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# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

## BULLETIN



Edited by  
**PETER E. DAVIS**

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(Issued free to Friends of Fair Isle)

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Fair Isle Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland  
(Tel: Fair Isle 8)

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Fair Isle Bird Observatory Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 4,  
December 1957

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## EDITORIAL

The editorial mantle of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Bulletin has now fallen on my shoulders, and I am conscious that it is rather too large. The Bulletin was very much a personal creation of Kenneth Williamson's, and since the first issue seven years ago its reputation has advanced with that of its founder. Readers will be glad to find that K.W. has contributed twice to the present issue, and we trust that his work will continue to appear from time to time.

In the past two years, the issues of the Bulletin have had to be curtailed, owing to the financial position of the F.I.B.O. Trust. I am glad, therefore, to be able to report an improvement in the situation, due partly to a profitable season at the Observatory Hostel, which makes it reasonably certain that the Trust can afford to produce two Bulletins each year, in addition to the Annual Report. It will not be possible, in the available space, to publish observations from as wide a range of localities as before. It has been decided therefore that outside contributions from Shetland and Orkney (which have no Local Bird Reports) and from Scotland generally, will be given preference.

The present issue covers the spring migration and the breeding season of 1957, and will be followed later by another devoted mainly to the "autumn" bird movements between late June and December.

PETER DAVIS.

57. Thrush Nightingale at Fair Isle - the third British record  
 PETER DAVIS

An example of the Thrush Nightingale or Sprosser (Luscinia luscinia) was taken in the gully trap at Fair Isle on the late afternoon of May 10th 1957. Although the main breeding area of the species is in Eastern Europe, it extends as far north-west as Denmark and southern Scandinavia, and the bird might well have been found more than three times in Britain, but for its very close resemblance to the Nightingale (Luscinia megarhynchos).

There were no opportunities of observing the Fair Isle bird in the field; all that was seen was the flick of a rufous tail as it flew into the catching-box of the trap, and little more than this as it dived behind the nearest building after release; but to those already familiar with the Nightingale, the duller, earth-brown, mantle of the Sprosser might indicate something out of the ordinary. The rather inconspicuous striations on the breast would seldom be observable in a species with such skulking habits.

The captured bird was examined in the laboratory by Peter Hope Jones and myself, and was seen later by two of the native ornithologists of Fair Isle, George Stout of Field and his son James Stout of Midway, who happened to be working nearby. In the hand, the most sure distinction from the Nightingale lies in the short first and long second primaries of the present species. In our bird, the first was 8 m.m. shorter than the primary coverts, and the second 4.5 m.m. shorter than the third or longest. Only the third primary showed emargination. The measurements taken were: wing (chord) 83.5 m.m. (straight) 86 m.m.; bill 13.5, tarsus 27, tail (which was heavily abraded) 63. The weight was 21.6 gm. which is probably light for a bird of this size, and suggests a recent arrival after a lengthy crossing of the N. Sea on the gentle SE wind prevailing.

The upper parts and wings were of a uniform earth-brown colour, rather more rufous on the upper tail-coverts and the outer edges of the primary feathers. Tail a warm rufous-brown. The chin and throat were whitish in the centre, with

a darker earth-brown wash at the sides; the breast and flanks greyish earth-brown, though paler than the mantle, each feather having a darker brown centre and a few warm buff webs about half-way down. The centre of the belly was whitish, the under tail-coverts warm buff with slight dark barring.

There were pale tips on the outer greater coverts and on two or three inner secondaries. According to the "Handbook," these are a feature of the first-year plumage.

The upper mandible of the bill was a uniform dark horn colour, the lower mandible paler, with a pinkish tinge; the legs and feet were pinkish-brown, with a purple tinge on the leading edge.

The previous Fair Isle specimen, which was also the first admitted to the British List (some doubt having been cast upon two earlier English specimens) was shot on May 15th 1911. It occasioned a typical entry in the diary of the late Duchess of Bedford, who was on the island at the time: "Wilson shot what Mr. Eagle Clarke says is a Nightingale. It does not seem to me nearly russet enough for our common one."

The B.O.U. Check-List of 1952 gives "one Scotland, one England," but the provenance of the accepted English specimen is not known to me at the time of writing.

#### 58. The Late Spring Migration at Fair Isle in 1957

PETER DAVIS

The Observatory reopened on May 1st, but for the first week of the month the isle was virtually empty of migrants. With pressure low over N. Europe and high west of Ireland, we endured strong cold northerly winds and frequent showers of hail and snow - there was almost complete snow-cover on the evening of the 4th. The rest of the month, from the 7th on, made ample amends for this inauspicious start, with two prolonged periods of easterly winds, and some of the most delightful weather of the year. Migrants were never numerous, probably because the winds were often too light to divert them from their northward course in Europe, but there was an un-

usually wide variety of rare and uncommon species.

On the night of the 6th-7th, winds were easterly for a few hours in the Skagerrak, on the north side of a low-pressure cell centred in the southern Baltic; and although Shetland had light northerlies still, a Wryneck, a Wood Pigeon, a Jackdaw, and the first Swallow of the year, were seen on the 7th.

Winds became generally SE or E in the N.Sea area during the night May 7th-8th, as a warm front penetrated southern Britain, and they were to maintain this air until the 14th. The distribution of pressure remained broadly constant in the first four days of this period; a ridge occupied the N.Sea, connecting Highs in Central Europe and NE of Iceland, and successive Atlantic Lows failed to penetrate it and filled over western districts of Britain. Pressure was mainly low in the Baltic, presenting a barrier of cloudy conditions in this area. On the 8th, we had Sparrowhawk, Corncrake, and the first Whinchats and warblers, many of which did not arrive until midday. On the 9th, there was a Ring Ousel, a Robin, several Redstarts and wider variety of warblers. Captures on the 10th included a Wryneck and the third British Thrush-Nightingale, while Fieldfares peaked, and the 11th brought the largest number of Whitethroats, the first Turtle Dove and Garden Warbler, and no less than six Reed Buntings. New species on the 12th were Kestrel, House Martin, Tree Pipit and Grey Wagtail, and the fewer arrivals on the 13th included a fine male Red-spotted Bluethroat.

During the 11th and 12th, an occlusion, followed closely by a cold front, had moved northwards across the North Sea, to merge and become almost stationary on a line Orkney - S. Norway late on the 12th. The depression with which they were associated moved to the Shetland area and filled during the 13th. The 14th saw the last of the easterly spell at Fair Isle, as an occluded front of a more complex depression ushered westerlies into the N.Sea. The last hours of favourable winds brought a renewed drift of birds to the isle. Arrivals logged on the 14th included Common Sandpiper and other waders, a Cuckoo, a new Wryneck, a few Turdidae, Black Redstart, the second Blue-

throat, more warblers, and a Blue-headed Wagtail, while Swallows and House Martins passed in some numbers.

A period of unsettled cyclonic weather lasted from the 14th to the 21st. Winds were southerly in the N. Sea for much of this time but there were comparatively few new arrivals at Fair Isle. Conditions in W. Europe generally must have slowed or halted most migrants. Some of the new birds we recorded on the 15th-17th were either overlooked on the 14th or were drifted-birds from the same movements passing N. out of Scotland. They included a Pied Flycatcher, a Tree Pipit and a second Cuckoo on the 15th, a Merlin on the 16th, a Wood Pigeon, four Dunlin, a Scandinavian Lesser Black-backed Gull, a hen flava wagtail and Fair Isle's second Red-headed Bunting (an adult male) on the 17th. There was probably also some direct passage at this period, notably of small numbers of Golden Plover, Curlew and Whimbrel, while a few hirundines were seen each day - probably Scottish breeders carried north of their range.

The 18th saw another small drift of Continental species on a SE breeze ahead of a northward-swinging occlusion. Birds logged on that day included Corncrake, Common Sandpipers, May's only Swift, a few Fieldfares, Blackbirds, Redstarts, Robins, single Bluethroat and Pied Flycatcher, and two Tree Pipits. Westerlies followed the occlusion, and winds were generally from this half of the compass until the 21st, but birds on re-determined or direct passage continued to pass. The 19th brought two Wood Pigeons and a Rook, and an extraordinary arrival of a score or so of Tree Pipits occurred late in the day. On the 20th a second Turtle Dove joined one already "off passage," and a small movement of Greater Wheatears occurred; a new Bluethroat, a few warblers and finches, and a Yellowhammer also arrived. The 21st provided single Snipe, Woodcock, and Iceland Redwing, a Ring Ousel, the first hen Pied Flycatcher, Tree Pipits, a Grey and a flava Wagtail.

