Fair Isle in mid-afternoon of September 2nd when an Eversmann's Warbler Phylloscopus b. borealis was caught in Vaadal Trap. It is very likely the first of its kind to be caught, ringed and released in Europe, for although the species breeds as far west as Finmark, it winters in south-east Asia and only very rarely wanders to the western seaboard of the Continent. There are now ten records of its occurrence at Fair Isle and about half as many for the east coast of England.

The bird was a young one of the year in the dark greenish-olive plumage, and with the characteristic wing-bars which, together with the long, broad superciliary stripe, make this one of the easiest British Phylloscopi to identify in fresh plumage. The most obvious bar is formed by creamy-white spots at the tips of the greater coverts, and above this, nearer the angle of the wing, there are a few less obvious and yellower markings at the tips of the median coverts. Adults, two of which were seen together at Fair Isle on August 30th 1951, are a brighter, greyer green than young birds, and as they do not moult until they reach winter quarters the uppermost wing-bar (and occasionally the lower one too) may be lost through wear in the autumn.

The trapped bird had a wing-length of 65 mm. and tail-length of 48 mm. The bill, which is stronger than in other British Phylloscopi, measured 13 mm. from skull and the tarsus was 20 mm. Its weight was 8.98 gm. On September 21st I found another young bird in the roots at Taft and had the pleasure of showing it to Horace Alexander, whose field experience of the Phylloscopi was thereby increased to the staggering total of 28 species! We had the good fortune to watch this bird and a young Willow Warbler moving about the same crop, and perching side by side on a wire fence.

K. W.

68. Eastern Short-toed Larks at Fair Isle.

KENNETH WILLIAMSON.

As in the autumn of 1952, two examples of the Eastern Short-toed Lark Calandrella cinerea longipennis were present at Fair Isle in mid-October. A note about the 1952 birds, the first of which was collected by Col. R. Meinertzhagen to establish identification, appeared in British Birds 46: 210. Before introducing this year's birds, I should like to quote from that account.

"The bird struck us as being very unlike a Skylark Alauda arvensis in its habits. Many of this species were feeding in the same stubbles, but the bird did not associate with them, nor did it ever call (as they did) on being flushed. Whereas the Skylarks climbed on rising and usually passed to another field this bird flew low and alighted only a short distance away, to stand upright in the stubble with its head raised alertly. We did not see it crouch as larks normally do when suspicious."

I repeat this paragraph because, if one imparts to each phrase its opposite sense, then that is exactly how the first of the 1954 examples behaved!

It was not until October 9th that the first one was identified, although it had been present for some days previously among Skylarks feeding on the stubble at Kennaby. Until the afternoon of 9th, though contact had been sought on a number of occasions, it was known only as a small bird with a strange bell-like call-note which associated with the larks and went off with them to some distant field whenever they were flushed. It was sometimes referred to as "Tinkerbelle", but more often (respectfully) as "that Hoodwink"; and as it is normal practice here to forget Hoodwinks, not record them, there is no certainty as to the date on which our

first encounter with it took place. This may have been as early as October 2nd, when a queer voice was heard by H.A. Crow and others in the same field, and was later put down, without much conviction, to a single Lapland Bunting that happened to be present.

On the afternoon of October 9th Harry Crow and I invaded the Kennaby stubble as usual, and all the larks left, "Tinkerbelle" among them. Half-an-hour later we tried again, and had got to the far side of the field without hearing the note when I picked up a small lark-like bird moving through the short stalks some 10 yards ahead. It was greyish-brown above streaked with darker brown, - but not much streaking on head and nape, - and an off-white colour below with no discernible markings on the breast. There was a dark line through the eye with a pale superciliary above and pale lores below; ear-coverts were dark brown, and the bill appeared to be greyish-brown. The flanks were washed with brownish-buff. Features of the closed wing were greyish-white tips to the greater coverts, forming a slight bar, and blackish tips to the median coverts; pale edgings were present on the secondaries, but they were not very obvious. The tail was blackish-brown except for the central feathers which were paler, and the two outer feathers which showed some whitish. There was no olive in the plumage and nothing of the rich warm brown and buff of the Skylark, and in fact the bird appeared to be in every respect identical with the skin obtained on October 7th 1952 and now kept in the collection in the laboratory. When flushed, the bird went off with the "Tinkerbelle" note.

The second example was first seen, but not recognised, on October 11th. It was not on stubble, but in the Busta turnips, and it used an entirely different and in fact more lark-like call. It was found again next day, when it did take to the stubble field after leaving the roots, and although it later sought the turnips on

several occasions, it behaved well and gave excellent close views. It was so like the first bird that we had to go to and fro between Busta and Kennaby several times to make absolutely sure that there were two.

Both were present on 14th, when I spent some time observing them and trying to reduce their various calls to some simple notation. The most distinctive and probably diagnostic call was the "Tinkerbell" one, which the Kennaby bird used a great deal, when on the ground and in flight, and the Busta bird very little. I cannot find this note, a sharp metallic "wink, wink" repeated, mentioned in "The Handbook of Brit. Birds," 1: 171, or any other work. There was also a "tewp, tewp, tewp" of uneven rhythm, given by both birds on rising; and sometimes they went off with a slurred rippling note not unlike the Skylark's alarm. The Busta bird was especially prone to do this when put out of the crops. Another plaintive single note, not often heard, was I think the "tee-oo" call described in "The Handbook." On this afternoon the Kennaby bird was feeding alone (the Busta one never had associated much with Skylarks) and was more approachable in consequence. I was struck by a point that had impressed us earlier, the extremely rapid feeding action of the bird. Whilst it would very often run (and was much given to crouching) it also had a curious sideways hopping movement.

Skylarks weredown to an absolute low the next day, after a fine still night, and the two Short-toed Larks had apparently gone out with them. These are the 5th and 6th recorded occurrences of the Eastern Short-toed Lark at Fair Isle, the dates being November 11th 1907, October 29th 1927, October 6th-7th and 9th-11th 1952, and October 8th-14th (possibly earlier) 1954. There is one other record of this race in Britain, for the Shetland island of Whalsay.

69. Birds of a North Sea Crossing.

Mr. G.B. RIMES of Gillingham, Kent, sends a note of birds seen during a crossing of the North Sea in S.S. SAGA from Gothenburg to Tilbury from August 19th to 21st 1954. There was a strong east wind late on 19th and on the morning of 20th this had increased to the point of blowing over several of the deck-chairs. The sky was overcast, with some rain. The "Daily Weather Report" indicates that the journey was made round the northern side of a depression centred off the Hook of Holland: anticyclonic weather prevailed in southern Scandinavia, as will be seen from reference to this period in the report on Fair Isle warbler migration on pp. 215-216. The journey up the Thames on the morning of 21st was made in fog.

The gulls present on 20th were fewer than on previous crossings, and were mainly LESSER BLACKBACKS, with a few KITTIWAKES, two of them immature: FULMARS, a single "comic" TERN and two GANNETS were also seen. Of waders, there was a single TURNSTONE at 10 o'clock on 20th, a probable GOLDEN PLOVER an hour later, one CURLEW at mid-day, and a LITTLE STINT in the evening. The stint was around the ship for at least three hours, sometimes landing on the deck and apparently picking up food.

Among the passerines identified were a flava wagtail between 0800 hrs. and 1030 hrs. (about which time Dogger Bank was reached), and an alba wagtail in the evening. A WHEATEAR and REDSTART appeared at mid-day, and another bird described to Mr. Rimes may have been a WHINCHAT. In the Thames next morning a wagtail (which may have been the one of the previous evening) and a pipit - not seen close enough for a positive identification - were on board the ship.

70. August Migrants at Sula Sgeir.

JAMES MacGEOCH.

