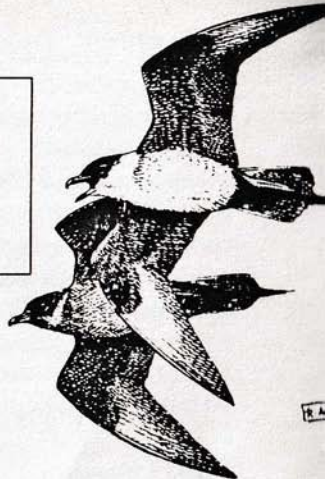


Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

FRIENDS of FAIR ISLE **newsletter**

No. 2 Spring 1988



It was not long ago that you received the 1987 Annual FIBOT Report which related the excitements of 1987, and the plans for 1988. Of primary importance for us all was the launch of the 40th Anniversary Appeal for £250,000. This first ever Spring newsletter will bring you further up to date with the ever active FIBOT.

1988 Staff

I am happy to report that Elizabeth Riddiford is recovering well from an operation at the end of February and expects to return to work in mid June. The staff, Peter and Peter, Assistant Wardens, with Louise, Cook and Joy Assistant Cook, have settled in well and have an extra assistant, Chris to cover almost all visitors requirements not otherwise catered for.

Appeal Going Well

The 40th Anniversary Appeal is proceeding well and FIBOT's appreciation is due to many people. To date, May 11th, we have been assured of £101,000 towards our target of £250,000. Individual members have been exceedingly generous, as have the National Trust for Scotland who forwarded us £11,000 and the Pilgrim Trust who have given us £10,000. However £149,000 must still be found so please do not relent in your personal support. If you have not yet personally supported, please consider doing so now — every £1, (especially covenanted £s) help FIBOT on its way to securing the next forty years. With this Newsletter is a special offer of a two week holiday for two on Fair Isle, with free accommodation and air travel from Edinburgh to Fair Isle and return. Only members can apply — so make sure your membership is up to date, and persuade someone else to take a special 40th anniversary membership with a minimum of £6.50 membership. Existing members need not apply for this Anniversary Membership. They would automatically be eligible for this special Offer.

"10p a bird"

One member, Howard Joliffe hit on an ingenious fundraising ploy — a sponsored bird watch over the May holiday in Norfolk when in a 24 hour period he counted 123 species and raised over £1,000 for the Appeal. He plans another 24 hour fund-raising vigil on the Whitsun Monday — this time on Fair Isle. Please help him to raise another £1,000 by sponsoring per species identified. (Nick reckons 80 species will be a good count, and Howard would welcome 10p per species — so you may be gambling up to £8). To support Howard's Whitsun bird watch please write now to Howard Joliffe, c/o FIBOT, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH5 7BT with your name and address and sponsorship offer per species. Alternatively telephone Nick Riddiford on 03512 258.

FIBOT Exposed

Keep your eyes and ears open for articles about FIBOT in the press. Loganair have generously taken 8 journalists to the Island this month. On Sunday 15 May listen to Nick Riddiford on Radio 4 at 7.15 a.m. — The Living World. Jimmy McGregor is taking a walk around the Island for Radio Scotland and Channel 4 TV are making a programme for networking in the Autumn. You might be wise to book your 1989 holiday on Fair Isle Now!

There are still vacancies at the Lodge in July and August this year. Please contact Nick on 03512 258 for details of availability.

LATEST BIRD NEWS

In Autumn 1987 there was never a dull moment. Spring 1988 has begun in the same hectic, exciting vein.

Migrants

The first major movements of the year were in late March, when Blackbirds and Woodcocks peaked at 1,300 and 100 respectively on 26th. A Red Kite was also found on 26th. Although difficult to see on the first day, it became far more active during a subsequent sunny spell and was seen regularly until 10th April. It was the third Fair Isle record and part of a major influx to eastern Britain. There were two more on Shetland and one on Orkney.

