

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

# **FRIENDS of FAIR ISLE**

## **newsletter**

No. 3 Autumn 1988



### **NEW START FOR NICK AND ELIZABETH RIDDIFORD**

The first edition of this Newsletter was on the printing presses when the Directors received Nick Riddiford's resignation as warden, effective from the end of January 1989. Nick and Liz with Naomi will be staying on Fair Isle in a croft house, which will be the base for Nick's consultancy with "Earth Watch Europe". His first project is to set up a bio-diversity study in Majorca.

Nick and Liz have made a great contribution to FIBOT in difficult times, for which we are all very grateful. We wish them all good luck in their new venture.

The Directors anticipate appointing a new Warden for the 1989 season.

### **THE APPEAL AND RE-DEVELOPMENT**

The appeal continues to be extremely successful, with over £230,000 now secured. The building work started in September, and significant progress has been made to date. The new Link building is walled and roofed, all the new windows are in place, and the new block walls nearly complete. The new heating and all the internal works will be finished by the end of March, ready for the next season.

The appeal is still open and will be until we reach our target.

### **HOLIDAY OFFER OPEN UNTIL FEBRUARY 1989**

Because of the continuing support for the appeal, the directors have decided to keep it open until February 1989. Please therefore do exort your friends to help us reach our target. It would make for a very special 40th Anniversary if we could take our membership total past 1,000. At the beginning of November 1988 there were 730 members, twice the number 12 months earlier.

### **A CHRISTMAS GIFT WITH A DIFFERENCE**

With this newsletter is another appeal leaflet so that you can give a subscription to FIBOT as a Christmas present. Don't forget that an anniversary membership offers the chance of a fully paid holiday on Fair Isle for two weeks, for two people, including



travel from Edinburgh with Loganair. Just think what a very special present that could be for a young bird enthusiast or equally a couple perhaps who have just retired or those who like travelling throughout Scotland, possibly as a special incentive present in the office.

Send the subscription of £6.50 or more per member to FIBOT at 21 Regent Terrace in Edinburgh, and we will send a receipted membership slip as your gift for Christmas wherever you are. In order to ensure that we are able to do so before Christmas please return the subscription form together with your cheque by 15th December – that means NOW!.

## **THE 1989 MEETINGS**

As last year there will be two FIBOT meetings in February 1989.

The first in Edinburgh on Saturday 25th February 1989 at 2.30. The second in London on Monday February 27th.

At both meetings there will be illustrated talks on the 1988 season, with particular reference to the Sea-bird colonies.

There will be a discussion on the role of the Observatory in the 1990s.

Please complete the enclosed application form and forward to the Secretary by 1st February 1989, at the latest.

**Please note that there are vacancies for two Directors on the Board with effect from February 1989. We are looking for new blood, and ideas so please do forward nominations to The Secretary, FIBOT, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT as soon as possible.**

## **1988 SEA BIRD BREEDING AND THE BIRD HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EARLY AUTUMN**

The summer of 1988 held mixed fortunes for Fair Isle's seabirds. Through April and May the cliffs and surrounding seas were alive with noisy, excited birds. A total island census revealed a boom in the Gannet population with 488 nests, an increase of more than 60% in one year. Both Arctic Terns and Common Terns also showed large increases from 1987, presumably representing displaced Shetland birds. Kittiwakes were unchanged from the last count, in 1986, but Arctic Skuas showed a distinct decrease, which is causing some concern.

The monitoring scheme got under way in late May with a rush of activity owing to the early breeding season. Studies of breeding success at annually monitored sites were initially encouraging; good fledging success was recorded among Guillemots,



and Puffins appeared to be bringing in plenty of food. In late June, however, it became apparent that the terns and Kittiwakes were having a hard time, with small young failing to grow and dying in the nest. This was a particularly disturbing period and before long the terns abandoned their breeding attempts. A few Kittiwakes struggled on to fledging — it was estimated that the 19,000 breeding pairs raised only about 200 young, compared with about 19,000 fledged in 1987. The failure of the surface feeding species indicates a shortage of small sandeels — usually their main prey on Fair Isle — were being brought in.