I had the good fortune to visit Sula Sgeir, a small isle half-a-mile long and rising to 229 ft. high, which lies in the Atlantic some 40 miles north of the Butt of Lewis and 50 miles north-west of Cape Wrath, between August 13th and 31st 1954. Sula Sgeir is well known as the site of a flourishing Gannet colony, and this and Mykinesholm in the Faeroe Islands remain the only gannetries which have an economic importance. My visit was made in company with the eight men of Ness who comprised this year's Gannet-crew, and whose aim was to collect a number of the fledglings for use as winter food.

For much of the time we had glorious weather, and as photography was my main pursuit the trip was most successful on that account, and I was able to get a complete pictorial record of the expedition, - the first that has ever been taken in the history of the Gannet-hunt on Sula Sgeir, a tradition that has lived probably since the twelfth century.

I was also able to make a count of the Gannets (although it was rather late in the season, and a bad gale on 29th interfered), get some idea of the present status of the Fork-tailed Petrel colony (which is now greatly reduced), and combine an accurate count of the breeding Fulmars with the ringing of over a thousand young. Four of the Fulmars have since been recovered. One, marked on the rocks above the landing-place on August 21st, was "stranded" at Pierowall, Westray, in Orkney, on September 5th, and another was found at the end of September near Stromness. A third was found at Woolacombe Sands, North Devon, on October 2nd; another reached Suduroy in the Faeroes a fortnight after ringing.

Apart from observations on the breeding-birds, which it is hoped to publish in a separate paper at a later date, I gave some time to observing the arrival and departure of migrant birds. I had previously discussed the possibilities of a migration watch with Mr. Kenneth Williamson, the Director of Fair Isle Bird Observatory, and at his request kept a daily schedule, with a view to seeking a correlation with events at Fair Isle over the same period. The present article is concerned with that aspect of the visit, and in order to complete the picture I have drawn freely upon Mr. Williamson's comments in letters that have passed between us.

Some migrants, as for example TURNSTONE Arenaria interpres and REDSHANK Tringa totanus were present in about the same strength throughout the whole period. My highest count of Turnstones was 22; they were to be met with on every part of the island, but usually they frequented the low dividing neck of rock between the north and south ends. The two Redshanks were usually at the stagnant pool on the south slope of Lundastoth. OYSTER CATCHERS Haematopus ostralegus were also seen: one was regularly in company with the gulls and may have been a resident birds, whilst two at the stagnant pool on August 16th seem more likely to have been on passage.

There were two remarkably late records of summer visitors: three late GUILLEMOT Uria a. aalge chicks were found and their parents photographed, and on the last evening, 31st, a PUFFIN Fratercula arctica grabae flapped down beside me in the gannetry with a beakful of fish. It was the only Puffin seen during the twenty days. A list of the migrant species seen, with notes on their status at Fair Isle and the weather



conditions at the time, follow. In an Appendix, I give a summary of local weather during my stay. I was asked by Mr. Williamson to keep a special look-out for passing MERLINS Falco columbarius, but none was seen.

CURLEW (Numenius arquata)

A single bird was seen on 12th and a flock of 12 circled the "village" (the four rude stone bothies used by the Gannet-crew) on 17th, giving the usual cries and making off in the direction of North Rona, which is 12 miles to the east. A pair was seen next day and there were 5 birds on 20th, a day on which there was strong Curlew passage at Fair Isle.

DUNLIN (Calidris alpina)

One was seen on 18th quietly feeding at a brackish pool near the well. There were two at Durness on this day and "the only one for a full week" was at Fair Isle on 19th.

GREENSHANK (Tringa nebularia)

There was one at the stagnant pool at the north end on 16th (one at Fair Isle 15th, one at Durness 16th).

WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe)

Despite a close search from August 13th to 22nd I could find only four Wheatears, always frequenting the rock face on Sgeir an Teampuill, south of the old temple. These four birds were very shy and were seldom met with on any other part of the island, and it is possible they were summer residents. On August 22nd I got out of my tent at 9 a.m. to find the "village" full of Wheatears. I made a hurried check, and at all parts of the south end of the island, from the low dividing portion in the landing-bay to the top cairn, I found Wheatears in twos and threes. I rounded them

up a bit, starting at the extreme south, and made a count of approximately 60 birds. They were bold in colour, strong-looking, and adopted a very upright stance. They were not in the least timid and would perch on the large stones which lay between the bothies.

The next day there appeared to be just as many flitting about, and they were well-mixed with Meadow Pipits, which appeared more numerous that day. (Mr. Williamson comments that pipit and wagtail movements are very often a day behind the Wheatears, since the majority are diurnal migrants). It was a great change to see the village area so well-stocked with small birds. All were busy feeding.

There was a noticeable decrease on 24th and I estimated about 30 birds, though counting was difficult over such broken ground. By the next day only a dozen remained and the rock face south of the temple, so busy all the week, was now deserted.

I counted ten on 26th and could find only four next day, and as these were on the rock face of Sgeir nan Teampuill I concluded they were the four resident birds. On the 28th I managed to find six, but on 29th was down to two, whilst odd birds only were seen on 30th and 31st.

This was the main species for which we hoped to find a correlation, and Mr. Williamson writes: "The movement which was apparent at Sula Sgeir on 22nd is reflected in our trapping figures here. Apart from a single bird on 20th (undoubtedly local, as it was in moult) we had only recaptures of Fair Isle birds from 16th. Then on 22nd six birds were trapped, all between 0500 and 0715 hrs., and as they were not significantly heavier or longer in the wing than our own birds I suspect they represent Shetland stock moving through.

Two rather heavier birds, however, may indicate a mixture with more northerly stock. We got only one wheatear early on 23rd, so the invasion was short-lived. Late on 21st and overnight there was an anticyclone over north-western Norway reaching Faeroe and Shetland, and light to moderate north-east wind and little cloud, - ideal conditions for emigration from this region. The fact that your birds were noticeably big suggests that you got more Faeroe birds in this north-east airstream, whilst we had to be content with Shetlanders. On 24th, when they decreased with you, three were trapped here, suggesting a further small influx; and with your further decline of 25th we also got an increase, eight and six being ringed on that day and 26th. The weather-map shows a dead calm in Iceland and Faeroe, and the majority of these birds had a longer wing and higher weight (schigleri type) than our local stock. As you had a moderate westerly and not north-east wind it seems likely that the second passage may have gone well to eastward of you."

#### WILLOW WARBLER (Phylloscopus trochilus)

I found two busy feeding on the slope at the foot of the "village" on 24th, and every day thereafter I was sure to meet either one or two in the vicinity of the bothies and the well. They were there until the last day of our stay. My highest count was three on 28th after a single bird the previous day. At Fair Isle there were two big peaks, on 21st-22nd and 25th-26th, and Mr. Williamson writes: "There was a marked decrease here on 23rd-24th due to redetermined passage south, and it was most likely a bit of this onward passage that you saw, especially as you had fresh NE. wind on 23rd and northerly wind on 24th."

#### MEADOW PIPIT (Anthus pratensis)

There was a small invasion with the Wheatears on 22nd, busily feeding. On 23rd the number had increased

from 12 to 30, and the peak of 50 was reached on 24th. They moved about singly or in twos and threes and were to be found at all parts of the island, though mainly in the southern half and often among the Gannets. At night, when I was moving about in the dark looking for Fork-tails, I disturbed quite a number of pipits settled for the night among the mayweed and thrift of the village area.

There was a noticeable drop in the numbers of Meadow Pipits on 25th, as of Wheatears, and this exodus took place with a moderate SW. to west wind and the Mainland clearly visible to the south-east. I counted 25 on that day and on 26th, and despite careful search on 27th I could find only four. There was an increase to 12 on 28th, and on 29th there were a few about till late evening, when I suddenly came across a flock of 20 resting on the rocks at the gannetry fringe. This was the only time I had seen them flocking and I feel that these were new arrivals.

After a severe overnight gale on 30th I found four dead Meadow Pipits in the village, and the Gannet crew reported finding others about the isle. I counted about 15 birds on this day and I noted that there were odd birds about on 31st, but I was too busy packing to make a check.

