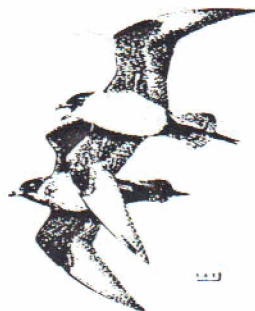


Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

FRIENDS of FAIR ISLE

newsletter

No. 4 Summer 1989



ALL GO AT THE LODGE

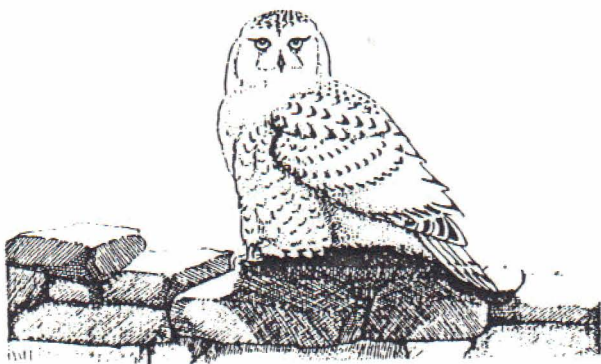
By the time the Lodge welcomed its first 'real' visitors towards the end of April nearly all the structural redevelopment work had been completed and most of the new fittings and furniture were in place. The harling has since been finished and the building — reddish-sandy colour — blends well with the cliff colour of nearby Maver's Geo. By the end of June the first grass shoots in the re-seeded ground around the building were showing green, and an electric fence was needed to keep the sheep from grazing them out of existence. Before long the sward should have completely recovered from the ravages inflicted by vehicle movements during the long wet winter.

The changes inside the building have been generally welcomed, although there are still a few teething problems to sort out. The lounge seems larger, and certainly is lighter, thanks to the floor-to-ceiling windows and the glass divider which now separates it from the dining-room. A more flexible arrangement is possible with the new chairs (referred to by Georgie Stout as the 'port and starboard' chairs as they are reddish and greenish!), which helps in eliminating the formality of regimented rows. And with new shelving and a solid wood table the library is now an attractive quiet corner. Next door the dining-room has been extended (taking in part of the old kitchen), carpet-tiled, and refurnished and the kitchen has virtually been replaced and equipped with many new aids to good cooking and convenience of operation. Upstairs all the windows have been replaced; the new ones are unusual in design and a little tricky to operate but, together with improvements in the heating system, they have helped to make the building much warmer. The researchers in residence now have their own small self-catering kitchen and the latest arrival on the scene has been the new computer, to be used mainly for data analysis and research projects.

Needless to say, the early part of the season was a very busy one for the staff, most of whom are new this year (only Peter Howlett, Assistant Warden, and Andy Silcocks, Seabird Monitoring Officer, were present last season). Before spring migration got under way, Paul Harvey, FIBO's new Warden, and Peter did wonders in rehabilitating several of the traps; and spare moments from birding have since been fully occupied with sorting books, doing minor repairs, and the thousand and one other tasks which have cropped up during the settling-in

period. Paul's wife Elizabeth, aided — or impeded — by 18-month-old Holly, looks after bookings, accounts and other administrative matters — and tries to find time to prepare for an addition to the family in mid-September. And the domestic side is under the charge of Joan MacDonald, our Cook-caterer. She presides in the kitchen, with Lorna McLeod as Assistant Cook, and also supervises Paul Donald and Jenny Forester, who do the cleaning, meeting of visitors and a multitude of other jobs.

From the completed questionnaires returned by departing visitors, it is clear that the FIBO team's efforts are much appreciated, with especially high praise going to the friendly and helpful atmosphere and the quality — and quantity — of the food. It is encouraging to note, too, that several recent visitors have become 'Friends of Fair Isle' — the more that do so the better will be the prospects for FIBOT's future.



ORNITHOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS, SPRING 1989

The highlight of the spring was undoubtedly the Song Sparrow trapped in the Gully on 11th April — the sixth British (third Fair Isle) record of this North American passerine. The bird departed on 26th April. Had it remained for a further weekend it would have been the centre of a major 'twitch', the Orcadia having been chartered to bring 120 people up from John O' Groats.