It was yet another good April for migrants and, eventually, for weather. The most impressive falls occurred on 19th-22nd when up to 1,500 Fieldfares, 320 Bramblings and 300 Wheatears were counted. Ring Ouzels also arrived then, reaching 50 on 21st and remaining common to early May. The finch of the month was undoubtedly Goldfinch. Until recently it was a rare bird anywhere in Shetland, but one or two have

turned up annually in the last few years. This April, about 7 individuals were seen, including a flock of 3. An unprecedented arrival of Grasshopper Warblers in the last week of April brought at least 15 individuals, including 10 on 30th when there were 4 together in Field ditch. Elsewhere shy and retiring, here they foraged unconcerned within feet of observers. There were other equally obliging species; up to 7 Lapland Buntings including some stunning and extremely tame males at Skerryholm; a Wryneck showed well at Hesti Geo on 28th; and a superb male Subalpine Warbler, trapped at the Plantation on 27th April, graced the Observatory garden with its presence into May.

Recoveries

The pick of recent recoveries was without question a male Long-tailed Duck shot in Finland last autumn. Not only was it first British recovery abroad, (very few Long-tailed Ducks are trapped) but...it had been ringed by Roy Dennis in October 1967, twenty years ago! Another very interesting recovery just received was a Fair Isle Bonxie caught in Sardinia, Italy, in March 1986 and released again unharmed. the Bonxie was well outside its normal range. A noteworthy Ring Ouzel recovery was one which last autumn had taken only three days to fly from Fair Isle to France, a distance of 1,200 km.

Seabirds

Work has already started on this year's Seabird Monitoring Scheme. Splendid weather was just what we needed for the Fair Isle Razorbill population census in late April. The total of 5,092 individuals was 29% up on the last count in 1986. On late April evenings breeding adults are in pairs near nest crevices or on the sea, whereas in June census work is complicated by the presence of non-breeders while breeders can be out of sight at sea or in nest crevices. The viability of counting in late April is being tested by comparing the position and number of pairs in relation to known nest sites. To ensure comparability with previous censuses, we shall count the Razorbills again in June.

After Razorbills we turned our attention to Puffins and Tysties. The first of the early morning Tystie counts at Busta Geo was done on 1st May, while every suitable evening from late April was spent looking for colour ringed Puffins to check on adult winter survival. So far we have found about 75% of last year's birds and expect to find more — Puffins are great survivors.

If the rest of the spring continues in the manner of March-April, we are in for an enthralling time.

1988 ANNUAL MEETINGS

The Annual Meeting on 20th February in Edinburgh was rated a great success. The highlight was Esther Williamson (Widow of FIBOT's first warden—Ken Williamson) cutting the birthday cake in the shape of Sheep hock. A selection of illustrated talks by Roy Dennis, Nick Riddiford and Peter Slater were enjoyed by over 170 members and friends.

Two days later 26 members assembled in a London Pub for a very informative talk by Nick on the pleasures of being an ornithologist on Fair Isle, be it for a day or two or a full year. Undoubtedly everyone present enjoyed the all too short evening and learnt a great deal — not least the Chairman of FIBOT!!

These two events are now annual occasions — the 1989 dates will be announced in the Autumn Newsletter. (If members would find a Midlands venue attractive please contact Valerie Thom, our Secretary with suggested locations).

Support Fledglings

Please don't forget nominations for the John Harrison Sponsorship for 1989 — to be received at 21 Regent Terrace by 31st October. The ideal candidate — keen ornithologist — 17-21 years — showing local club interest, and suggesting sound reasons for visiting Fair Isle — (subsidised travel and accommodation is not good enough).

R. A. Richardson—Some Rarities

FIBOT is selling 19 vignettes by Richard Richardson, at £50.00 each. The proceeds will be credited to the John Harrison Memorial Fund which was started by Richard. For a schedule of the vignettes please apply to The Secretary, FIBOT, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh. This is a special offer to members of FIBOT. If they are not sold by October they will be advertised openly.

"The Editors" would like to thank the anonymous member who paid for the printing and distribution costs of the Newsletter, as a contribution to the Anniversary Appeal (Sponsors for future Newsletters will be welcome).