Nothing was noticed at Fair Isle corresponding with my movement of 22nd-23rd, but there was an apparent influx - presumably from the north - on 26th-27th, when my birds moved out. Mr. Williamson writes: "Your new arrivals of late 29th and 30th are very interesting. It seems fairly clear that these birds had done a cyclonic migration from Iceland round the western sector of the depression responsible for the gale, and that some had been too over-taxed to survive their landfall. They could hardly have originated anywhere else, since no Meadow Pipits could possibly have reached you from

eastward against a force 6 gale, and it looks as clear a case of down-wind cyclonic drift as one could wish to find."

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla a. alba*)

The first two arrived early on August 23rd: they were perching on stones near the bothies when I got out at 8.30 a.m. One had a yellowish suffusion about the face. The following day I counted six, including some with the yellowish tinge to the head, presumably young birds. They dispersed about the island and were to be found at the foot of the cliffs, running about on the rocks at the water's edge. I even met them among the Gannets. Each day until departure on the 31st I saw odd birds, and feel they just remained there all the week.

On my arrival at Port of Ness I learned from a local crofter that he had seen five wagtails flying about the village for two or three days the previous week, probably August 25th or 26th. On September 2nd, on the headland near Port of Ness, four wagtails flew in from the sea, made a brief stop on a fence, and then made off again before I could identify them properly.

There were White Wagtail increases at Fair Isle on August 23rd and 26th, and on September 2nd a big movement began (p. 222).

STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

A solitary Starling appeared on 17th, sitting on a stone post above the bothies. The following day what was probably the same bird perched on the cairn of Sgeir an Teampuill. On 24th four Starlings were found near the north tip of the island but they made off to sea after a few minutes, and did not return. They went in the direction of North Rona. This was probably dispersal of local Hebridean or north Scottish birds rather than a true migration.

LAPLAND BUNTING (*Calcarius lapponicus*)

On August 26th I thought I got a glimpse of a Lapland Bunting in the vicinity of the bothies but it was off before I had a chance to train my glasses on it. The following day, however, I had a good view of two Lapland Buntings quietly feeding among the rocks near the landing-place.

APPENDIX.

Extracts from Diary of Local Weather.

August.

- 12th-15th Excellent, bright and sunny, wind NE.  
16th Wind easterly, light to fresh, good visibility.  
Hot and sunny. Sea flat calm.  
17th Wind east, strong, backing south; later on  
backing north. Strong sun.  
18th Wind NE., strong. Hot and sunny. Good vis.  
19th Wind NE., fresh. Good visibility.  
20th Wind NE.; then variable. Very hot day.  
21st Wind SE. to east. Dull day.  
22nd Wind east to NE., fresh. Dull and overcast  
with some bright intervals.  
23rd Wind NE., fresh to strong. Dull and overcast  
with the odd bright interval.  
24th Wind northerly, fresh. Calm sea.  
25th Wind SW. to west, moderate. Very hot day.  
Excellent visibility, Mainland seen. Sea  
flat calm.  
26th Wind SW., poor vis. Sea-fog over island.  
27th Wind SW., strong to gale. Dull and overcast.  
Seas broken.  
28th Wind SW., fresh to strong. Visibility poor.  
Heavy showers. Sea moderate.  
29th Wind SW., strong to gale. Heavy rain.  
Severe SW. gale all night.  
30th Wind SW., strong, decreasing through the day.  
31st Wind SW., fog patches. (Departed 4 p.m.).

71. Migration in Sutherland, August 1954.

D.I.M. WALLACE.

A glance at any early autumn Fair Isle Bulletin should quickly dispel any doubts about the value of migration watching in August, especially during the last fortnight of the month. This report contains a summary of all observations on migration made in the area of Durness, Sutherland, during the period August 15th to 22nd 1954. The two observers, W.J. Wallace and myself, arrived in the area late on 15th and were able to make almost continuous records till leaving at 0930 hrs. on 22nd.

It was essential to find a census area, both attractive to migrants and easy to watch, as soon as possible, and so a double one was tentatively pitched on the first evening. It consisted of (a) Durness village and the crofting valley of Sangomore, an area of cultivation and good cover, and (b) the Kyle of Durness and the first mile of the River Dionard, an area of open sand-flats, rocky shores, and sheltered river-mouth with some good cover.

Apart from the 15th, when the counts were made in the evening, all counts were made from 0730 - 0930 hrs. As the state of the tide affected the number of waders present in the Kyle of Durness, a second count of that group was taken, generally around 1800 hrs. Figures in the wader table (p. 213) are from that count.

Throughout the period the weather was good, with little cloud on the first three days and frequent and prolonged intervals of sunshine. Wind direction was as follows: NE. till 2100 hrs. 15th, East till 2100 hrs. 16th, SE. till 0900 hrs. 17th, again East till 2100 hrs.

T A B L E .

Passerine Birds at Durness

	A u g u s t											
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22				
Skylark												
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			5	7	3			2				
Swallow												
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>				1								
Sand Martin												
<i>Riparia riparia</i>	25	25	15	12			1	3				
Carrión Crow												
<i>Corvus c. corone</i>											1	
Dipper												
<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				1								
Wheatear												
<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	20	42	8	4	5	3	5	4				
Redstart												
<i>Phoen. phoenicurus</i>				1								
Barred Warbler												
<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>				1								
Common Whitethroat												
<i>Sylvia communis</i>				1								
Willow Warbler												
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i> . A.			2	1				1				
B.	25	25	5			3						
Spotted Flycatcher												
<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				2								
Meadow Pipit												
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>				P	P		P	P	P	P		
Rock Pipit												
<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	30	30	30	30	30	40	30	45				
White /Pied Wagtail												
<i>Motacilla alba</i>	10	12	10	18	5	5	8	5				
Reed Bunting												
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>								2				

"P" = passage.



18th, and from then consistently NE. Apart from the 19th and morning of 20th, when half a gale was blowing from the NE., the wind never rose above a stiff breeze and up to the 18th it was generally light.

#### The Migration.

As the project was very much a "shot in the dark" a gratifying amount of migration was seen. Although the occurrence of two rarities, - a juvenile BARRED WARBLER *Sylvia nisoria* at the River Dionard on August 16th, and a GYR FALCON *Falco rusticolus* at Strathy Point on 20th, - does tend to colour the general picture, interesting passage of alba wagtails and waders and departure of some local birds were noted. Sixteen passerine and 20 non-passerine species passed through the area. Together with resident birds, a total of eighty species was seen.

The peak day for passerine migrants was August 16th, following a night in which the wind went from NE. to East at 2100 hrs. 15th. This change of wind was not repeated, but the impression remained that owing to the geographical situation of the area, a veering wind in the NE. quarter would be the most productive for eastern migrants, the more so if this followed a "rush" of such birds in the northern isles (see p. 215).

The daily numbers of passerines are shown in the table (opposite page). The split in Willow Warbler is shown because of the fact that the birds in Area B were probably local birds moving out, whilst those seen in Area A were probably genuine migrants. The high numbers of Sand Martins and pipits are due in some measure to local populations, and this is probably the case also with Wheatears and wagtails. There was a definite increase in White Wagtails, however, on the 18th, and several birds of the same race were seen elsewhere on the same day (see p. 222).

Although the Kyle of Durness and Balnakeil Bay, another area thrice visited, are not particularly attractive to waders (certainly less so than the Kyle of Tongue some 15 miles to the east) good numbers were seen of several species and in all 13 were identified. The commonest was the LAPWING, but its status is confused by the fact that a full count was difficult to make because the flocks spent a lot of their time hidden in the crop area. However, there were definite peaks on 15th (or previously) and again on 20th-21st. The other species showed no clear pattern save that there was a gradual rise in numbers on the 18th. The passage of four species, - Knot, Sanderling, Greenshank and Turnstone, - was confined to the same period as the passerine "rush".