By the 21st, an anticyclone centred off the coast of Central Norway was intensifying, and north-east winds returned to the Northern half of the North Sea, veering E to SE on the 22nd. A few birds came into Fair Isle late in the day; an adult male Rustic Bunting was taken in the gully trap, a Corn



Bunting and three Tree Sparrows were seen. The Scandinavian High was to determine our weather until the 26th, and conditions remained ideal for trans-N Sea drift out of middle Europe throughout this time. Arrivals on the 23rd included four Turtle Doves, two Cuckoos, Song Thrush, Robin, odd warblers an adult male Woodchat, and a Red-backed Shrike. This movement, unlike the early May drift, had a pronounced peak, on the 24th. The main species involved were hirundines (including the only Sand Martin of the spring), Redstarts, the sylvia warblers, and Spotted Flycatchers, with Jackdaw, Redwing, Blackbirds, Whinchat, Pied Flycatcher, Tree Pipit, and flava wagtail (a Blue-headed and a probable Grey-headed) also on the move. Two Blue-throats, three Red-backed Shrikes, and a Crossbill gave added interest to the proceedings. The majority of these had passed on by the 25th., when we saw five Dunlins, some twenty Swallows and a male Serin singing from telephone wires. This species has been recorded only three or four times in Scotland, and as with the Thrush Nightingale, the single previous Fair Isle record was in the same month over forty years ago. The only newcomers on the 26th were a late Fieldfare and two Tree Sparrows.

By this day, the centre of highest pressure was west of Scotland and moving slowly south; the Scandinavian centre persisting but now less important, and drifting north-east. Light NW winds were affecting Fair Isle on the 27th, and these backed slowly south of west in the remaining days of May. A few Swallows continued to pass, and there was again a small redetermined movement of night-migrants, the only noteworthy individuals being a cock Bluethroat and a Yellowhammer on the 28th and a hen Bluethroat on the following day. Four Dunlin were seen on the 30th, and there was a second small influx of Greater Wheat-eaters on the 31st.

Early June was a time of unsettled cyclonic weather which brought very few migrants to the isle. In the first five days of the month the trickle of redetermined passage continued. A Wryneck was present from 1st to 7th, two Wood Pigeons on the 1st, a Cuckoo on the 3rd, a flava wagtail on the 4th. A drake Goosander was seen on the 3rd and 4th. A few Dunlins passed until

the 17th, and there were Swallows on most days to the 20th, and House Martins till the 24th. A few Swifts occurred about the middle of the month.

The only small drift of continental birds was on the 10th-11th, in light south-easterlies occasioned by a small Low centre west of Shetland. The arrivals were a few Spotted Flycatchers, single Wood Pigeons, Garden and Sedge Warblers, and Tree Pipits.

June's most unexpected bird was a Hawfinch on the 16th, a day of light south wind, and there was an adult male Crossbill on the following day.

#### SYSTEMATIC LIST

Red-throated Diver (Gavia stellata). Two June 12th and 13th.

Heron (Ardea cinerea). One May 27th, 28th, and June 4th.

Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos). One May 7th.

Teal (Anas crecca). Two May 8th, one 10th, two 16th, three 17th, one June 5th and 6th.

Widgeon (Anas penelope). Two on most days May 16th to 22nd.

Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula). One May 11th and 14th.

Red-breasted Merganser (Mergus serrator). One May 8th, June 14th, two 17th, four 19th.

Goosander (Mergus merganser). A ♂ June 3rd and 4th.

Sparrowhawk (Accipiter nisus). One May 8th to 10th and 12th.

Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus). One present May 12th to 22nd.

Merlin (Falco columbarius). One May 16th.

Corncrake (Crex crex). One seen May 8th, 9th and 18th, resident thereafter.

Golden Plover (Charadrius apricarius). One or two seen frequently in the first three weeks of May, with seven 4th and three 9th. Well-marked birds of the northern form altifrons were present on these two days, and single birds June 10th and 20th were also of this race.

Snipe (Capella gallinago). One May 3rd, four 4th, two 8th, one 11th and 21st.

Woodcock (Scolopax rusticola). Singly May 8th, 21st, 31st.

- Curlew (Numenius arquata). Seen frequently throughout May, Maxima three 4th, four 18th and five 19th.
- Whimbrel (Numenius phaeopus). One May 2nd, and occurred on most days 10th to June 10th, Maxima three 14th, four 16th, three 17th, and June 3rd.
- Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos). One May 14th to 17th, three 18th, one 23rd, and 28th.
- Dunlin (Calidris alpina). Passage May 15th to June 9th, with maxima four 17th, five 25th, four 30th and 2nd. Birds trapped on May 20th and 21st were of the southern form schinzii from wing-length (110,111).
- Lesser Black-backed Gull (Larus fuscus). A black-mantled bird seen May 17th was ascribed to the typical race.
- Common Gull (Larus canus). Seen frequently, maxima six May 23rd, ten 24th.
- Black-headed Gull (Larus ridibundus). Present on most days, maxima eight May 14th and 23rd.
- Wood Pigeon (Columba palumbus). One May 7th, 17th, two 19th, one 22nd, and two June 1st, one 11th.
- Turtle Dove (Streptopelia turtur). Present May 11th to June 8th, two May 20th, four 23rd, two June 3rd to 7th. One ringed May 20th was present until June 7th. One seen June 18th and two 20th.
- Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus). One May 14th, two 15th, one 16th, and 18th. Two 23rd, one June 3rd.
- Swift (Apus apus). One May 18th, June 14th. Twelve June 16th, ten 20th.
- Wryneck (Jynx torquilla). One May 7th, 10th, 14th, and June 1st to 7th. At least three different individuals.
- Swallow (Hirundo rustica). One May 7th and 9th, and birds passing on all except two days 12th June to 20th. Maxima thirty May 14th, thirty-five 24th, twenty 25th, 26th, and June 9th.
- House Martin (Delichon urbica). Seen on most days May 12th to June 24th, maxima seventeen May 17th, fifteen June 4th and 10th.
- Sand Martin (Riparia riparia). One May 24th.

- Carrion Crow (Corvus c. corone). One or two May 10th to 15th,  
 and 22nd to 25th.
- Rook (Corvus frugilegus). One May 19th.
- Jackdaw (Corvus monedula). One May 7th, 12th, 15th, 17th,  
 21st, two 24th and 25th.
- Fieldfare (Turdus pilaris). Seen most days May 9th to 20th,  
 Maxima forty 10th and fourteen 14th. One May 26th.
- Song Thrush (Turdus ericetorum philomelos). Singly May 14th,  
 15th, 23rd and 25th.
- Redwing (Turdus musicus). One of the Iceland race coburni  
 present until May 7th, another 21st and 22nd. A  
 third bird seen 24th.
- Ring Ousel (Turdus torquatus). A ♀ May 9th, a ♂ 21st.
- Blackbird (Turdus merula). (Excluding residents). Four May 3rd  
 three 4th, four 13th, three 18th and 24th.
- Wheatear (Oenanthe oenanthe). Breeders established before May  
 1st. Small influx May 7th, and (of Greater Wheatears  
Oe.oe.leucorrhoa) 20th and 31st.
- Stonechat (Saxicola torquata). One May 1st (J. Wilson).
- Whinchat (saxicola rubetra). Present May 8th to 15th, maxima  
 four 9th and five 13th. Two May 24th, one 26th.
- Redstart (Phoenicurus phoenicurus). Seen daily May 9th to 26th  
 (except 17th), greatest nos. five plus 9th and 13th,  
 six 24th.
- Black Redstart (Phoenicurus ochruros). One May 14th.
- Thrush Nightingale (Luscinia luscinia). One May 10th (see p.163)
- Bluethroat (Luscinia svecica). Singly May 13th, 14th, 15th,  
 18th, 20th, two 24th, one 28th and 29th. At least  
 seven different birds involved.
- Robin (Erithacus rubecula). One May 9th to 12th and 14th.  
 Three 18th, one 23rd.
- Grasshopper Warbler (Locustella naevia). Two May 9th, one re-  
 maining until 14th.
- Sedge Warbler (Acrocephalus schoenobaenus). Three May 10th,  
 one 11th, 14th, two 15th, one 20th, 21st, two  
 23rd, one 24th, 28th, June 9th and 10th.
- Blackcap (Sylvia atricapilla). ♀ May 10th to 12th, ♂ and ♀  
 24th.

Garden Warbler (Sylvia borin). One May 11th, 12th, 16th, two 24th, one 27th, June 11th, 12th, 16th, 18th.