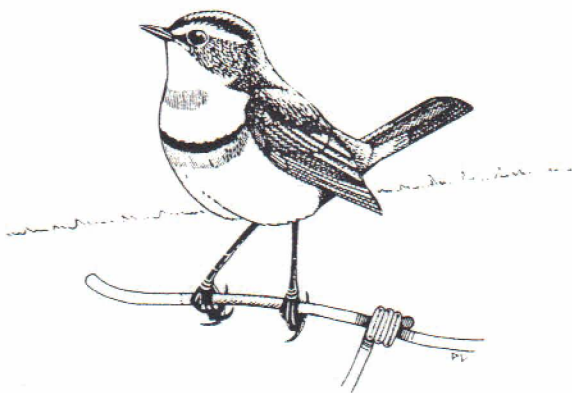
Spring passage started in mid February and, although thrush and finch numbers were lower than in recent years, some species showed a strong passage, notably Snow Bunting, 300 on 24th Feb., Skylark, 750 on 6th March (both record spring counts), Goldcrest, 80 on 1st April and Ring Ousel, 50 on 22nd April. There was also an unprecedented series of influxes of Carrion Crows, the largest of which numbered 34 birds.

Early arrivals were also the norm during April, with Sand Martin on 2nd, Willow Warbler on 3rd, Ruff on 9th, Whinchat on 13th and Crossbill on 16th—all earliest ever records for the Isle.

As usual the spring produced a good series of rare and unusual species. These included the overwintering male King Eider; 3 Great Grey Shrikes, a female Garganey—the seventh Island record, and a Rough-legged Buzzard all in April; Subalpine Warbler, Short-toed Lark, Little Bunting, 4 different Thrush, Nightingales, Rustic Bunting, Black-headed Bunting, and an immature Snowy Owl in May; and two Hobbies, Red-headed Bunting and Rose-coloured Starling in mid June. Smarter than all of these though, and rarer in Fair Isle terms, was the Island's second ever Firecrest, found at Pund on 2nd May.

Fair Isle specialities were also in good supply, with peaks of 12 Bluethroats, 12 Red-backed Shrikes, 4 Icterine Warblers, a Red-breasted Flycatcher, all in late May, and 10 different Marsh Warblers in June.

Paul Harvey



OTHER 'SPECIAL' ARRIVALS

The recipients of the 'free holiday for two' offer made in conjunction with Loganair during the Appeal arrived at the Lodge on Friday 23rd June, in glorious sunshine. Mr Mike Marwick and his wife were standing in for his father, who actually won the prize but, at over 80 years old, did not feel able to make the journey himself. By a happy chance, Mr Marwick Senior worked with Willie Logan, founder of Loganair, many years ago, and his son knew George Waterston. We hope that, after having this taste of Fair Isle, the Marwicks will decide to return at some future date.

NEW FOR 1990

In an endeavour to ensure that our newly improved accommodation is fully occupied during the summer months, FIBOT is planning a series of package weeks for next season. Two of these are 'birdy'—a general one on seabirds and the other a specialist seabird ringing course—but there will also, if all goes well, be three general interest weeks under the heading 'Island Insights'. Several Fair Islanders will be helping with these, which are aimed at people who would like to know a bit more about island life than can be gleaned on a casual visit. Dates and other details will be included in our new brochure, which will be circulated to Friends with the autumn/winter Newsletter.

DEVELOPMENTS 'DOWN THE ISLE'

Work has started on the rehabilitation of the Old Haa and Springfield—both of which were virtually roofless in June. The NTS has imported specially hand-prepared slates from Caithness for the Haa, where newspapers dating back to the middle of last century were found underneath the wallpaper. Some of this year's Thistle Camp volunteers have been tackling bracken-cutting—a somewhat daunting task, even with a strimmer. Others have been dyke-building at Setter, where Michael Stout's poly-tunnel has already produced lettuces and courgettes, with the promise of beans and tomatoes to come. Soon a group of archaeologists will be excavating the Finnikuoy mill, in preparation for its reconstruction. And at Barkland Alec's new venture of making model yoals attracted several orders from the States when the 'Polaris' called in during a cruise in mid June.

But of all the things happening on the island probably the most significant is the sudden spate of extra Loganair flights. This started with notification of a Wednesday flight from Kirkwall via North Ronaldsay (1 July to 28 October). Then an extra three Tingwall flights were announced, two on Wednesdays and one on Friday mornings, operating from 16 June to late September. The Fair Isle airstrip is now nearly as busy with planes as with birds! If these flights are well enough used there is a good chance that at least some of them will be repeated next year. Only the Orkney flight appears in Loganair's second edition summer timetable, though, so booking for the Shetland ones is probably best done through Tingwall.

STILL 'COMING SHORTLY'!

'Fair Isle—an island saga' really is making progress at long last but is not now expected to appear until late September/early October. Some compensation for the delay, however, is the fact that it is now to include a colour section. The price, according to the publisher's catalogue, is likely to be about £12.95.

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