TABLE.

Waders at Durness.

	A u g u s t								
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	
Oyster catcher									
Haematopus ostralegus	40	45	50	80	60	50	50	50	
Lapwing									
Vanellus vanellus	500	150	8	9	38	200	150	30	
Ringed Plover									
Char. hiaticula	p	2		14	19	5	12	5	
Turnstone									
Arenaria interpres	16								
Curlew									
Numenius arquata	20	35	35	45	40	40	40	40	
Whimbrel									
Numenius phaeopus	1	1	1	2			2		
Common Sandpiper									
Tringa hypoleucos	1	1		2	1		1		
Sanderling									
Crocethia alba	2	3							
Redshank									
Tringa totanus	p	40	p	26	p	20	20	20	

"p" = present.

There were single KNOT Calidris canutus and PURPLE SANDPIPER Calidris maritima on 15th and 16th respectively, two GREENSHANK Tringa nebularia on 16th, and two DUNLIN Calidris alpina on 18th. No detailed picture of gull passage was obtained. The BLACK-HEADED GULL Larus ridibundus was surprisingly common, with numbers of juveniles on the 18th and 20th, and HERRING GULLS L. argentatus increased on 20th.

#### Direction of Passage South

The fall in numbers on 17th was probably due to the fine warm weather (continuing on 18th), which enabled migrants to recover quickly and move on south. In addition, a good proportion of the local summer visitors took this opportunity to move out.

Some observations were made on their route, and it is suggested that migrants striking this part of Britain, owing to the generally inhospitable character of the terrain, are forced to make a choice between continuing down the western seaboard, or by an inland route down the Loch Stack - Loch Shin valley. It was thought that some of the Willow Warblers and the Sand Martins in the Loch Stack area on 21st were from the breeding populations known to be leaving the Durness area. On the other hand, an increase in alba wagtails at Durness on the morning of 18th was reflected in the numbers seen at Laxford Bridge and Scourie later the same day, both localities being on the coast.

#### Visit to Strathly Point

This area was visited on August 20th: the weather was fine and warm, when sheltered from the strong NE. wind. Apart from the GYR FALCON already mentioned, - which was observed and sketched at close quarters, - three other interesting species were present: a single LINNET Carduelis cannabina, WHIMBREL Numenius phaeopus and an unidentified PHALAROPE in winter plumage.

72. The Notched Second Primary in Sylvia  
and Acrocephalus.

K. WILLIAMSON and P.A. RAYFIELD.

"The Handbook of British Birds," vol. 2, draws attention to the fact that variations in the position of a notch on the inner web of the second primary are useful in helping to discriminate between members of the warbler genus Acrocephalus. Thus, in the Reed A. scirpaceus the notch usually falls between the tip of the 8th primary and the tips of the secondaries; in the Marsh Warbler A. palustris it is usually between the tips of 6th-8th; in Blyth's Reed A. dumetorum it falls just short, and in the Paddyfield A. agricola well short, of the tips of the secondaries, and so on.

In so critical a group as Acrocephalus any difference in wing-structure, no matter how trivial, is useful in the laboratory examination of trapped birds. But we think it is a pity that the "Handbook" does not add a cautionary note that a distinct notch, falling usually opposite the tips of the 7th-8th primaries, is also to be found in the Garden Warbler Sylvia borin and others of the genus Sylvia. In this genus in Britain, perhaps only borin is likely to be confused with an Acrocephalus, since in autumn there are many birds, presumably 1st-winter, which are more olive-coloured above than the "Handbook" description suggests, and nearer the colour of a Marsh Warbler. The 3rd primary only is emarginate (as in Reed and Marsh) in a majority of cases, but at Fair Isle a few Garden Warblers have turned up with a slight but distinct emargination also on the 4th primary (as in Blyth's Reed).

As we ourselves have been misled by this notch on the 2nd primary into believing that an unusually olive Garden Warbler was "something else", and as we are aware that it has proved troublesome to visitors to Bird Observatories, it seems worth while emphasising this similarity in the wing-formula in the two genera.

73. Warbler Migration at Fair Isle in  
August and September 1954.

KENNETH WILLIAMSON.

Although there was a trickle of migration, mainly of waders, from late in July, the first flush of warbler migration became evident on August 10th when small movements of Willow and Garden Warblers took place, and the first Barred Warbler was seen. Migration of the early waders - Green Sandpiper, Greenshank and Ruff - showed a spurt on this day, and several Herons arrived. Weather of an anticyclonic character prevailed in Scandinavia, with clear skies and light east to north-east winds off the Norwegian coast and across sea-area Forties. This easterly airflow was complementary to the wind blowing on the northern perimeter of a depression then covering the North Sea and British Isles, with centres over the West Frisian Islands and the Outer Hebrides. On the basis of arrival by down-wind drift, it seems probable the birds must have originated on the south-west coast of Norway or at the Skagerrak crossing.

During the next few days Scandinavia was dominated by low pressure weather and it is likely that the few warblers noted (they included a Barred at a good weight on 18th, - see p. 229) were passing on to the south from Faeroe or Shetland, where there was calm or light air in the ridge of a high extending south-east from Iceland.

An exceptionally big movement of Willow Warblers for the autumn season began on August 20th and had its first peak on 21st-22nd, subsided on the next two days, then showed a resurgence on 25th. Among other birds concerned Wood Warblers were noteworthy, since this is a rare bird at Fair Isle at any time. One, at a low weight of 8.36 gm., was trapped on 20th, and two were

seen next day. A few Garden Warblers appeared, also a remarkably early Fieldfare, and on the first day there was a considerable passage of Herons. Garden Warblers appeared again on 23rd, alone except for a few Whinchats and a movement of Common Gulls. The second Willow Warbler invasion of 25th, when two Barred Warblers and two Ruffs appeared, was also preceded by a Heron influx.

Of the 16 Willow Warblers trapped between 20th-22nd the great majority had ♀ wing-length and all were young birds. Their average weight was 8.12 gm., about normal for new arrivals, but three caught on 22nd were low at 7.31 gm., 7.43 gm., and 7.89 gm. Two on 24th were heavy at 9.17 gm. and 8.30 gm., but four trapped on 26th averaged only 7.97 gm. Thus, on the evidence of weight, a fairly long sea-journey seems indicated for birds of the two major peaks. Four Garden Warblers trapped between 22nd-24th were all a little over 16 gm. which is on the low side for this species.

This was an interesting period from the point of view of the meteorological correlation. When the movement first came to notice on 20th there was an elongated ridge of high pressure reaching north-east from the Azores anticyclone to the Norwegian coast beyond Faeroe. On 21st this developed a centre between Faeroe and Shetland, expanding northwards on 22nd. There was a north-easterly airstream off the west coast of Norway, between this high and a depression active in the North Sea, and it would appear that the Willow Warblers flew south-westwards in this anticyclonic airstream, easily displaced from the coast despite the clear skies and light breeze.

There was considerable cloud at the coastal stations on the night of 22nd/23rd, owing to the increasing influence of the low, and Willow Warbler migration (but apparently not that of Garden Warbler and Whinchat)

seems to have been checked by these changed circumstances. The night of 24th/25th saw a return of the calm, clear weather on the Norwegian coast (though fog developed in the early morning), and Willow Warbler passage appears to have been resumed in strength, the north-easterly airstream again drifting them in our direction. A small amount of re-determined passage followed from this drift in col weather to the north-west of Fair Isle from 29th to 31st.

September opened quietly, but some slight movement of small birds took place on 3rd-4th, involving Barred and Willow Warblers, the first Lesser Whitethroat of the autumn and an extraordinarily early Goldcrest. A small high covering the North Sea on 3rd was banished by the warm front of a depression which moved northwards during daylight on 3rd, pivoting on a centre in northern Scotland, and causing an east wind drift ahead of it from the coast of Denmark, the Skagerrak and south-west Norway. Its diurnal movement probably saved the situation for many birds, for had the front passed the Skagerrak after nightfall a considerable drift might have occurred.