Whitethroat (Sylvia communis). Seen daily May 8th to 27th, peak nos. ten 11th, eight 14th, 15th, 24th. Two May 30th, one 31st, a ringed bird still present June 4th, and one 8th..

Lesser Whitethroat (Sylvia curruca). One on most days May 9th to June 3rd, with two May 15th, 16th, 25th. A bird ringed May 12th remained at least eight days, and one ringed 29th at least five.

Willow Warbler (Phylloscopus trochilus). A few each day May 8th to 24th, maximum seven 14th.

Chiffchaff (Phylloscopus collybita). One May 8th, 9th, 10th, and 12th.

Spotted Flycatcher (Muscicapa striata). Ten May 24th, five 25th, one 30th, June 1st, 2nd, 5th, four 10th, and one 11th.

Pied Flycatcher (Muscicapa hypoleuca). Single males May 15th, 18th, 24th, single females 21st to 23rd and 25th.

Tree Pipit (Anthus trivialis). One May 12th, 15th, two 18th, twenty 19th, three 21st, two 24th, one 25th, 26th, and June 11th.

White Wagtail (Motacilla alba alba). Single birds on most days May 2nd to 25th, with three 10th, two 19th and 22nd.

Grey Wagtail (Motacilla cinerea). One May 12th, 14th, and 21st.

Blue-headed Wagtail (Motacilla flava flava). Males of this race seen May 14th, 15th, 24th. Females or birds not well seen were; one May 17th, 18th, 21st, 25th, two 26th, one 28th, 31st, and June 4th. A probable Grey-headed (M. f. thunbergi) was seen by James Stout and James Wilson, May 24th.

Woodchat Shrike (Lanius senator). An adult male May 23rd to 25th.

Red-backed Shrike (Lanius cristatus collurio). A ♀ May 23rd, and ♂ and two ♀♀ 24th, two ♀♀ 25th, one 26th.

- Greater Redpoll (Carduelis flammea rostrata). One May 4th, 8th, two 9th, one ringed on this day remaining until 16th. One 20th.
- Serin (Serinus serinus). A male singing from telephone wires near South Harbour, May 25th. The two narrow wing-bars and yellow rump, and the absence of yellow patches at the sides of the tail, were noted. The previous Fair Isle example was collected by the late Jerome Wilson of Springfield on May 22nd 1914.
- Hawfinch (Coccothraustes coccothraustes). One (probably male) June 16th.
- Crossbill (Loxia curvirostra). A ♀ or juv. May 24th, an adult ♂ June 17th.
- Chaffinch (Fringilla coelebs). One May 7th, three 9th, one 12th and 19th.
- Brambling (Fringilla montifringilla). One May 8th, 9th, 10th, 13th, 14th, two 20th, 21st, one 25th, two 26th, one 27th.
- Corn Bunting (Emberiza calandra). One May 22nd.
- Yellowhammer (Emberiza citrinella). One May 20th, 28th, June 2nd, two 3rd, one 5th.
- Red-headed Bunting (Emberiza bruniceps). An adult male May 17th. The 2nd recorded at Fair Isle.
- Rustic Bunting (Emberiza rustica). An adult male May 22nd. The first spring record since 1919.
- Reed Bunting (Emberiza schoeniclus). One or two on most days May 8th to 27th, with six 11th.
- Snow Bunting (Plectrophenax nivalis). One or two present May 4th to 22nd, with seven 6th, five 7th, and six 8th. One June 5th.
- Tree Sparrow (Passer montanus). Three May 22nd, two 26th.

# 59. The Breeding Birds of Fair Isle in 1957.

PETER DAVIS

It is now some fifteen years since a nest of the STORM PETREL (Hydrobates pelagicus) was seen at Fair Isle, though it

has remained an article of faith that the bird still bred. In 1957 birds were heard or seen at night in the Kirn of Skroo, at Hoill Lee (above the hostel) and on Malcolm's Head, where they seemed to be in numbers. Peter Jones mist-netted eight birds there on the night August 4th-5th, four of which regurgitated fish-pulp, a reaction peculiar to birds with chicks. The colony appeared to be on the precipitous slopes near Fugli Stack; four more birds were caught later in August. On the same night of August 4th-5th, a MINX SHEARWATER (Procellaria puffinus) was heard below Malcolm's Head. It is quite possible that a few shearwaters nest in obscure corners of the isle. The very abundant FULMARS (Fulmarus glacialis) probably continue to increase. Their period of absence from the cliffs was very brief this year, lasting only from Sept. 29th to Oct. 16th. No 'blue' birds were breeding this year. SHAGS (Phalacrocorax aristotolis) remained abundant, the largest colonies being on boulder-beaches at Wester Lothar, South Naaversgill, and Gunnawark. Nests of the EIDER (Somateria mollissima) were found in all parts of the isle; some large broods of up to seven ducklings were seen. Two pairs of PEREGRINES (Falco peregrinus) bred, rearing two young on the Sheep Craig and 3 at Keesta on the west coast. It is many years since more than one pair was present. A CORNCRAKE (Crex crex) was calling in the Busta-Quoy area for much of the summer, but probably failed to get a mate. Some fifty pairs of OYSTERCATCHERS (Haematopus ostralegus) nested, many of them inland on the hill ground. Three pairs of LAPWINGS (Vanellus vanellus) are known to have bred on Thionc, and a fourth pair was present, which could have attempted to nest. The abundant predators make chick-rearing a difficult task, and only three young were fledged, the last as late as the first week of July. One pair of RINGED PLOVER (Charadrius hiaticula) again nested on Buness, losing their first laying to predators, but rearing two chicks in July. No SNIPES (Capella gallinago) bred this year. The SKUAS are treated of elsewhere in this Bulletin. GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULLS (Larus marinus) contrived to rear young on some isolated stacks and promontories, and some twelve or fourteen pairs of LESSER BLACK-BACKS (Larus fuscus) were divided between the

South Gavel and Goorn. HERRING GULL (Larus argentatus) chicks were first seen on June 10th. KITTIWAKES (Rissa tridactyla), RAZORBILLS (Alca torda), and GUILLEMOTS (Uria aalge) all bred in numbers, though to a southron the razorbill population seemed disproportionately small. BLACK GUILLEMOTS (Cepphus grylle) suffered from an unseasonable gale on July 12th; 3 of the seven nests at the accessible South Haven colony were washed out. The PUFFIN (Fratercula arctica) is probably still the commonest bird on Fair Isle. The first chick seen hatched about June 8th, an early date for any colony. The only easily-accessible large colonies, at Burrista and Toor o' da Ward Hill provided the bulk of the 241 birds ringed. A few pairs of ROCK DOVES (Columba livia) bred in cliffs near the crofting area. SKYLARKS (Alauda arvensis) were more abundant and wide-spread than usual, particularly on the hill. Three pairs of RAVENS (Corvus corax) bred successfully at South Ramnigeo (the old Norn name means "Raven's gully"), Hoini, and Wester Lothar. At least forty HOODED CROWS (Corvus corone cornix) were resident. Kenneth Williamson found 47 or 48 singing WRENS (Troglodytes t. fridariensis), all on the coast, during dawn counts in late June. (See page 184). One pair of BLACKBIRDS (Turdus merula) certainly bred, a newly-fledged brood being seen at the Heshalls, on the east coast, by G. Stout of Field; single males sang in the village area and at Pund during May and June, and a pair frequented the derelict Buildings on Ward Hill all summer, but no further evidence of breeding was found. THEATEARS (Oenanthe oenanthe) were rather fewer than in a 'normal' year, but probably still the most abundant passerine. MEADOW PIPITS (Anthus pratensis) were in better numbers than usual. ROCK PIPITS (Anthus petrosus), STARLINGS (Sturnus vulgaris), TWITES (Carduelis flavirostris) and HOUSE SPARROWS (Passer domesticus) remained numerous.



60. The Arctic Skua Study in 1957

KENNETH WILLIAMSON

The Arctic Skua Stercorarius parasiticus study was continued under the new warden Peter Davis and its instigator, Kenneth Williamson, who spent a fortnight at Fair Isle in June for this purpose. There was little increase in breeding-strength compared with last year, the total number of nests rising from 51 to 56. A check was made round the colony of those breeding-birds which had been colour-ringed in the seasons 1954-56, and a further increment of new birds was added to the "collection," so that now 101 breeders await a similar check in 1958. Of the total of 92 colour-ringed breeders at the end of 1956 season, 11 failed to take their places this year, so that the loss to the effective breeding-strength was 11.97%, slightly less than the figure for 1956 (Bulletin 3:113).

