

March 2004

FRIENDS OF FAIR ISLE NEWSLETTER

Extra

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This extra Newsletter is brought to you in order to round off the late autumn bird sightings, in what has been a quite remarkable year for rare birds and to keep you abreast of preparations for the coming season but also to publicise the imminent arrival of an important new book; 'The Birds of Shetland', which 'Friends' can purchase at a special reduced rate.

Late autumn birding

After a tremendous October, the excellent autumn continued into November. Some good passage on 1st included 130 Blackbird, 50 Fieldfare, 150 Redwing and 240 Snow Bunting and with variety provided by a late Bonxie, two Long-eared Owls, seven Chiffchaffs (including at least one *tristis*), a few Goldcrests, Reed Buntings and Yellowhammer and all topped off with a pair of fine Northern Bullfinches and a Waxwing. There were two Waxwings the following day and a further sighting on 21st. More rarities arrived on 3rd when the autumn's third Olive-backed Pipit was found (and later trapped) in the Gully whilst the long-staying bird remained at Shirva until 6th. Star bird however was the juvenile American Golden Plover on the Rippack. This, only our ninth record and first since

1991, roamed around the south of the isle until 10th. The last Bonxie of the year flew through on 6th and the last remaining Richard's Pipit departed the following day. Thrushes continued to pass through in good numbers up to the middle of the month whilst there were small numbers of (mainly *tristis*) Chiffchaffs throughout. A male Redstart on 9th was the second latest on record whilst six Dunnocks on 13th was also a good count for the date. This latter date however will be remembered for the discovery of Shetland's first Hume's Warbler, at Midway! It was trapped and ringed and remained long enough for the Shetland birders to twitch it the following day. A Black Redstart and two 'northern' Bullfinches were the supporting cast to a fine Wood Lark on 15th, which frequented the Skadan for a week. A 'blizzard' of Snow Buntings, totalling 520 birds on 17th was the highest count of the year. The same day produced the fifth Pallas's Warbler of the autumn and this would have been the highlight but another Hume's Warbler – this one at Nether Taft/Leogh - stole its thunder. It remained until 23rd. The remainder of the month was dominated by cool winds and wintry showers and was most notable for some late migrants – Oystercatcher on 22nd and Chiffchaff and Goldcrest on 27th but included a Slavonian Grebe (16th-21st), a Goosander (22nd), Waxwing (21st), Glaucous Gull (24th-25th) and the final addition to the year list – a Eurasian White-fronted Goose on 30th.

The year came to a quiet end with small numbers of Lapwing, Curlew and a few over-wintering Water Rails and a lone Kestrel throughout, with a Moorhen (17th) and occasional Little Auk, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls noted. On the passerine front – reasonable numbers of Blackbirds and Redwings also included a few Song Thrushes and a handful of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits also lingered into the New Year. A Blackcap on 3rd December was late but not as late as the Chiffchaff on 17th and Goldcrest on 19th. Snow Buntings were also present throughout but in fewer numbers, with a peak of 120 on 26th. Two Common Redpolls on 27th were the last notable sighting of the month and a tremendous birding year!!

Staffing for 2004 season

We have just secured all our staff for the coming season and as usual we have a mixture of new and familiar faces which should make for a convivial atmosphere at the Observatory, which we hope those of you visiting this year will enjoy. Lois Smallwood, Ann Prior, Janet Gibson, Rebecca Nason and Alan Bull are all returning for (at least part of) the season whilst newcomers will be Claire Bailly, Amanda Mitchell, Charlotte Seaton and Liz Burnett.

Landmark Book!

With this newsletter is a special offer for 'Friends' on a new book currently being printed. 'The Birds of Shetland' is a weighty tome written by Shetland's top ornithologists, including two former FIBO wardens and our vice-chairman and is worth its weight in gold for anyone with an interest in the avifauna of Shetland. The book retails at £40 but 'Friends' and members of the Shetland Bird Club can exclusively secure a copy for just £35 by using the enclosed special offer form before 30th April 2004.

Major Changes to Flight Schedules

Since March 2004, Loganair have completely taken over the franchise for flights between Mainland Shetland and Fair Isle (and other islands). This has several implications for our visitors: Bookings to Shetland (Sumburgh) from mainland Britain can still be made through British Airways. However, bookings between Mainland Shetland and Fair Isle (inter-island flights) can **NO LONGER BE BOOKED THROUGH BA** and **MUST** be booked direct with **LOGANAIR**: Tel: 01595 840246 Fax: 01595 840247 E-mail: shetlandres@loganair.co.uk or their website: www.loganair.co.uk. Unfortunately, if you try to book (inter-island flights) through British Airways you may be informed that either there is "no availability" or even that "there are no flights to Fair Isle". **This is not the case – Loganair will fly to Fair Isle four days a week as before.** Loganair will honour bookings already made through British Airways so those who have already booked to visit this season should have no

worries, but if in doubt (and especially if you booked your Fair Isle flight through BA) contact Loganair for confirmation.

Furthermore, Loganair are no longer operating from Tingwall, Lerwick on Saturdays. Loganair (Orkney) will now be operating a new service on Saturday mornings from Kirkwall to Fair Isle then on to Sumburgh and returning in the afternoon. Visitors who have already booked a Saturday flight from Sumburgh to Fair Isle should not be affected but those who have booked a Tingwall to Fair Isle, or Fair Isle to Tingwall flight will be offered an alternative flight to/from Sumburgh, Shetland or Kirkwall, Orkney. Visit the Loganair website for more details (including the **new cheaper fares**). **Again, if in doubt, contact Loganair on 01595 840246** but please feel free to phone the Observatory if you still have any concerns.

Vacancies & Special offers

Bookings for the coming season are looking healthy but we still have space for virtually any time (except the last week of September and early October), including our incredible **half-price offer periods in August and October**. Why not take advantage of the **cheaper flights and/or the new route via Orkney** and come and visit us? You will not be disappointed!

Refurbishment

We are constantly striving to improve the accommodation to make our guests stay as comfortable as we can. Continuing our room improvements, we have redecorated several more bedrooms this winter and upgraded the Ladies shower, so that there are now two brand new showers in situ.

Crops and Trees

Almost everything is in place for our cropping project to begin in earnest this Spring, so in conjunction with our continued planting of bushes and trees, this should improve the habitat for birds and birders alike. We await with baited breath!!

Subscription reminder!

Would all 'Friends' please remember to renew their membership (due on 1st April) if you do not subscribe by Bankers Order.