The next day of importance was September 7th and quality rather than quantity was the keynote of the day. An Icterine Warbler, two Bluethroats and four Wrynecks appeared, as well as half-a-dozen each of Tree Pipit, Redstart and Kestrel: there were four Pied Flycatchers, and Garden Warblers and Whinchats struck an autumn peak. It seems likely that this movement came from north-west Germany or Holland rather than the Skagerrak, for heavy rain was falling over southern Scandinavia and good migration conditions existed only on the Danish and German west coasts, the skies being clear and wind light southerly backing with the approach of a warm front.

September 10th marks another small influx which brought 4 Common Whitethroats, a Barred and 5 Willow

Warblers, and a Whinchat "plus" and three Ruffs, with a Sedge Warbler and Ring Ousel located next day. It does not seem likely that these could have been drift migrants for although North Sea winds were S.S.E. late on 9th ahead of the occluded front of a low centred on north Scotland the wind over the whole North Sea had backed to SW. before midnight. Moreover, the western seaboard of Europe was under the influence of this depression and conditions were not good for migration. Another low pressure cell lay to west of Ireland, and between the two there was a calm region which embraced Faeroe, so that the birds seem more likely to have been on redetermined passage from the north-west. The weights of the Barred and Garden Warblers trapped do not suggest a long journey, though one of the Whitethroats is low at a little over 11 gm.

Another movement appears to have come from the west Norway coast by cyclonic drift round a small low centred on the Alesund area on September 17th. This was a day of strong wind veering from south-west to north-west at Fair Isle, and the birds found on 18th included two Scarlet Grosbeaks, six Willow Warblers, and a pair of Pintail. On 20th, with an extensive low centred on the Fair Isle sea-area, Faeroe, Shetland and Orkney had a brief spell of calm bright weather and the movement observed seems likely to have been onward passage from the 17th-18th drift. At least 3 grosbeaks were on the isle, single Whitethroat and Blackcap appeared, there was a slight increase in the other warblers, and at dusk the first of the Yellow-headed Wagtails was trapped (pp. 191-192).

Late in the day the low pressure centre passed eastwards into Forties and the weather deteriorated at Fair Isle, and during the night there was a further cyclonic drift from the coast of western Norway round the north-western sector of the depression. Blackcaps



predominated among the warblers present on 21st, and two Lesser Whitethroats trapped out of four seen on this day and the next proved to be the Eastern race (see para 66). Single Grasshopper and Eversmann's Warblers were seen, there was renewed Whinchat passage, and the first few migrant Blackbirds appeared. Another Barred Warbler and a Red-backed Shrike were found next day.

Summarising, it can be said that the most important and remarkable feature of the warbler and small passerine migration in August and September 1954 is that several of the movements appear to have had their origin along the west coast of Norway, rather than at the Skagerrak sea-crossing and southwards as in former years. These movements were largely cyclonic in character, the birds travelling round the northern side of depressions active in sea-area Forties, so reaching the Shetland area on a backing northerly airstream.

The unusually big Willow Warbler migration from August 20th to 25th was, however, anticyclonic, taking place in the north-easterly airflow of an Azores ridge. The fact that much of the migration was drawn from the north-east may explain the appearance of some exclusively northern species, such as the Scarlet Grosbeaks (commoner than usual), Eversmann's Warblers, Eastern Lesser Whitethroats, Eastern Short-toed Larks and the Yellow-headed Wagtails. But it cannot explain the remarkable number of Barred Warblers noted during the season, - at least 14 or 15 different individuals seen, of which no fewer than 8 were trapped. This is not a northern species, and apart from a few pairs in the Oslofjord region does not breed in Norway. Its appearance in Shetland and Fair Isle as a regular autumn migrant, - and in such remarkable numbers when one considers the general pattern of migration in 1954, - poses a special problem.

74. Further Notes on Passerine Migration  
at Fair Isle in Autumn 1954.

KENNETH WILLIAMSON.

REDSTART Ph. phoenicurus. In addition to those mentioned in para 73, there were four with a SE. wind drift on October 4th, ♀♀ on 6th and 18th, whilst ♂♂ were trapped on 28th and 30th.

BLUETHROAT Luscinia svecica. There were two on September 7th and a ♂ from 23rd-27th. A ♂ on October 1st was followed by one on October 6th.

ROBIN Erithacus rubecula. One trapped on October 9th after a night of SW. wind ahead of a warm front crossing Scotland was compared with skins and proved to be E. r. melophilus. Its weight was 17.11 gm. Continental Robins first appeared on October 16th-17th, and on 18th two were seen. They were very scarce this autumn, and four of the dozen trapped were caught on October 27th-28th. Their weights ranged from 13.67 gm. to 16.60 gm. One which weighed 14.65 gm. at 1530 hrs. on 18th was caught roosting that night and reweighed at 13.42 gm. next morning. A bird captured at 15.44 gm. on November 2nd had gained to 16.42 gm. at the same hour five days later.

WARBLERS. The warbler migration is dealt with separately in para 73, and details of BARRIED WARBLERS captured are shown on p. 229. See also the notes on an EVERSMAAN'S WARBLER (p. 196) and on SIBERIAN LESSER WHITETHROATS (p. 195). Dr. Maeve Rusk reports that a Lesser Whitethroat was at Baltasound, Unst, from September 19th-22nd. There were at least two ICTERINE WARBLERS on the isle between September 7th-9th, the second one being trapped twice on the last day. Its weight at 0640 hrs., 11.02 gm., suggests a newly-

arrived bird, as three other autumn trappings in 1951 are nearer  $13\frac{1}{2}$  gm. It had gained to 11.58 gm. by 0945 hrs. There had been S.SE. wind in the North Sea ahead of an occluded front during the previous night.

CHIFFCHAFF Phylloscopus collybita. There were two on September 21st and one, unquestionably typical race, was at Upper Stoneybrake from that day to 25th. The movement of "Northern" birds was later, none being seen until October 19th. This bird was in the Busta turnips, and as usual with this species was so tame that excellent views were possible at only a few yards range; it was a very drab, brownish bird heavily infuscated on sides of breast and flanks, with greenish-olive on the edges of the wing-feathers and no suggestion of yellow streaking beneath, - characters which are in keeping with the Siberian Ph. c. tristis. The second was trapped in the Gully on October 30th and was carefully compared with a long series of collybita skins in the laboratory: it was more greyish-olive than the first bird, though equally brown about the head, rather whiter beneath, and with a little yellow streaking on the breast. In my opinion it could best be called an abietinus-tristis intergrade. A more typical abietinus with yellow breast streaks visible in the field at close range was in the Mires cabbage-patch on November 1st.

GOLDCREST Regulus regulus. A great rarity this autumn, single birds only being seen on September 3rd, 9th, 14th and 22nd, and October 16th and 18th.

HEDGE-SPARROW Prunella modularis. Continental birds with markedly white underparts were caught in the traps on October 21st and November 11th. The first had the 2nd primary 3 mm. shorter, and the 6th primary 2 mm. shorter, than the 3rd-4th-5th; in the second example these feathers were 4 mm. and 2 mm. shorter respectively. In both the 7th primary was 7 mm. shorter than the three

longest feathers. Their weights were 18.43 gm. and 20.36 gm. respectively.

WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla a. alba*. The first on August 13th was followed by six next day with light N.NW. wind in Faeroe and Shetland, and the next movement was of at least 30 birds on 17th, these quickly passing on under fine calm anticyclonic conditions. A slight increase to ten took place on 20th with Faeroe in an anticyclonic ridge and a similar influx occurred on 26th, with more movement on 30th in westerly weather suggestive of a cyclonic arrival from Iceland (see p. 206). About 40 appeared on September 2nd and there were well over 50 next day, and again these appear to have had an Icelandic origin as a weak low to the east of that country provided a north-westerly airstream to the Shetland region. Birds were leaving on 4th-5th in col weather and had declined to 5 or so only by 8th, and one ringed in this period was recovered in the Moray Firth two days later. A slight influx was noted on 10th after clear weather and light NE. wind at Faeroe, backing near Fair Isle, and this was the last time on which double figures were noted. Some slight passage took place between 19th-21st when calm weather again prevailed in Faeroe and Shetland at the centre of a passing depression.

GREAT GREY SHRIKE *Lanius excubitor*. Singly on October 16th and 21st and on several days following 27th. The last was watched on the morning of October 31st, trying to get at a field-mouse which had caught itself in a wire funnel trap.

RED BACKED SHRIKE *Lanius cristatus*. There was a bird on September 5th and one on 21st, with two next day.

For notes on YELLOW-HEADED WAGTAILS and EASTERN SHORT-TOED LARKS, see paras. 64 and 68 respectively.

GREENLAND REDPOLL Carduelis flammea rostrata.

It was a good year for this delightful little bird, and the details of four trapped are given on the next page, with data for three birds of this race captured in 1953. The first was seen on September 17th and on 18th there were three, whilst C.K. Mylne had a redpoll on Foula on this day in the unfinished funnel of his trap. At this period, with a depression covering southern Norway, a NW. airstream was maintained between Iceland and the Shetland area. Iceland, with calms in the east and light westerly wind in the west, seems the most likely point of origin of these birds: the Greater Redpoll breeds there, and a number doubtless pass through on migration from eastern Greenland. None was seen on 19th, but over the next 3 days they increased from one to three, a time of calm, fair weather with Faeroe and Shetland almost at the centre of a depression.

A ridge of high pressure moved north-westwards across Britain from the Continent, maintaining this fair weather with light westerly to NW. winds between Iceland and our own area on 23rd, and this was our best day with six redpolls recorded. Generally this is a very dark race, showing little white on the rump (typically greyish streaked with brown), but two of these six birds were unusually pale examples, the ♂ trapped having a markedly white rump tinged with pink. Three stayed for several days but only one could be found on 29th-30th, after calm nights. In October a redpoll was seen on 8th-9th after weather suggestive of Continental origin, and on 11th, when the first movement of Iceland Redwings arrived, 3 Greater Redpolls were seen in the crops. Again there was a pale, white-rumped example which was certainly rostrata on the heavy flank-streaking and conical bill, and this bird remained till 14th. On this day a new arrival in a westerly airstream from southern Greenland was taken in Vaadal Trap. One seen and later trapped at North Haven stayed from 20th to 25th.

REDPOLLS (*Carduelis f. rostrata*)

trapped at Fair Isle.

Date.	Sex.	Wing.	Bill.	Tarsus.	Tail.	Weight.	Time.
23.ix.54	♂	82	10 x $7\frac{1}{2}$	$16\frac{1}{2}$	65	17.66	1115
25.ix.54	♂	80	10 x $7\frac{1}{2}$	17	60	17.90	1330
14. x.54	♀	80	12 x $6\frac{1}{2}$	$17\frac{1}{2}$	65	14.70	1540
21. x.54	♀	79	11 x 7	17	61	17.09	1500
22. x.54	Same bird retrapped					17.05	1200
25. x.54	Same bird retrapped					17.26	1030
<hr/>							
5. x.53	♂	75	10	17	61	14.73	1400
	Same bird retrapped					15.02	1800
12. x.53	♂	80	11	17	63	21.18	1100
	♀	78	$9\frac{1}{2}$	$16\frac{1}{2}$	61	19.73	1100

Measurements in mm. Weights in gm. Time in G.M.T.  
Bill-measurement: length from skull x greatest depth.

SCARLET GROSBEAK *Carpodacus erythrinus*. One between August 24th-26th appears to have arrived from western Norway in the NE. cyclonic airstream of a low centred over Holland. There were two from September 18th, following similar cyclonic weather in Forties caused by a low over southern Norway; and three on 20th are likely to have been on redetermined passage, with Faeroe and Shetland enjoying calm weather at the heart of a depression. Two remaining birds disappeared in col weather on the night of 22nd/23rd, and the next was a single individual on 26th. After the Skagerrak drift of October 1st-2nd two were seen, and one seen on 5th and two on 6th are likely to have been on redetermined passage. All birds were either ♀♀ or immatures. To the food-plants noted by M.F.M. Meiklejohn in Scottish Naturalist 66: 55, may be added the seeding heads of Autumnal Hawkbit *Leontodon autumnale* and Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus* var. *ornatus*.

CHAFFINCH Fringilla coelebs. An early ♀ came on September 18th and stayed 10 days, and on 29th a ♂ was recorded. A ♀ on October 2nd was followed by three on 4th, in both cases after cyclonic SE. winds in the North Sea; and there was one or more on later dates until on 15th four were followed by eight next day, during more easterly weather. The species became common in the stubbles for a time from 19th, when cyclonic easterly wind brought drift-migrants from the Skagerrak. Of the few ♂♂ trapped the earlier ones (October 16th-18th) were of the typical race, but one taken on 28th after further increments was more closely akin to the form described as F. c. hortensis, from Central Europe. At 18.94 gm. it was almost certainly a new arrival on a S.SE. airstream of a low to the west of Britain.

BRAMBLING Fringilla montifringilla. Two ♂♂ appeared on September 21st with the NE. cyclonic airstream of a low centred in the North Sea. There were 36 with the Skagerrak drift of October 2nd, and these were down to a score by 5th and one only by 7th. Next day there was another arrival of 40 or so with a high over southern Norway and east wind in the Skagerrak, veering to southerly at Fair Isle. These gradually decreased to 15th, when 20 arrived to be followed by 200 or so next day, when a low between north Scotland and the Skagerrak gave an easterly airstream between there and Fair Isle.

LITTLE BUNTING Emberiza pusilla. A fine ♂ gave excellent views at Busta on October 8th, and another was seen by James Wilson on October 28th.

There was a single YELLOW BUNTING E. citrinella on October 19th and three on 23rd; and a REED BUNTING E. schoeniclus on 16th-17th and also 19th. There were three GREENFINCHES Chloris chloris also on 19th.

LAPLAND BUNTING Calcarius lapponicus. It will be remembered that last autumn was a season of phenomenal abundance for this species (see pp. 51-55): this autumn it was a very scarce bird. The usual intensive search of the hill-ground at the end of August and in early September drew a complete blank, and it was not until 7th that the first birds were seen. There were two or three only and they appear to have arrived after a night of easterly wind in the Skagerrak, veering to SE. at Fair Isle, - not the conditions under which we expect to find Lapland Buntings reaching Fair Isle! There were two on 19th and four next day, with one or two on several subsequent days, and these arrivals offered the more familiar picture of a cyclonic migration from southern Greenland in the westerly airflow of a depression with its centre south of Iceland. Four on 28th-29th probably represent a new arrival from the same source, under similar weather conditions. There were odd birds in early October, two on 18th (after a night of easterly wind in the North Sea), and one on 21st.

SNOW BUNTING Plectrophenax nivalis. The first was seen on August 20th and there was one from 25th-27th and on 31st and September 2nd. Migration really began on September 12th when a single bird was followed by 9 and 15 on successive days, apparently a cyclonic immigration from the north-west. About 30 arrived on 17th-18th in similar weather, and there was a "rush" of over 150 on 21st, which is more likely to have come from the Norwegian coast round a depression in Forties. These increased on 27th-28th with north-westerly weather, and probably also on October 1st when the ridge of a polar high reached our area. There were very few left in the middle of the month, but a further increase to over 100 took place on 17th-18th in easterly weather. When Tom Henderson came into the isle on November 6th, a day of light NW. wind, he saw two flocks passing "The Good Shepherd", heading for the isle. Snow Buntings were common and well dispersed about the isle that week-end.