Last year the colony extended its bounds to Wirvie in the north and the Brecks of Busta in the south, the latter being the first nest within the Village area; but it contracted to its former dimensions in 1957, the Busta pair vanishing without trace, and the surviving ♀ of the Wirvie pair (who has now had three different mates in the past three years) moving half-a mile closer to the heart of the colony and nesting within 300 yds. of her original breeding-site in the Furse Valley. Another pair which completely disappeared was the old-established and very aggressive pale x intermediate mating which had occupied Thione since 1950. A pair - possibly the same - had been seen at Thione during May, but Bonxies had taken over this site and there was no sign of the Arctic Skuas in June.

## AGE-GROUPS WITHIN THE COLONY:

The colony is now so well-known through several years of intensive field-study, including colour-ringing of the majority of the breeders, that its composition by age-groups at first breeding can be fairly accurately assessed. Nearly two-thirds of the 112 birds have no more than three years' experience, only about 40 belonging to the 1954 or earlier intakes. Of the remainder, 31 or 27.7% joined in 1955 and 22 or 19.6% in 1956, whilst 20 newcomers came in this year.

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 Continuance of Matings Established in:

1954 or previously	1 9 5 5	1 9 5 6	1 9 5 7 (now)	Total
11 (19.6%)	8 (14.3%)	22 (39.3%)	15 (26.8%)	56

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This table shows that as much as two-thirds of the present matings are no older than the second year. Eas Brocks North and Homisdale Springs both pale x intermediate, are now the only matings which are confidently known to have survived the last decade: this, it should be stated is an opinion based on the personal experience of K.W. and cannot be confirmed from ringing. The very pale and dusky pale morphs on the Mire of Vatnagard have had eight seasons together, and so also have the pale x intermediate at Tarryfield, dark x intermediate at Airstrip East, pale x intermediate at Brae Middle and dark x intermediate at Brunt Brae West.

## CHANGES IN MATINGS, 1956-57:

The annual check of the pairings was made vastly easier in 1957 by virtue of the fact that there were no "divorces" as there had been in the previous year. Such changes as occurred were due to the failure of a 1956 partner to return, and in all cases except two the newcomer to the pair had no previous breeding experience at the colony. The first exception at Vaadal is discussed in the section on intermittent breeding. The second was at the Burn of Furse. Here the North ♂ was found injured in August 1956 and had to be destroyed, and the South ♀ failed to return from the winter at sea. The surviving members of these adjacent pairs joined forces and amalgamated their territories, which formerly had been close enough for there to be considerable friction between the nesting birds. The amalgamation left a little space at the end of the valley which the Eas

Brecks North-west birds were not slow to fill: each year this pair have fledged their young in this area, close to a pool and two tumuli which make good look-out points, although nesting higher on the hillside.

#### TERRITORIAL CHANGES:

Last year the old plantacrubs territory in Homisdale was split into two when the ♂ and ♀ each took different mates, and stood their ground. The new section was called Homisdale Circle from its proximity to the remains of an ancient stone "circle" on the moor. These contiguous territories were very small and in consequence there was continual friction and bickering between the two pairs. In 1957 an expansion took place in this region. The Plantacrubs territory reverted to its former extent, and the 1957 nest was in fact very close to the site of the 1956 Homisdale Circle nest: since the Plantacrubs nest was the first to hatch, on 22nd June, it can be assumed that this pair returned earlier, attained breeding condition more rapidly, and asserted their rights to the ground. The Homisdale Circle pair moved 150 yards westward into a shallow "cup" between the Peerie Brae Upper and Homisdale Springs sites, in turn forcing the Peerie Brae Upper pair (new in 1956) over the ridge to the Northern side of the airstrip. Here it so happens that the earlier nesting of the 1955 Airstrip North pair at a point some 50 yds. east of their 1956 nest-site (they too were hatching on 22nd June) had left room for another pair to move in.

It is interesting to find that among these birds, to whom territory can have no significance whatever as a source of food-supply (as in many passerines), there is nevertheless a minimum size, and the re-distribution of ground in this region in 1957 has ensured each of the competing pairs the maximum of room available. The important factor to be satisfied in the case of the skias is undoubtedly freedom of movement for their offspring.

#### RETURN OF YOUNG BIRDS:

Three of the season's new breeders had been ringed as chicks at the colony in a previous year. Two of these were nesting for the first time at 5 years of age, the other at 4 yrs.

1. YD 0023 (formerly 344.175). A dark morph marked as a chick of the Burn of Furse South pair on 10th July 1953, joined the old-established ♂ at Swey East when his 1954-56 partner failed to return. A single egg was laid.
2. YD 0024 (formerly 344.140). A dark-intermediate type reared on the Burn of Furse North territory in 1952 by a dark ♂ and a dark-intermediate ♀, the latter a "white-winged mutant" (see Bull 3:50). Together with an unringed dark bird, this 5-year-old established territory at Swey South, which had been vacant in 1956, and had a single egg beside the 1955 nest-mark. Although an apparently normal chick it will be interesting to see if YD 0024 carries the "white-winged mutant" gene(s) and transmits them to its offspring in years to come.
3. AT 26954 (formerly 344.162). A dark bird, mated with the survivor of two handsome buff-collared intermediates which established a new territory at Airstrip Middle in 1956. Last year this bird was caught as a non-breeder at the skuas' bathing pool on 14th June, and was found to have pink-over-blue plastic rings on the right leg, but alas no corresponding aluminium ring on the left. Since pink-over-blue was used only once in conjunction with an aluminium ring of the butted type (the only kind likely to be lost), it was possible to identify the bird with the Sukka Moor South brood of 1952. By a stroke of fortune its brood-mate AT 26971 (formerly 344.163), which similarly retained this pink-over-blue combination in excellent condition together with the numbered ring when re-captured on 20th June 1956, was then breeding for the first time at a new territory at Swey Summit West, to which it returned with the same partner in the present season. So we have two birds of a brood returning to the colony to begin breeding in their 4th and 5th years respectively, and it is interesting to compare this with the case of the Mire of Vatnagard 1953 twins, both of which were first-time nesters at the age of 3 years (Bull. 3:116).

In 1957 we got our first evidence that Fair Isle youngsters

do not always return to the parent colony to breed. Mr. G. T. Kay wrote in June to say that a bird-watcher visiting Noss, 50 miles away, had been attacked by a colour-ringed Arctic Skua which obviously had a nest of young on that Island.

Among the immature birds present at Fair Isle in June 1957 were several carrying aluminium rings, among them a very fine example of the "white-winged mutant" which must surely be an offspring of the original Burn of Furse North pair. Two chicks of 1955 and one of 1953 were among the birds trapped at the non-breeders' bathing pool in July.

#### INTERMITTENT BREEDING:

Last year we recorded an instance of a pale morph, ringed as a first-time breeder in 1954, but not on the strength in 1955, returning to a nearby site with a new mate to nest again in 1956. It is a bird easily recognised quite apart from its colour-rings by the absence - perhaps the result of an accident - of two or three inner primaries of the wings. It was back with the same mate in the present season.

This year brought two similar cases of intermittent breeding. The first was at Sukka Moor South, where there was no nest in 1956, but a two-egg nest in 1957. One of the pair was new, but when trapped on 24th June the other proved to be the same intermediate which nested with a pale morph on this territory in 1954-55, and probably for some years previously. This bird too has a long-standing injury, being without a foot on the left leg.

The second case was at Vaadal where the 1956 pale morph failed to appear (its long-dead remains were found on the moor late in the 1957 breeding season). This bird's place was then taken by a pale bird, unfortunately not trapped, which carried the colours given to one which had bred at Swoy South-east in 1955, but which was not seen in 1956.

#### NESTS WITHOUT EGGS:

We had a most interesting case in 1955 at a new site, Sukka Moor Middle, of a pair going through all the antics

associated with nesting, - brooding for long periods, vigorous injury-feigning when disturbed, and so on, - but failing to produce any eggs. The nest-scraps contained only part of an empty cartridge-case, and a hard-boiled hen's egg was substituted for this and was accepted. Later the pair was given a hatching skua's egg and succeeded in rearing the adopted chick. Only the ♂ of this pair came back and in 1956 and 1957 was the mate of the neighbouring Sukka Moor North ♀.

