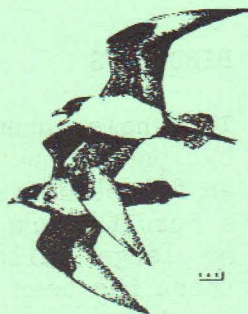


Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

FRIENDS of FAIR ISLE

newsletter



No.5 Autumn 1989

As Fair Isle Bird Observatory's forty-first season draws to a close, and tired staff take a well earned rest, FIBOT has much to celebrate. Apart from completion of the building re-development and a successful 'opening' ceremony in August (reported later in this Newsletter), the Lodge has welcomed more visitors than ever before, both as measured by visitor weeks/bed nights and in numbers of individual visitors. Increasing opportunities for flying to the isle from both Tingwall and Kirkwall have encouraged more visitors to come for short breaks; Sunday is now the only days in the week (during summer) when travel to and from Fair Isle is not possible by air &/or sea.

Unfortunately there is one disturbing aspect of increasing demand at the Lodge - the number of visitors who book accommodation (especially for migration periods and often far in advance) but then fail to appear or to cancel. This means that beds can remain unoccupied at times when there is actually a waiting list for vacancies. Please contact Elizabeth immediately if you decide not to take up your booking, so that we can try to fill the vacancy; not to do so is unfair to FIBOT and also to those who would be only too anxious to fill the gap. Where there is a good reason for cancellation, and it is possible to re-let the room, refunding of a deposit may be considered - but all visitors are advised to take out travel insurance including cancellation cover. New insurance arrangements negotiated with Sun Alliance are detailed in the enclosed brochure for 1990. For next season we have introduced a higher charge for peak periods, reflecting the demand for accommodation at these times, and have also increased the deposit by £5.

BIRD NEWS

The whole autumn has been dominated by a series of anti-cyclones situated in the Western approaches, resulting in an almost uninterrupted westerly airflow at Fair Isle. As a result there has been a dearth of common migrants, and no large falls of passerines. Surprisingly, however, there has been a string of rarities.

August commenced with a large passage of Common Gulls peaking at 700 on 11th. We had to wait until the end of the month for the more interesting migrants - Red-necked Phalarope on 25th, Citrine Wagtail on 27th and a Yellow-breasted Bunting and 2 Rosefinches (including a red male) on 26th.

September brought another 2 Yellow-breasted Buntings and 5 Little Buntings. Meadow Pipits peaked at 900 on 1st and there was a good selection of common migrants on 10th including the Isle's third ever autumn Nightingale. Other highlights were Aquatic Warbler on 16th, Spotted Crake on 14th, Lanceolated Warbler on 16th, the first Grey Phalaropes (3) since 1979 on 20th, Booted Warbler on 22nd and Fair Isle's third Coal Tit on 26th.

A "red" Red-breasted Flycatcher was the star bird of a rather quiet opening to October. The best fall of the autumn occurred on 5th, when Redwings numbered 5000, Jack Snipe 20 and quality was provided by a Short-toed Lark, a huge Arctic Redpoll of the Greenland race and an incredibly obliging Pechora Pipit. Next day brought the autumn's sixth Little Bunting and a second Short-toed Lark. A Yellow-browed Warbler and a Richard's Pipit arrived on 8th, but the super first-year male Pied Wheatear that arrived in near gale force westerlies on 10th was a shock to all and a long overdue first for Fair Isle. The 11th was calm and a trickle of migrants arrived including a Bluethroat, the second "hornemanni" Arctic Redpoll and a Lanceolated Warbler that walked over its admirers' boots in the Leogh ditch.

Paul Harvey

'OPENING' CEREMONY AT THE LODGE

Saturday 26th August 1989 was a day of double celebration; it not only marked completion of the re-development of the building but was also the 41st anniversary of the Observatory's opening. Some 120 guests, staff and islanders, age range 18 months to 80+ years, packed into the newly refurbished dining-room and lounge to enjoy a magnificent buffet meal - topped off with an island-shaped cake - followed by a concert from the isle's folk music group. Both the Observatory and Fair Isle itself have made great strides since that far off day in 1948 when visitors and islanders came together socially - over tea on that occasion - for the first time. The links - both social and economic - established in those early days have strengthened over the years, and the interdependence of the Observatory and the island community was a major theme of the speeches, by David MacLehose, Chairman of Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust; Jimmy Stout of Skerryholm, Fair Isle's community councillor; John Arnott, Vice-chairman of the Countryside Commission for Scotland and a past Chairman of FIBOT; and Magnus Flaws, Councillor for Dunrossness.

Several of the people present at this year's celebration could make a first-hand comparison with the earlier event, but the only guest in that position was Esther Williamson, wife of the Observatory's first warden, the late Ken Williamson. Esther travelled with her daughter Hervor from near London to join the party, and found today's accommodation vastly superior to the old Naval huts in use for the first 21 years of the Observatory's life. Other guests included Mr Archie Duncan, son of Sir Arthur Duncan (a founder of FIBOT with George Waterston and Ian Pitman), former warden Roy Dennis and his wife Marina, and representatives of Shetland Islands Council, Shetland Tourist Organisation, and the National Trust for Scotland.

SPRING MEETINGS 1990

The now familiar pattern of Friends of Fair Isle meeting in February each year is planned again - for LONDON on MONDAY 19th (at 1800 hours in the White Hart, Theobalds Rd, Holborn - buffet supper inc.) and EDINBURGH on SATURDAY 24th (at 1415 hours in the Members' House, Edinburgh Zoo - tea & biscuits inc; snack lunch - soup, filled rolls, coffee & biscuits - available on request). At both meetings Paul Harvey, the Warden, and his wife Elizabeth will be interrupting their winter holiday to be present to talk, with slides, about current activities on Fair Isle and in particular the enhanced opportunities for research and group visits. These meetings are informal - a chance to meet with friends who share a common interest and to enjoy a meal if you wish. Booking forms are enclosed.

NEW ARRIVAL

Congratulations to Paul and Elizabeth on the arrival in September of Bryony, a sister for Holly. We wish them all well and a peaceful winter together.

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

Just in time for Christmas, the much heralded book 'Fair Isle - an island saga', by Valerie Thom, is now published by John Donald. It tells a full story of Fair Isle and has been described by the Shetland Times reviewer as "a celebration not only of a captivating island but also of that generous, wildly optimistic, endlessly energetic man George Waterston, - a natural and worthy companion to 'Fair Isle - a Photographic History'".

Copies of this lovely book, signed by the author - an ideal Christmas present - can be purchased from FIBOT by completing and mailing the enclosed order form, together with your cheque.

Have a happy Christmas and an eventful 1990.

FAIR ISLE - AN ISLAND SAGA by Valerie M.Thom
Published by John Donald, Edinburgh, at £12.95.

Excerpts from the publisher's 'blurb' on the jacket:

"Valerie Thom's book traces the story from Viking times to the present day, drawing on contemporary accounts to illustrate the changing patterns of life over the last 300 years, as the islanders have adapted from being dependent almost solely on fishing to a more diverse economy.

The book also highlights the important roles played by Fair Isle Bird Observatory and the National Trust for Scotland in bringing new hope to the community at a time when morale was low and in helping the island to achieve the integration of its human, wildlife and landscape heritages which gained it a Council of Europe Diploma".

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BOOK ORDER FORM

Please send me copies of 'Fair Isle - an island saga @ £12.95 including (UK) postage & packing. (A contribution towards overseas postage costs would be welcome, where appropriate.)

I enclose a cheque/postal order for payable to FIBOT.

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

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