75. Northwards Movement of Arctic Skuas and  
Other Sea-birds in mid-October.

VALERIE THOM.

A remarkable northwards passage of Gannets, skuas and Kittiwakes along the Aberdeenshire coast was witnessed by Mr. and Mrs. A. Tewmion, Miss Betty Garden and myself at Collieston, a village some 15 miles north of Aberdeen, on October 17th.

We had intended to count the wildfowl on the loch of Strathbeg, but the weather was so bad that this was out of the question. The cottage where we stayed was on top of the cliff about 100 ft. above sea-level, and had an uninterrupted view out to sea. We noticed that there was a steady procession of Gannets Sula bassana flying north, and decided to count them in age-groups.

About mid-day Arctic Skuas Stercorarius parasiticus were first noted, and between 1420 hrs. and 1530 hrs. we counted 115 (and also three Bonxies S. skua) all flying north. The majority of the Arctics were in ones and twos, but there were two parties of 9, one of 8, and three of 7. Several pale phase adults were seen but most of the birds were dark in plumage. The skuas were following the same flight-line as a continuous stream of immature Kittiwakes Rissa tridactyla, between 100 yds. and half-a-mile offshore and low over the water. A lot of the single birds were actually with the Kittiwakes but most of the larger parties were separate. Only one skua was seen to chase a Kittiwake.

The Kittiwakes were passing at a rate of over 500 an hour, - calculated from six 5-minute counts between 1300 hrs. and 1520 hrs. In three separate counts between 0930 hrs. and 1530 hrs., totalling 2 hrs.

35 mins., 350 Gannets passed, as follows: 243 adults flying north (4 going south), 40 immatures flying north (one to the south) and 62 1st-year birds, all to the north. Less than a dozen adult Kittiwakes were seen during the counting.

There was a strong south-east wind estimated at force 6, and continuous heavy rain. Visibility varied considerably as the squalls came over and was less than a mile at 1530 hrs.

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(This appears to be a quite abnormal movement for the time of year: one can only suppose that the birds were anxious, for some very good reason, to get out of the North Sea to the north instead of through the English Channel, which one assumes would give a more direct access to their dispersal areas and migration routes. The "Daily Weather Report" confirms the wretchedness of the weather along the east coast of Scotland on 17th, the area being in the rain-belt of a warm front which stretched eastwards from a low west of Ireland, and crossed the North Sea between Yorkshire and Holland. As there is some evidence that sea-birds - especially terns - do not relish fronts, this may have been a sufficient barrier to exit via the Channel. But it is not immediately apparent why the birds should want to leave at all, for the weather conditions in the middle of the North Sea were very much better than on the coast. Forties, Fair Isle and as far south as Dogger were in a different weather-system, a ridge of high pressure extending south-eastwards from an anticyclone over Denmark Strait, and wind-strength was moderate or even light.

Perhaps the real incentive for the movement is to be found in the previous day's weather, however,

for on 16th, in place of this ridge, the whole of the North Sea had been enclosed in a depression which formed in Cromarty in the early hours and moved rapidly eastwards to the Skagerrak. Did the circular airflow of this depression (and winds must have reached forces 5 - 6 in the warm sector on its southern side) bunch too many sea-birds together in an area too small to provide adequate sea-room for all ? With the dissipation of the low over the Baltic on 17th and the incursion of polar air from the north-west, bringing a 10-12 degrees drop in temperature from that of the warm sector, the birds may have been induced to seek a way out of the crowded and troubled waters to the north, rather than face the advancing front of tropical air to the south. - Ed.)

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BARRED WARBLERS trapped at FAIR ISLE  
in AUTUMN of 1954

<u>Date.</u>	<u>Wing.</u>	<u>Bill.</u>	<u>Tarsus.</u>	<u>Tail.</u>	<u>Weight.</u>	<u>Time.</u>
Aug. 18	90	15	27	74	26.15	0500
29	85	17	25	71	21.42	0645
Sept. 3	84	17	25	68	22.49	1130
4	85	16	25	69	19.20	0700
	Same bird retrapped				20.02	1645
4	87	17	27	72	20.27	1515
7	89	16	26	76	23.67	0700
10	88	17	27	72	22.40	1420
Oct. 8	87	19	24	74	24.23	1345

Measurements to nearest mm.      Weight in gm.      Time  
in G.M.T.

All the birds were in 1st-winter plumage.

76. Notes from Alderney, September 1954.

R.S.R. FITTER.

For almost the whole of the week September 7th-14th that I was on Alderney, there were strong westerly winds, so little migration was to be expected. It is significant therefore that the only bird of special interest seen was a Lapland Bunting Calcarius lapponicus on the 13th, after four or five days of strong winds from west or north-west. Some of the numerous Wheatears on the island may also have come from this airt, though none was definitely identified as Oenanthe oe. leucorrhoa. I had a good view of the striking facial markings of the bunting, a wide pale ring on the side of its head, and several times heard its flat little trill, a note which I have heard previously on three occasions in Norfolk.

Other probable migrants among passerines seen were single specimens of the Chiffchaff, Tree Pipit and Whinchat, and a fair number of flava wagtails. The status of the alba wagtails and House Martins seen is doubtful, whilst the Common Whitethroat, Sand Martin and some at least of the numerous Swallows and Wheatears might well have been bred on the island.

Wader migrants seen included single individuals of Whimbrel and Bar-tailed Godwit, and several Common Sandpipers, Curlews, Dunlins, Turnstones and Sanderlings. Some at least of the Ringed Plovers and Oyster-catchers had doubtless bred on the island. Small parties of Sandwich Terns were seen, and once a single Little Tern.

77. Birds at Noss Head, Caithness,  
May 9th - 14th, 1954.

JAMES GUNN.

During early May 1954 I spent a few days at Noss Head, near Wick, which I had previously visited in company with Dr. Ian D. Pennie in October 1951. The main features of this rather bare and exposed headland are described in his article dealing with that visit, in Bull. No.5 (1951), para 49.

From May 9th to 12th inclusive the wind was SE. varying in strength from force 4 to 6, so some migrants could be expected. On the night of 12th the wind was light easterly, and for the remaining two days of my stay blew at force 2 - 3 from NW. Visibility was good on 9th, but poor on the night of 10th with the foghorn sounding, and moderate thereafter till it improved on 14th. It was generally warm or mild, overcast on 10th and with some rain on 13th and 14th, otherwise with a moderate amount of cloud.

Kestrel, Lapwing, Blackbird, Twite and Yellow Hammer were breeding on the headland, and there were casual observations on a number of other species which may have been breeding locally. The following list is confined to the more important migrants observed.

MANX SHEARWATER Procellaria puffinus. A single bird was seen by one of the lightkeepers as it flew close past the lantern, in a northerly direction, at dawn on 14th.

SANDWICH TERN Sterna sandvicensis. Parties of 5 or 6 were seen flying in Sinclair Bay. Common and Arctic Terns were also seen.

WOOD PIGEON Columba palumbus. One bird seen in a geo appeared to be very tired and flew a short distance to another geo farther along the coast when I disturbed it.

LONG-EARED OWL Asio otus. A bird was flushed from the long ditch which runs across the headland, on 9th. What was probably the same bird flew to this ditch when disturbed from a geo near the Lighthouse on 10th.

FIELDFARE Turdus pilaris. There was an injured bird, able to fly short distances only, between 9th and 12th. On the last day it was joined by another.

SONG THRUSH Turdus ericetorum. One in Noss Farmhouse garden on 10th, and one in a geo near the Lighthouse on 12th.

WHEATEAR Oenanthe oenanthe. There were four ♂♂ on 10th, and a ♂ and ♀ on 11th and 12th.

WHINCHAT Saxicola rubetra. A ♀ on 10th and a ♂ on 11th.