There was a similar case to this in 1957 at a new territory on the ridge called Peerie Brae. Both birds were unringed. After a display of injury feigning on 20th June one was watched back to a scrape which contained a small, rough pebble half the size of an egg. A hen's egg was substituted and attempts were made to trap the birds. As a measure of their strong attachment to this "nest" it should be said that one returned to the hen's egg only 3 minutes after P.D. had been installed in the hide: she got out of the clap-net when the string was pulled, but we re-set it and this time she took  $4\frac{1}{2}$  minutes to return! K.W. trapped the mate on the same evening so that both birds are now colour-ringed.

#### ABNORMAL CLUTCH-SIZE INHERITED:

A clutch of three eggs (the first K.W. had seen in about 300 skuas' nests in Shetland and the Faeroe Islands) appeared at the Brunt Brae Upper site in 1956, but none hatched, the bird presumably being unable to cover them effectively. It was thought that two ♀♀ might be responsible, since two of the eggs were almost identical and the third was rather different in markings. However, none other than two birds, a pale and intermediate, appeared to be interested in the nest. In 1957, the same pair again had three eggs, two being similar and the third one slightly different, and it is clear that only one ♀, presumably with a gene for an abnormal clutch-size, is concerned. It would appear that the pale morph is the ♀ since the intermediate had established the territory in 1955 with a bird of similar kind, and on that occasion a normal clutch was laid. The 3 eggs again failed to hatch in 1957.

## EARLY AND LATE LAYINGS:

Although it can be stated as a general rule that the old-established pairs precede the younger pairs in the date of laying, this rule is not without exceptions. First to hatch in 1957 was the Homisdale Springs pale x intermediate mating which has been unbroken since 1948, perhaps earlier. The first hatching was usually a race between this and the Eas Brecks North-west pair, also of (?pre) 1948 vintage, but as the old ♂ failed to come home this year, Eas Brecks North-west was not in the running. By contrast, the double-pale pair at the Mire of Vatnagard, whose first nesting was in 1950, are consistently slow starters and seldom hatch until early July.

61. Breeding Success in the Fair Isle Arctic Skua colony, 1957  
PETER DAVIS

The 1957 season turned out to be one of the least successful for the Fair Isle Arctic Skuas in the recorded history of the colony. Ninety-nine eggs were laid (possibly 101, since a July clutch at "Swey Summit West" is thought to have been a replacement laying), and though some eighty-eight of these are believed to have hatched, only fifty-five young were fledged. The following table gives the detailed figures for the years since 1949:-

Season	No. of Pairs	Eggs Laid	Eggs Hatched	Young Reared	% reared of Eggs Laid
1949	20	36	30	14	38.9
1950	22	42	34	25	59.5
1951	26	49	35	23	46.9
1952	32	55	49	45	81.8
1953	31	60	56	54	90.0
1954	34	62	47	43	69.4
1955	44	75	60	53	70.2
1956	51	96	76	69	71.9

In 1957, as is usual, the inexperienced breeders were the least successful. There were six pairs composed entirely of birds breeding for the first time, all of which had one-egg clutches, and only one of these succeeded in rearing a chick. However, inexperience cannot be advanced as a general explanation of the season's poor fledging rate, for many older birds were no more successful, and remarkably few reared both their young.

The weather is often a useful scapegoat in such instances, but though July and early August were rather dull and damp, there were only two prolonged "wet-and-windy" periods, in the second week of July and in mid-August, and these are not thought to have left any major tale of casualties in their wake. (The second was in any case too late to affect any but the latest families.)

The likeliest reason for the slump in fledgings is therefore food-shortage; and it is perhaps noteworthy that in casual observations at several Kittiwake colonies I was struck by the unusually large number of empty nests and nests with only a single chick. Since the skuas live mainly by harrying these small gulls there was an obvious inference to be drawn. Many Kittiwakes are reported to have died of starvation in Orkney, during the late summer. A long-term comparative study of breeding-success in the two species could be of interest, and it is to be regretted that the Fair Isle Kittiwakes are singularly inaccessible.

## 62. The Fair Isle Bonxie Population in 1957

PETER DAVIS

In 1957, the Fair Isle breeding-population of Great Skuas (Catharacta skua) further increased to a total of twenty-one pairs, compared with 17 in 1956 and 13 in 1955. As in earlier years, the birds were widely distributed over hill ground nearly two miles by one in extent. In 1956 there were two fairly closely-knit "colonies," each with four pairs of Bonxies, at the two extremes of the breeding-area, Vaasetter in the south



and Dronga in the North; but in 1957 the Vaasetter group became pre-eminent with six pairs, while Dronga had only three.

The site of the missing pair at Dronga was the only one established in 1956 or earlier to be vacated in the present year. There were again single pairs at Lorness, Burrashield, the Brae of Restensgeo, Eas Brecks, and Byerwall, and three pairs around the Mire of Vatnagard, while the pair known as "Desdemona and Othello" (a very pale and a very dark individual) returned for their fourth season on Sukka Moor. The new breeding sites, apart from those on Vaasetter, were in the southern half of Sukka Moor, in Homisdale (in the heart of the Arctic Skua ground), and near the summit of Ward Hill. These last three were the only nests on the isle with single-egg clutches.

The Bonxies fared even worse than the Arctic Skuas in their breeding this season. Thirty-nine eggs were laid, and thirty-four are believed to have hatched, but only fifteen young were fledged. Nesting-success was therefore only 38.5%, compared with 77% in 1955 and 72% in 1956. The more experienced pairs were the more successful, and four of these contrived to rear two chicks each, whilst only one of the five new pairs reared a single youngster. This may have been due in part to the later breeding season of the newcomers (in some cases a full month behind the earliest pairs) which exposed the chicks at a vulnerable age to the inclement weather of mid-July, but the basic cause of the general lack of success in the colony is more likely to have been some problem of food supply.

Two adults colour-ringed in 1955 and 1956 were recognised in 1957, and the 1950 Fair Isle chick which bred for the first time at the Brae of Restensgeo in 1956 also returned. As with the Arctic Skua, our first direct evidence that chicks do not necessarily return to the colony of their birth came in 1957. The Dutch ornithologist A. C. Perdeck saw a bird with the red year-ring of a 1954 Fair Isle chick at the Noss colony on June 20th. With 3 very large colonies and many thriving smaller groups in Shetland, it may prove to be exceptional for Fair Isle young to return to their birthplace.

63. The Wren Population at Fair Isle

KENNETH WILLIAMSON

When I described the Fair Isle Wren as a new subspecies, Troglodytes t. fridariensis in Ibis, 93:599-601, I estimated the island's population at "between 30 and 40 pairs, all nesting on the coast." This was based on counts of singing birds made on a number of days in May and June 1950. When I revisited Fair Isle in June 1957, I determined to make a more accurate census, for I had previously had an opportunity of censusing the St. Kilda Wren Troglodytes t. hirtensis, and wished to compare their numbers and discover in what ways their choice of habitat differs.

The comparative study of the two races, isolated on our remotest islands, will be the subject of a longer paper, and my purpose in the present contribution is to give details of the wren's distribution on Fair Isle "for the record." At both places the counting was limited to the first two hours or so of daylight, a time when one can be sure that most if not all of the males are in song. Should anyone feel inclined to repeat this census in future years, I would recommend mid-May as the best time: for in June some birds are already feeding young and are disinclined to join in the dawn chorus, especially if the morning is raw and cold. Feeling that the urgency of domestic activities, or inclement weather, - or both, - might inhibit dawn-song in some cases, I covered most of the cliffs at least twice, and am satisfied that the survey gives a very reliable figure for the population.

In all, 48 singing stations were plotted on the map (a copy is kept at the Bird Observatory), - an astonishingly low figure when compared with 117 on Hirta and an estimated 230 pairs for the St. Kilda archipelago as a whole. Hirta is smaller than Fair Isle, but its cliffs are higher and provide a much wider variety of habitat. I was not able to visit Sheep Craig, and as there is usually a pair at the Geo. of Sheep Craig, we may put the Fair Isle population at not more than a hundred individuals in the spring of 1957.

As at St. Kilda, the wrens were not uniformly distributed

round the coast, there being a few areas where they are concentrated in what must be regarded as optimum habitats. Steep sloping "banks" and cliffs with a poor vegetation are avoided, and parts of the isle with an exposure to the prevailing southerly and south westerly winds are sparsely tenanted. The majority of wrens favour the small geos, especially where these have a small storm-beach at their head; and birds can often be seen feeding on small organisms among the wrack thrown up by high spring tides. The neighbourhood of the Bird Observatory is therefore an attractive one, and here 3 ♂♂ sang "against" each other every morning, - one in the corner of North Haven next to the Hostel, one on the lip of Mavers Geo, and the 3rd on the shore of South Haven under Buness. The first appeared to have the whole of the North Haven to itself, as it sometimes challenged the last from the stack behind the pier.