So with some species having a poor breeding season while others were 'successful' it will be interesting to see what 1989 holds for the seabirds. Hopefully, the demise of the Shetland birds will not continue though it seems likely that it may take several years for the fish stocks to recover.

*Andrew Silcocks (Seabird Monitoring Officer).*

## **BIRD HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EARLY AUTUMN**

The main feature of the July to mid September period was an excellent wader passage, including counts of 35 Knot on 27th July, 25 Purple Sandpipers on 7th August, 12 Greenshanks on 11th and 12 Green Sandpipers on 25th August. There were 30 Ruff on 3rd September while 33 Little Stints and 35 Curlew Sandpipers on 5th were record counts for Fair Isle.

Other August highlights included Greenish Warblers on 9th-21st and 27th, a Dotterel from 29th and the usual scattering of Wrynecks Scarlet Rosefinches and Barred Warblers. September began with an impressive fall after an easterly gale on the night of 1st/2nd. The following morning the isle was full of birds including 12 each of Wyrneck and Red-backed Shrike, 120 Tree Pipits, 100 Whinchats, 70 White Wagtails, 35 Redstarts, 65 Pied Flycatchers, 40 Common Sandpipers and 20 Lesser Whitethroats. The rest of September was dominated by westerley winds with gales at the end of the month, but these brought unprecedented numbers of Long-tailed Skuas — a total of 18 were seen from the isle in a 13 day period from the 18th and an additional 3 along with 7 Pomarine Skuas from the Good Shepherd.

As usual, September was not without rarities. Lanceolated Warbler and Yellow-breasted Bunting made their now customary appearance, while other vagrants included 2 American Golden Plovers and Pectoral Sandpiper from the west, Citrine Wagtail and Short-toed Lark from the east and King Eider (a male coming out of eclipse) from the north. There were Corncrakes on 4 dates, but only one Yellow-browed Warbler. Lapland and Snow Buntings were present in good numbers by the end of the month.

Our participation in a north-east Atlantic Storm Petrel project begun this year produced some interesting results. Among 1,000 trapped were 2 from Norway and one which subsequently visited the Faroes.

*Peter Potts*



## **MARKETING AND CATERING ON FAIR ISLE**

The Directors of FIBOT have commissioned two reports in conjunction with the redevelopment and the future operations of the Lodge. The first is a catering study to assist in the design and operation of a new kitchen and dining room. In addition to bringing FIBOT up to date behind the scenes the study is examining the menus to see if they can be changed to provide a greater choice of food. The essential family atmosphere will not be altered in the Lodge and the tariffs will not be increased more than they have been recently by a margin that covers inflation.

The marketing report is intended to try and find ways to encourage more people to visit Fair Isle during the summer months when the attraction of birds is not as great but Fair Isle as an Island is as colourful as ever and a wonderful holiday base. The marketing study will also explore any opportunity for using the Lodge during the winter periods. Any ideas you may have will be welcomed.

To assist with the marketing study it would be helpful if you could contribute by completing the enclosed form and returning it to the Chairman at 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh as soon as possible. As you will see the study encompasses many aspects of a visit to Fair Isle as well as encouraging your comments on any matter which affects your holiday. Thank you for your co-operation. A full report of the catering and marketing studies will be presented at the A.G.M. in Edinburgh.

## **BOOKINGS FOR THE LODGE IN 1989**

Bookings for the Lodge in 1989 are about the same level as this time last year. With the exception of the mid September to mid October period there is still accommodation at all times. Nick urges keen birders to book in for the Spring migration from mid May to mid June which can be just as exciting as the Autumn. The attraction at this time is that it coincides with the Whitsun break.

Now that the Loganair timetables are on the Travel Agency computers it is possible to book your transport to and from Fair Isle for 1989 now.

Don't forget that new research accommodation for two people in the Observatory is being offered at attractive rates. Do please encourage the use of this new facility for genuine research projects. For details and booking places please ring 0351 2258 or by writing direct to the Lodge.

**Happy Christmas and may 1989 bring you great happiness and success for you and yours.**