REDSTART Phoenicurus phoenicurus. A ♂ was seen in Noss Farmhouse garden on 6th and 7th and a ♂ was found dead in the engine-room of the Lighthouse on 8th. There were two ♂♂ on 10th and two ♀♀ on 11th.

BLACK REDSTART Ph. ochruros. A ♀ was watched on 10th and 11th frequenting an area of large boulders near the Lighthouse.

ROBIN Erithacus rubecula. Single birds were seen on 9th, 10th and 11th.

SEDGE WARBLER Acrocephalus schoenobaenus. Two on 9th, one on 10th, and one next day, all very easy to approach.

COMMON WHITETHROAT Sylvia communis. A ♂ on 11th a ♂ on 13th, and two ♂♂ and a ♀ on 14th.

WILLOW WARBLER Phylloscopus trochilus. Two each day from 9th to 11th inclusive.

PIED FLYCATCHER Muscicapa hypoleuca. A ♂ was seen in trees at Wick on May 7th.

( There was an extensive anticyclone over the whole of western Europe, its centre moving slowly northwards in Scandinavia, during the period of these observations, and North Sea winds were light to moderate SE. Skies were mainly clear on the Continental sea-board, and conditions there appear to have been excellent for migration. We had a Whinchat peak at Fair Isle on May 10th and Redstart movement was evident on 5th-6th and from 10th-12th. The first Sedge-Warbler influx of note took place on 10th, the only time we had more than one Pied Flycatcher was on 7th-8th, and Common White-throats really were common between 10th and 13th. - Ed.)

#### 78. Sooty Shearwaters in "The Roost".

Lt. Col. W.M. Logan Home informs us that a Sooty Shearwater Procellaria grisea was seen on September 1st by Lt. Col. H.G. Brownlow, Gordon Corbet and himself as they returned to Shetland from Fair Isle. Although it appears to be considered rare in Shetland waters (vide "Handbook of Brit. Birds" 4: 61; "Birds of Scotland" 2: 486) it is in fact a regular if somewhat scarce bird on the journey between Fair Isle and Sumburgh Head in the late summer, and is not infrequently reported by visitors to the Bird Observatory. It is well known to James A. Stout, who sees single birds, and occasionally two or three, on most crossings in September.

TABLE  
FLEAS from SPRING MIGRANTS, 1954

Host-species.	Examinations.		D.g.g.		C.gal.		C.bor.		C.gar.	
	Pos.	Neg.	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀
Sparrow-hawk	1	1			1					
Woodcock	1	-								1
Cuckoo	1	2		1						
Long-eared Owl	1	-		1						
Wryneck	1	1	10	1						
Redwing	1	-				1				
Blackbird	5	5	4		1		1			
Wheatear	10	14	4	7	1		7	4		
Redstart	6	2	1	6		1	4	3		
Red-sp. Bluethroat	1	-	2	1				1		
Robin	7	7	3	5	1	2				
Grasshopper Wrblr	1	2	4	1						
Sedge Warbler	11	4	13	3			1			
Icterine Warbler	1	-	1	1						
Blackcap	2	2		3						
Garden Warbler	5	2	9	6		1				
Whitethroat	14	16	14	9		6				
Lesser Whitethrt	1	4				1				
Willow Warbler	3	3	1	2						
Pied Flycatcher	1	1					1			
Meadow Pipit	1	2	1	3						
Rock Pipit	5	4	1	5						
White Wagtail	2	1	1	1						1
Grey Wagtail	1	-		3			1			
Starling	1	-				1				
Twite	1	10		1						
T o t a l s	85	83	69	60	5	12	17	8	0	2
			129		17		25		2	



79. Bird Fleas at Fair Isle in Spring 1954.

Search for fleas on the bodies of migrants and local breeding-birds was again made during the spring of 1954, using the improved "Fair Isle Apparatus" which has been fully described and illustrated in British Birds, 47: 234-235.

Over 170 fleas were collected from 26 different species of birds, and with two exceptions they belong to the three flea-species we have taken in previous years, namely Dasypsyllus g. gallinulae, Ceratophyllus gallinae and C. borealis. All were sent to the Hon. Miriam Rothschild, who kindly made the determinations, and to whom I am indebted for advice in the preparation of this report. The collection is deposited at the British Museum of Natural History at Tring.

The distribution of the fleas by species and sexes is shown in the Table. The first column gives the number of positive, and the next the number of negative, examinations made in each host-species. It will be seen that about half of the birds examined showed infestation.

Dasypsyllus g. gallinulae, the "Moorhen Flea" (so-called because it was first described from that bird) by far outnumbers the other two species combined. The sexes occur in about equal numbers, as we found was the case in 1952, when a similar study was made (see Bull. No.7, para 45). Of the two Ceratophyllus species, C. gallinae - in which the ♀♀ preponderate - appears to have been scarce. In its larval stage it requires a dryer environment than the Moorhen Flea and one would imagine that the cold, dry spring of 1954 would have favoured it. Yet it was more numerous, in comparison with C. borealis, in the warm, damp spring of 1952.

Again it is noted, as in the former season, that C. borealis has an apparent preference for Wheatoars, whether these be local breeders or passage migrants bound for Faeroe, Iceland and Greenland. It was also found commonly on Redstart and Whitethroat, whereas in 1952 C. gallinae was more in evidence on these species. The distribution of the various fleas on birds of passage may well be determined largely by environmental factors: after arrival, the chats, and some Whitethroats, keep to the open country with dry-stone dykes, whilst a number of other migrants, in the absence of cover, haunt the island's ditches, in which D. gallinulae may be presumed to be dominant. Indeed, this flea has virtually no competitors for the Sedge and Grasshopper Warbler and Bluethroat niche. The finding of no fewer than 11 specimens on a Wryneck is interesting: this bird is occasionally seen feeding along the ditch sides, although that is not its usual habitat. Whilst it is impossible to say what proportion of the fleas are picked up after the birds' arrival it is probable that this is large: examination of re-trapped birds shows that reinfestation may take place very quickly.

Miss Rothschild has pointed out in Entomologist 81: 84-95 (and in a paper now in press) that borealis is a "fringing form" present on small, rocky islands round the coast of Britain, having been replaced on the mainland by the closely related C. garei. She has found birds' nests in which garei and borealis hybrid populations occur, so that they can and do interbreed. The mainland form had not been seen at Fair Isle until autumn 1953 when a single ♂ C. garei was taken from a Meadow Pipit. During the present season, single garei ♀♀ were taken from a White Wagtail and a Woodcock. The 1954 specimens, at any rate, are most likely to have been on the birds before they reached Fair Isle.

K. W.

## FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

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

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

**Terms.**—Full board, including service, is SEVEN GUINEAS PER HEAD PER WEEK. Reduced terms are available for parties of students from schools and universities. These terms include use of bicycles, bird-rings, and other Bird Observatory equipment, but do not include hire of motor transport or small boats whilst staying on the island.

**Catering.**—Breakfast is served at 9 a.m., lunch at 1 p.m., and supper at 6.30 p.m. Facilities for early morning and late evening refreshments are provided in the hostel sitting-room.

**Applications.**—Priority in bookings will be given to "Friends of Fair Isle," and to *bona fide* naturalists prepared to take part in the scientific investigations of the station under the leadership of the Director, and to help with such other duties as may be necessary from time to time in connection with the station or hostel. Anyone else wishing to visit the island will be made welcome, provided room is available. Those who are not keen ornithologists are asked to book for the summer months—June, July, and August—so that more accommodation will be available in the Spring and Autumn for students of bird migration. Application should be made as follows :—

**(1) If made between 1st April and 31st October.**

To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, by Lerwick, Shetland. Telegraphic address: "Migrant, Fairisle."  
Telephone: Fair Isle 8.

**(2) If made between 1st November and 31st March.**

To the Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, 17 India Street, Edinburgh. Telephone: Edinburgh CENTRAL 4532.

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

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

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