One of the regions of concentration, abounding in small beaches is the three-quarters of a mile between Yessa Ness and Wirvie, in which there are 8 pairs. The region between and including the Kame of Furse and South Restingsgeo has always been a popular one and has 4 of these. At Wirvie there were songsters above the beach near the Stack, and on the cliffs north of the stream. Jivy Geo was surprisingly vacant, and in fact there were no wrens at all between here and Skroo, where the cliffs are fairly high and precipitous and very bare. Along the North coast there was another concentration with 8 pairs between East and West Bergaroo and the beach of Wester Lothar, including birds at Lorcum, Easter Lothar, the geo inside Millinshoullan, and Saaverstein. With its ample beach and rocky terrain above one might have expected 2 pairs at Wester Lothar.

Beyond this, over the roach known as Shina Witha, the coast falls steeply in a grassy slope to a low cliff, and there are no wrens until Dronga is turned. Sloangie has one and introduces another good wren area with birds at North and South Fellsigio (the latter sometimes singing from Matchi Stack), the high Ward Hill cliff inside the stack, and Guithicum. Considering that here the cliffs are highest and most diversified, with plenty of vegetation, the number is smaller than one would expect; but it must be borne in mind that we are now following

the exposed western coast. Farther south, the association of wrens with deeply-cut, sheltered geos becomes very marked, the only occupied places being Gray Geo, North and South Naversgill, Troila Geo and Gunnywark (with a single pair only in each!), South Geo of Huni, the north side of Heukni Geo and the south side of Hunds Hillier. A bird sang in Steinsi Geo, and where the cliffs rise to 330-350 feet in the lee of Malcolm's Head 3 songsters were counted.

The western and southern aspects of Malcolm's Head, four-square to the prevailing winds, are without birds, nor are there any in the lee of the Holms of Shaltstein, or in the vicinity of Smirri Geo and the South Lighthouse. The coast of Skaddan is rocky and low and quite unsuited to wrens, but I was surprised to find that the famine persisted all along the south and south-east coast. Actually, song was heard on three different mornings in the South Harbour region, once from the natural arch below the graveyard and twice from Aaglass, and I was forced to the conclusion that this was the extensive territory of a single pair. Meo Ness - not really suitable with its bare, rocky terrain - was vacant, and Stroms Hellier and Swartz Geo were unexpectedly empty.

Indeed, with the exception of two "hardy annuals" in the Geo of Busta and South Rammigeo, the wrens of the south-east side are confined to the bays sheltered from the south by the Rippack and Vaasetter. There are 3 pairs between Clingers Geo and Heswalls, one at Shaldi Cliff and another at South Milla Hesslands. Duttfield had its regular pair, and there were 2 at Funniequoy, one singing from the cliff north of the outfall of the Gully Stream, and the other challenging from the Stack. The last site was not occupied in 1956, but this may be the pair which nested in that year at Johnny's Peats.

Like Johnny's Peats, there were several places without wrens in 1957 where birds have bred in previous years, - the South or Salt Water Reeve, Lunna Geo, the mouth of the Burn of Gilly, the Kirn of Skroo, and (the only "inland" nest I have found) the old mills at the head of the Gully. Perhaps these are more austere locations which attract wrens only when numbers are high and competition for territories is strong, and future surveys should

seek to elucidate this situation and find out how the numbers fluctuate.

Finally, - and this is astonishing, considering that the wren is traditionally a garden and woodland bird, - the crofting area was quite devoid of wrens, despite the existence of attractive, sheltered gardens beside most of the cottages. In Shetland and Faeroe the "toonships" are inhabited, and even the deserted village of Hirta, though it has nothing even remotely resembling a garden, has always had its little colony of St. Kilda Wrens.

64. A List of Birds Recorded on Foula, Shetland,  
in July and August 1957

R. F. DICKENS and D. R. WILSON

These notes are based on the observations of members of the Brathay Exploration Group expedition (of which R. F. Dickens and J. C. Gittins were leaders) and of D. R. Wilson. The latter was on Foula from the 5th to 13th August and the Brathay Group from 30th July to 13th August with one member, Bruce MacGregor, staying until the 26th.

Red-throated Diver: 9 on Rosie Loch, 1st Aug. 4 and 1 juv. on Flick Lochs, 4th Aug. On the 5th there were two on Rosie and 8 off Swaa Head.

Leach's Petrel: One was caught and at the same time two others were heard calling on the Noup on 6th Aug. Single birds were also heard on the 7th and 9th, but no nesting burrows were found. This is the first record of live birds being found in the Shetland Islands during the breeding season and a fuller account is to appear in British Birds. Two birds seen at the south on the 4th were thought by R.F.D. to be of this species after seeing the trapped bird released with a Storm Petrel in daylight.

Storm Petrel: Very numerous around the Noup but no nesting burrows found there. Odd birds were seen at night at various points on the north, south and east of the island. At South Biggins, several birds were brought in by cats.

Manx-Shearwater: Breeding on the Noup. Colony not thought to be very large.

Fulmar: A dark phase bird was seen off the western cliffs and another at the north-east.

Gannet: Two adults continually patrolling along the N.E. side of the island. Over 20 on the 11th, a day of strong NNE winds. 50 on 14th.

Cormorant: Odd single birds seen.

Shag: Exceedingly numerous.

Heron: Three flying south over the island on the 13th. One on 1st and 2nd, 2 on 12th, and 4 on the 15th.

Mallard: 2 on the 1st. 3 on the 14th.

Teal: Up to nine seen on most days.

Eider: Fairly numerous. 80 plus in one raft on 1st. 24 together on the 11th were all drakes.

Peregrine: One on the 8th, and one on the 15th.

Merlin: A female or young bird on most days up to the 13th.

Kestrel: One on 8th and 10th.

Corncrake: Present in the Hametoun area. Single bird calling continually.

Oystercatcher: Recorded on all days. 43 at the north end was the largest number together. The tame bird again returned to Funds after wintering in Lerwick where it was recognised by an old break in one of its toes.

Lapwing: Up to 20 on most days. 23 flying NE over the sea on 7th.

Ringed Plover: Up to 5 recorded daily. One young ringed.

Golden Plover: Two on 7th, 8th, and 9th. One on 11th.

Turnstone: Present all the time. Max. count ca. 30.

Snipe: 15 on the 4th and 20 on the 10th were max. counts.  
Nest c/4 on the 4th.

Knot: One on the 2nd.

Curlew: Present on most days. 5 on 10th and 11th, and 7 on 14th and 16th.

Whimbrel: One or two most days. 12 on 2nd, 9 on 7th.

Green Sandpiper: One on 7th, 8th, 9th, 15th, and 23rd.

Common Sandpiper: One on 10th and 11th.

Redshank: Some on most days. 9 on 3rd and 7th; 13 on 8th as max.

Greenshank: One on 9th, 10th, 11th; 3 on 15th, and 1 or 2 on 16th.

Purple Sandpiper: Maximum numbers were 8 on 1st and 6 on 5th.

Dunlin: One on 2nd, 2 on 5th, and one on 6th.

Ruff: 4 on 9th and 10th; 1 on 12th.

Arctic Skua: In the NE quarter of the island where there were over 70 birds on the 5th, the numbers had dropped to about 20 by the 11th.

Great Skua: Simultaneous counts at various points gave a total of ca. 910 on the island on the 12th. This total included juvenile birds but not birds over the sea.

Gulls: No full counts were made of HERRING, LESSER BLACK-BACKED or GREATER BLACK-BACKED GULLS (there were ca. 30 of the latter present on the 10th).

Common Gull: Usually small numbers near South Wick. Max. of 8.

Black-Headed Gull: One on 6th and 8th; 2 on 7th.

Kittiwake: No counts made.

Arctic Tern: 300 plus at Wurrwobank on 2nd; ca. 12 on 9th; ca. 250 on the 10th when there was rain; 3 on 11th.

Guillemot: None seen on the island. One seen from the "Island Lass" under the western cliffs on the 7th.

Razorbill: Only one bird seen on the island with a chick at the cliff foot of Mucklaberg. Three on the 5th.

Black Guillemot: Fairly numerous. 22 birds ringed including 1 ad.

Puffin: 300 plus on Gaada Stack and 500 plus on Swaa Head on the 5th. No counts made of other areas.

Rock Dove: ca. 20 was the maximum count.

Swift: One on the second with very white chin/throat. Head-on it appeared to have an all-white Head. Paler edges to coverts gave a distinct pattern to the wing. One on 5th.

Skyllark: Max. of 6 up to the 11th. ca. 20 on 12th.

Raven: 4 together at N. end. Possibly 2 others.



Hooded Crow: Max count of 5.

Wren: Difficult to estimate numbers seen in various parts of the island, on cliffs, along walls, etc.

Blackbird: Maximum count in a day was 6, but this represented only a small part of the total population. 8 were ringed in Ham Yard. Others were seen at N. end, about South Biggins, and in Daal.

Wheatear: A maximum of 30 plus on the 5th.

Meadow Pipit: 25 on the 6th. On the 7th ca. 20 in a loose flock flew from the E. over Sloag. They were high and possibly came off the sea.

Rock Pipit: No counts made.

Garden Warbler: One on 25th.

Willow Warbler: One on 12th and 15th; 2 on 16th; 1 on 18th.

Wagtails: Alba wagtails were recorded on the 12th, 1; 22nd 20; ca. 10 on 23rd; ca. 12 on 25th. A possible flava on the 12th.

Starling: A flock of about 250 plus seen from time to time.

Twite: Flocks of ca. 40 seen at various places. Ca. 40 at Ham and ca. 25 at the South on 10th were not the same birds.

Brambling: One adult cock at the Sneck of the Smallie was present from the 6th to 10th. The earliest previous autumn record was by C. K. Mylne on 9th September 1955.

House Sparrow: No counts made.

RINGING: 473 birds of 22 species were ringed.

Leach's Petrel	1	Black Guillemot	22
Storm Petrel	71	Puffin	19
Manx Shearwater	5	Wren	1
Fulmar	60	Blackbird	8
Shag	114	Wheatear	3
Oystercatcher	2	Willow Warbler	1
Ringed Plover	1	Meadow Pipit	2
Arctic Skua	4	Rock Pipit	2
Great Skua	116	Starling	2
Arctic Tern	10	Twite	13
Razorbill	1	House Sparrow	15

65. Spring and Summer Notes from Haroldswick, Unst, in 1957  
MAGNUS SINCLAIR

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER (*Gavia immer*). An immature bird inshore on March 5th and April 2nd.

RED-THROATED DIVER (*Gavia stellata*). The first was seen on March 11th, an early date.

FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*). Three were incubating on a ledge at the east side of Black Loch on June 24th; the nearest coast being one and a half miles away. One nest was two feet from the edge of the loch, and one foot above water-level. No young or adults in the vicinity on July 21st.

HERON (*Ardea cinerea*). Three flying over, July 8th.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*). A duck with at least four young on June 10th. A brood of three about two weeks old and a B/5 about 3-4 weeks old in marshes on August 29th.

TEAL (*Anas crecca*). A duck with young, and a half-grown young bird found in the marshes by Mrs. J. W. Henderson on July 17th.

SCAUP (*Aythya marila*). A drake on Black Loch, June 24th.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*). A ♀ as late as May 13th.

EIDER (Somateria mollissima). First young seen at sea-shore were two, with two ducks, on June 19th. The last to reach the sea were three very small young, about a week old, on September 7th.

SHELDUCK (Tadorna tadorna). Two flying westward over the Loch of Brecksie on June 24th.

GREY LAG-GOOSE (Anser anser). One on April 28th.

WHOOPEE SWAN (Cygnus cygnus). Two arrived on January 8th, and there were nine by the 11th. Numbers fluctuated throughout the next month, and all had left by February 17th. In March three on 9th and two on 19th were the last seen at Haroldswick, though several remained at Norwick for some time afterwards.

QUAIL (Coturnix coturnix). Two calling on May 29th, and heard frequently throughout June and July (three on July 4th). One calling until August 8th. Most records were from ryegrass and oats, some in marshy land, one even in cotton-grass (Eriophorum).

CRANE (Grus grus). Two reported flying over Haroldswick in the second week of June. (Two were in Dunrossness, S. Shetland, in late May-early June, and were reported at Mid Yell in mid-June; these are the first Shetland records since 1906 - Ed.)

CORNCRAKE (Crex crex). First heard May 20th, and calling in three different localities around Haroldswick during the summer. Greatly decreased since 1953.

OYSTERCATCHER (Haematopus ostralegus). Reported back at Norwick on February 9th, and one at Hirk on the 13th.

GOLDEN PLOVER (Charadrius apricarius). A flock of forty passed through on May 7th.

TURNSTONE (Arenaria interpres). A pair at Haroldswick on May 12th, and one flying north on June 3rd.

WHIMBREL (Numenius phaeopus). One on April 25th.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (Limosa limosa). Two on May 1st, the earliest record so far.

DUNLIN (Calidris alpina). Three on May 23rd.

GREAT SKUA (Catharacta skua). Single birds arrived in the first week in April, with four on the 17th.

ARCTIC SKUA (Stercorarius parasiticus). First three on April 26th.

GLAUCOUS GULL (Larus hyperboreus). One on March 6th, and one at Baltasound on April 15th.

ARCTIC TERN (Sterna macrura). First arrivals were two on May 14th.

CUCKOO (Cuculus canorus). A probable May 21st, and a juvenile in the last week of July.

SWALLOW (Hirundo rustica). Mrs. Henderson saw one May 14th. There were four on 21st and two 24th. In June, four arrived on 10th, three 15th, one 28th and two 29th.

HOUSE MARTIN (Delichon urbica). One June 11th.

ROOK (Corvus frugilegus). Sixteen on March 20th and five 25th. Two to four from April 1st to 5th.

JACKDAW (Corvus monedula). Two on April 1st, one 3rd and 5th.

FIELDFARE (Turdus pilaria). Nine on January 5th; five Feb. 7th, nine 10th to 13th, Two March 4th and three 30th. One April 16th and one May 15th.

SONG THRUSH (Turdus ericetorum). One March 15th.

REDWING (Turdus musicus). One January 5th, two February 10th, one March 21st. In April, one to four seen from 3rd to 17th. One May 15th.

BLACKBIRD (Turdus merula). Five flying high on March 29th were probably on migration.

WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe). A male arrived on March 24th, early date. A hen April 16th, and small nos. to 25th; about a score 26th. An increase, mainly hens, May 10th.

WHINCHAT (Saxicola rubetra). A male which arrived May 10th was warbling the following morning.

REDSTART (Phoenicurus phoenicurus). A female on May 10th.

ROBIN (Erithacus rubecula). Two from March 24th to 30th, with three 24th. In April, two 1st, three 2nd, one 3rd and 4th.

BLACKCAP (Sylvia atricapilla). A male on May 10th.

WHITETHROAT (Sylvia communis). A probable May 20th, and one 21st.

WILLOW WARBLER (Phylloscopus trochilus). Single birds May 12th, 14th, 15th, and 19th.

WHITE WAGTAIL (Motacilla alba alba). One March 12th and 28th, April 21st and 26th, May 1st; two May 4th, one June 2nd.

- CHAFFINCH (Fringilla coelebs). Nine March 25th, two 28th, three 29th, seven 30th. One April 1st, three 2nd, one 3rd and 7th.
- SNOW BUNTING (Plectrophenax nivalis). Two on January 5th. Six February 24th, and a flock 50 to 60 next day. In Mar., twenty on the 3rd, one 16th, and 20th, five 23rd, two 25th, seventy to eighty on the 27th, declining to thirty on 30th. Five April 2nd and 5th. In May, two on the 4th, one 8th and 9th, three 12th. A male not quite in full summer plumage was singing near the top of Saxavord Hill on June 10th, but no sign of nesting.

#### 66. Miscellaneous Notes from Shetland

- TUFTED DUCK (Aythya fuligula). R. F. Dickens saw a bird with two young at Walls, July 31st 1957. Venables and Venables in their "Birds and Mammals of Shetland" (1955) give only one Shetland breeding record, at the Loch of Hillwell, Dunrossness, in 1952.
- COMMON SCOTER (Melanitta nigra). A female and two half-grown young at Weisdale Voe on June 28th. (G. T. Kay and Dr. P. Peterson). The species probably breeds regularly in Shetland, in small numbers, but this is not proved every year.
- OSPREY (Pandion haliaetus). One at Basta Voe, Yell, May 15th. (K. and P.)
- CRANE (Grus grus). Two at Huesbreck, Dunrossness, on June 8th. (K. & P.). (The birds had been present for some days prior to this date. First record for Shetland since 1906.)

#### 67. Numbers of Song-Thrushes breeding in Shetland

L. S. V. & U. M. VENABLES.

In our "Birds and Mammals of Shetland" (Oliver & Boyd

1955) we show that Song-Thrushes (Turdus ericetorum) began to breed in Shetland possibly in the 1890s though the first nest actually recorded was in 1906. By 1946 there was a minimum of 22-24 pairs breeding in five localities.

In 1947, there was an alarming drop in numbers following, and perhaps caused by, an abnormally severe winter over most of Europe (the Shetland breeding birds do not winter in the islands) and the population had sunk to one pair by 1951. A small recovery then began and by 1953 there were two breeding pairs in Kergord Plantations and one breeding pair in the Manse garden at Lerwick.

We have no information for 1954 or 1955 but in 1956 no birds were seen at all. In 1957 there was one singing bird at the Lerwick Manse (G.T.Kay) and another at Kergord Plantations (Mrs. R.D. Winton). No second bird was ever seen at either locality, there was no evidence of nesting, and it seems probable that both were unmated males.

#### 68. Spring and Summer Notes from Orkney (Mainland)

E. BALFOUR.

#### Spring Migrants

A small invasion of WAXWINGS (Bombycilla garrulus) occurred between February 11th and March 7th. On March 3rd, a party of 40-50 KNOT (Calidris canutus) was observed in flight, and on the 17th a pack of some 200 GOLDENEYE (Bucephala clangula) had assembled on Loch Harray. Many LAPWINGS (Vanellus vanellus) were on the fields in arrival flocks on the 23rd.

In April, a GOLDCREST (Regulus regulus) was seen on the 4th, a WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe) on the 7th, and a few LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULLS arrived on the 10th. A ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD (Buteo lagopus) was hunting over moorland on the 13th, and an early WHIMBREL (Numenius phaeopus) was seen and heard on the 27th.

The May migrants (several of which make interesting comparison with the Fair Isle records -ED.) included the first CORNCRAKE (Crex crex) heard on the 7th, the arrival of a pair of COMMON SANDPIPERS (Tringa hypoleucos) on the 8th, and of the first ARCTIC TERNS (Sterna macrura) on the 9th. A HOUSE MARTIN (Delichon urbica) was seen on the 13th; many WHIMBREL were passing over on the 14th; the first CUCKOO (Cuculus canorus) was heard on the 16th, and a SWALLOW (Hirundo rustica) seen on the 18th. The outstanding bird of the month was a male SCARLET GROSBEEK (Carpodacus erythrinus) in beautiful plumage, on the 29th.

On June 26th, a HOBBY (Falco subbuteo) was observed at quite close quarters. This is believed to be the first certain record for Orkney. (Full details have been submitted which leave no doubt as to the identification. - Ed).

#### Some Breeding Birds

- RED-THROATED DIVER (Gavia stellata). Appears to be in a flourishing state. Six pairs bred at one small loch.
- LITTLE GREBE (Podiceps ruficollis). Rather scarce, breeding on a few small lochs.
- WIGEON (Anas penelope). One of our rarer breeding ducks; at least one brood was reared.
- HEN HARRIER (Circus cyaneus). The prevalence of bigamy by males seems to be declining a little. This was the best hatching in recent years, though nest losses were quite heavy. However, a reasonable number of young were reared. One was an albino, seen in flight a few weeks after leaving the nest.
- GREAT SKUA (Catharacta skua). Now breeding on at least three islands but in small numbers.
- ARCTIC SKUA (Stercorarius parasiticus). Has been increasing and spreading in recent years.
- SHORT-EARED OWL (Asio flammeus). Maintained its usual good numbers, and had a successful season.
- WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe). Increasing slightly, though not very numerous.

SEDGE WARBLER (Acrocephalus schoenobaenus). Several widely-distributed pairs.  
 WILLOW WARBLER (Phylloscopus trochilus). A few pairs nested.  
 PIED WAGTAIL (Motacilla alba yarrellii). Becoming increasingly scarce.

# 69. Flat-Flies from Fair Isle Migrants in 1956

GORDON B. CORBET

All the Hippoboscid flies collected on Fair Isle in 1956 were of the species found locally, namely Ornithomyia fringillina. Only one spring migrant was infested, a swallow on June 16th which had a male fly similar to the local ones. The Autumn migrant passerines showed the usual very low degree of infestation, but owing to the large number of birds examined sufficient flies were obtained to demonstrate fairly conclusively certain differences from the local flies. In the local population, i.e. flies collected from the breeding birds in July, the pigmentation is in general very dark. The markings under the head are invariably very dark whilst those under the thorax are usually dark but occasionally pale and very rarely absent. However, all eleven flies from migrant passerines and waders in autumn had these thoracic markings very pale or quite absent. Although continental material is very scanty this does seem to be the dominant type there, at least in Scandinavia. Of the twelve flies from Merlins, only two were of this latter type, coming from one Continental and one Icelandic bird.

The following list gives all the records from autumn migrants:-

## MERLIN Falco columbarius

- Aug. 12 - One ♀ f.c. aesalon with 2 flies ♂ and ♀
- Aug. 28 - One 1st W ♂ subsp? with 1 ♀ fly.
- Aug. 29 - One 1st W ♀ F.c. aesalon with 2 ♀♀ flies.



Sept. 1 - One 1st W ♂ F.c. subaeselon with 1 ♂ and 5 ♀♀ flies.

Sept. 12 - One ♀ F.c. subaeselon with 1 ♂ fly.

SNIPER Capella gallinago: Sept. 26 - One with 1 ♀ fly.

COMMON SANDPIPER Tringa hypoleucos:

Sept. 10 - One with 1 ♀ fly. This fly had about 30 mites Microlichus avus on the thorax and abdomen. These are common on flies from Fair Isle starlings.

WHINCHAT Saxicola rubetra:

Aug. 27 - One with 1 ♀ fly.

Aug. 29 - One with 1 ♀ fly.

REDSTART Phoenicurus phoenicurus:

Sept. 4 - One with 1 ♂ fly.

BLUETHROAT Cyanosylvia svecica:

Sept. 8 - One with 1 ♀ fly.

GARDEN WARBLER Sylvia borin:

Sept. 4 - One with 1 ♀ fly.

TREE PIPIT Anthus trivialis:

Sept. 7 - One with 2 ♀♀, one with 1 ♀ fly. The latter fly was carrying under the wing a specimen of the mite Microlichus uncus along with batches of eggs. In the local flies this is particularly characteristic of flies from rock and meadow pipits.

Sept. 13 - One with 1 ♀ fly.

One other record of special interest is from a juv. blackbird Turdus merula on Aug. 15th which had a single ♀ fly carrying on its abdomen three mallophaga. These have been identified by Miss Theresa Clay as female Bruelia merulensis (Denny). This is the only certain record of phoresy we have encountered on Fair Isle apart from Sturnidococcus sturni on starling flies.

## 70. Hostel - Season 1958

The Hostel will be open for visitors between 1st April, and 30th November with accommodation for 14.

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

Charges for board and accommodation are as follows:-

- (1) Inclusive of provision of sheets, etc.... £1 per night.
- (2) As (1) for persons under 21 years of age,  
or undergraduates .....17s.per night.
- (3) Exclusive of sheets & pillow slips .....18s.per night.
- (4) As (3) for persons under 21 years of age,  
or undergraduates ..... 15s.per night.

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

Mr. and Mrs. Peter Davis returned to the island at the end of January this year; and all booking enquiries should be made direct to Mr. Davis, Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland. (Tel: Fair Isle 8).

Starting on 1st May, there will be a twice-weekly service of the "Good Shepherd," leaving Fair Isle on Tuesdays and Fridays at 6.30 a.m. for Grutness Pier, Sumburgh. It leaves Grutness on the return journey at approximately 10.30 a.m.

Copies of the 1958 Prospectus and information on becoming a "Friend of Fair Isle" (Annual subscription one guinea) can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, The Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, Mr. George Waterston, 5 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh 2.

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY TRUST

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

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

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

Charges for board and accommodation are as follows:—

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

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

**Catering.**—Breakfast is served at 8.30 a.m.; Lunch at 1 p.m.; and Supper at 6 p.m. Late evening refreshments are provided in the Hostel Common-Room. Packed lunches may also be made available.

**Bookings.**—The Hostel will be open for visitors between 1st April and 30th November. Priority in bookings is given to *bona fide* naturalists prepared to take part in the scientific work of the Observatory under the leadership of the Warden. We wish to stress however that anyone interested in island life is made warmly welcome. The main migration months are May, September, and October, and visitors not so keenly interested in this are asked to come where possible during the mid-summer months.

Application should be made as follows:—

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

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

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

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

# FAIR ISLE BIRD OBSERVATORY

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